



MISSING IN AMERICA PROJECT VETERAN RECOVERY PROGRAM

www.miap.us



WE WILL NEVER FORGET

Redding soldier killed in Afghanistan back home.

The body of a 23-year-old Redding soldier killed in action last month in Afghanistan arrived this morning at the Redding Municipal Airport as part of his final journey home.

As members of his anguished family wept and comforted one another, the flag-covered casket containing the body of U.S. Army Cpl. Preston Dennis was taken off a military-chartered twin-engine Falcon 20 jet by an honor guard and placed in an awaiting hearse outside the Air Shasta Rotor and Wing facility north of the airport.

From there, a long procession that included Patriot Guard and Missing in America Project motorcyclists accompanied the hearse to McDonald's Redding Chapel as blue skies, a breezy wind that kept a sea of U.S. flags flapping and a snow covered Lassen Peak provided a tranquil backdrop to the somber occasion.



REST IN PEACE



RADCLIFF, KY. (WDRB) -- Their remains were abandoned and left for vandals to destroy. They had served our country and couldn't be identified. But on Tuesday they received the memorial service they deserved.



Bagpipes played, a 21-gun salute rang out, and those in attendance heard the sounds of "Taps" on Tuesday during the service.

Donald Ritz died of throat cancer in 1987. He served in World War II and left behind 11 brothers and sisters. The family cremated his remains and left them at Eastern Cemetery. Years later, the cemetery was left in ruins.

Vera Massie, Donald Ritz's sister, tells WDRB News, "They just walked away and left them for vandals and that cemetery is still vandalized today."

The remains were eventually turned over to the Archeology Department at the University of Louisville. But many couldn't be identified, so they sat -- soldiers who had fought for our country without a proper resting place.

Volunteers with the Missing in America Project worked to identify those soldiers, coordinated Tuesday's service at Kentucky Veterans Cemetery, and brought Donald's surviving siblings the moment they had long awaited.



Mimi Ritz Graves, another sister of Donald Ritz, says, "He taught me how to whistle when I was five. And that's what I'll always remember. It was good."

Massie points out, "It's something you cannot explain not matter how you try...I'm just happy."

"Amazing Grace" played during the memorial, and a speaker intoned the words of Sir Walter Scott's "The Lady in the Lake": "Dream of battlefields no more. Days of danger. Nights of waking. Rest in peace. Rest in peace."

Graves says she was, "very proud, a little sad, because for a long time we didn't know where he was, and this was wonderful."

There are still about 100 sets of cremains at the University of Louisville. Missing in America volunteers say they're trying to identify more veterans, but just don't have enough information to go on right now.

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**OK MIAP Mission for Gary P. Watson -
Friday, May 27, 2011**



It was fitting that the first MIAP mission in Oklahoma fall on the eve of the Memorial Day weekend. It was fitting that Gary P. Taylor be interred on this day. He was honorably discharged from the US Army in 1959. Gary, who was basically estranged from most of his family, died in Tulsa, OK in 2009. Not learning of his death for over a year, his sister, Anna, recovered his remains from the funeral home. A few days ago, his other sister, Donna, living in Utah, contacted MIAP member Bruce Clemens, who contacted me. Between the four of us, we immediately got the ball got rolling. I found everyone involved in the process extremely helpful and efficient.

May 27th was a beautiful day, with bright blue skies and fluffy white clouds. Bonnie and I rode the fifty some odd miles from Broken Arrow, OK to Fort Gibson National Cemetery, arriving about 8:30 a.m. After checking in at the office, we proceeded to the pavilion shelter to make sure everything was in order. As always, the staff had these hallowed grounds in perfect order. In preparation for the weekend's upcoming annual Memorial Day ceremonies, the cemetery was decked out with American flags. There were large burial flags, which had been donated by families over the years posted along the drives, and small flags placed at each and every headstone. It was a truly beautiful sight.

The Honor Guard arrived first, followed by the American Legion rifle squad and bugler. The family soon began arriving, Uncle Jack and Aunt Alice along with a cousin and her boyfriend. Soon, Gary's sister Anna, her boyfriend and her daughter arrived with Gary's urn. The thunder of motorcycles was heard in the distance as members of the Patriot Guard Riders, Rolling Thunder, and other groups made a grand entrance with flags flying.

The ceremony was short with a brief eulogy, prayers and hymns from the minister followed by honors being rendered. There were tears and stories along with hugs and handshakes as we paid our respects. It was a beautiful ceremony that was sincerely appreciated by the family. I was honored to be a part of it.

