

VA



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VA to begin legal process of replacing three German POW headstones

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today that it will initiate the process required by law to replace three German prisoner of war headstones in national cemeteries in Texas and Utah.

The headstones are controversial because they bear swastikas and other symbols and texts related to the Nazi regime that millions of Americans fought during World War II.

The headstones mark the graves of prisoners of war and are located at sites and in cemeteries protected by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Consequently, under NHPA, VA is not permitted to unilaterally remove them or alter them. However, later this month, under Section 106 of NHPA, VA will begin taking required steps including consultation with stakeholders about how to replace these headstones with historically accurate markers that do not include the Nazi swastika and German text.

“Americans must always remember the horror of the Nazi regime and why so many Americans sacrificed so much to free the world from its reign of terror,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “It is understandably upsetting to our Veterans and their families to see Nazi inscriptions near those who gave their lives for this nation. That’s why VA will initiate the process required to replace these POW headstones.”

The German POW headstones are located in the Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio, Texas, and the Fort Douglas Post Cemetery in Salt Lake City, Utah. The cemeteries were under the control of the Army when these interments occurred in the 1940s. The Ft. Sam Houston and Ft. Douglas cemeteries were subsequently transferred to VA’s National Cemetery Administration in 1973 and 2019, respectively. Once replaced, VA will propose to preserve the headstones in its National Cemetery Administration History Collection.

VA will also install interpretive signs at all VA national cemeteries where foreign enemy prisoners of war are interred in order to provide historical context about how non-U.S. service members from World War I and World War II were interred and buried on American soil.

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