

# VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
National Cemetery Administration

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## National Cemetery Administration (NCA) enemy Prisoners of War (ePOW) headstone removal and historic preservation

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) moved toward removing two government-issued enemy prisoner-of-war (ePOW) headstones with Nazi iconography from [Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery](#), Texas, in May 2020 after public and political complaints. On December 23, 2020, after completing required historic preservation consultation, NCA removed the headstones and replaced them with government headstones, minus the offending information.

A third headstone with the same iconography at [Fort Douglas Post Cemetery](#), Utah, will be retained and modified rather than being replaced. NCA initially proposed replacement with a government headstone, but because it is a private marker purchased by fellow POWs, reconsidered available options with the support of the Utah State Historic Preservation Officer.

All three historic headstones date to World War II when the German POWs died while interned in U.S. Army-run camps. VA cemeteries contain the graves of more than 1,000 enemy POWs from World War I and World War II—German, Italian and Japanese. Most are marked with government headstones. NCA is committed to preserving its cemeteries and interpreting all aspects of their history to the public.

The headstones are inscribed with the decedents' name and a 1939 German Iron Cross that contains a Nazi swastika. The Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery headstones are standard government-issue upright marble engraved with a German Iron Cross; the swastika and additional German text were added after the Army ordered the headstones.

In June 2020, NCA initiated consultation with the respective states and stakeholders per Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 to consider removal of the headstones. The agency determined this was an “adverse effect” to both cemeteries, which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. To mitigate the removals in Texas, NCA will provide historical ePOW information in the form of interpretive signage at 23 VA cemeteries where they are buried, publish online and printed content, and seek opportunities to exhibit the Texas headstones in an educational context. These requirements are outlined in a memorandum of agreement among the Texas State Historic Preservation Office, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and NCA.

The granite headstone at Fort Douglas will be altered by filling and covering a small Nazi swastika with a matching material; this process is reversible and preserves the historical integrity of the marker. This is a common best practice and treatment is slated for spring 2021.