Jeff Brown

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Chastity Booth, 32, state director of the Missing in America Project, has found the unclaimed remains of five veterans since she began searching for them in March. She hopes to have them buried in Dayton National Cemetery before the end of summer. "When I took this on, I thought, 'If I can get one vet, I will consider that a triumph,'" she said. WASHINGTON - In funeral homes across the country, basements and storage rooms contain thousands of unclaimed remains, including those of some U.S. veterans.

Sometimes, families, for a variety of difficult and emotional reasons, couldn't claim the remains. Sometimes, the deceased had lost contact with loved ones. Sometimes, there weren't any loved ones at all.

Funeral directors call them "closets of memory."

Chastity Booth, a stay-at-home mother in Randolph, Ohio, near Akron, has a mission: She wants to identify Ohio's unclaimed veterans and put them to rest, with military honors, in Ohio's veterans cemeteries. Last week, two Ohio lawmakers introduced a bill aimed at making it easier for her to do that.

Booth, 32, is the state coordinator for the Missing in America Project, an undertaking that aims to claim the cremated remains of U.S. veterans. Nationally, volunteers for the project have visited 1,423 funeral homes out of about 54,000. They've identified 9,050 unclaimed cremated remains and verified 1,277 as veterans. They've interred 1,049 with military honors.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE TO OUR VETERANS, Ms. Booth!

Missing In America Project Gives Soldiers Proper Burials

MEDICAL LAKE, Wash. -- There are about 40 people at the Veterans Cemetery in Medical Lake whose families don't come to visit their graves. Those soldiers are part of the Missing in America Project

The project recovers and identifies the remains of veterans abandoned at funeral homes and coroner's offices and gives them a proper military burial.

Cemetery Director Richard Cesler started the project six years ago. The project is now operating in more than 30 states. "You think about being dishonored in death but honored in life because our job is to find these men and women and give them the honors they're entitled to," said Cesler.

Cesler says there are more than 6,000 abandoned cremated remains sitting on shelves in Eastern Washington coroner's offices and funeral homes.

Missing in America is working to get lists of the names and find out if any are veterans who deserve to be buried at the Washington State Veterans Memorial Cemetery.



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Volunteers Canvas Funeral Homes for Forgotten Veterans

When Catherine Grant's husband died in 1994, she never imagined she would find his obituary in the paper 17 years later. But there it was, under the heading "Veterans Honored." "It was very strange," said Grant, 77, who lives in St. Louis. "I never look at the obituaries. But that day I did."

Over in Louisville, Ky., Carolyn Russell, 72, was about to receive a shocking phone call. Her brother Donald Ritz, a World War II combat veteran, had died of throat cancer in 1987 -- but she never found out where he had been cremated. Until this year.

"I was just thrilled to death, it kind of gave me cold chills," she said.

The non-profit group Missing in America Project (MIAP) was behind the burials of both of these forgotten veterans.

In the central U.S., Dale Lamond, a former Marine who helps coordinate burials for MIAP, delivered the news to Russell.

"It's gratifying that you find these veterans that have been lying there all these years, some of the families didn't know there were there," he said.

Missing in America, the passion project of founder and former U.S. Army Maj. Fred Salanti, holds military burials for unclaimed veterans' remains. The group has nearly 700 volunteers in 48 states canvas funeral homes searching for veterans' remains in backrooms and storage areas where, in many cases, they have been long forgotten.

Since its inception in 2007, 63-year-old Salanti says MIAP has visited more than 1,400 funeral homes and found more than 1,200 veteran remains. Of those, 1,049 have been interred.

As soon as they find a veteran at a funeral home, MIAP volunteers examine funeral home notes and the death certificate, track down living relatives, and study genealogy resources and old Department of Defense databases. Sometimes the most time-consuming process can be obtaining proof of military service.

Most of the time the MIAP volunteers are the only people to attend a veteran's military burial. And that's exactly what drives them.

"That's a real tearjerker knowing that we, the Missing in America people...are the family," Salanti said. "They accomplished something honorable, respectful and they're receiving what was due them for service to the country."

The MIAP volunteers are mostly retired, many of them former servicemen and some who aren't, but all consider this a calling.

"When I found out there were this many people who have fought for our country and they're sitting on shelves it moved me to a point that I said let's do something about it," said Dave Woodcook, 63, who joined MIAP about five years ago and began leading burial escorts near Redding, Calif.

Salanti says the unclaimed veterans' remains are nobody's fault: funeral homes aren't required to seek out anyone and next of kin and funeral homes aren't required to report the unclaimed remains to the VA.

"A lot of people come out and say the VA needs to be in charge of this, but how does the VA know [where the remains are]?"

They don't have authority to go into a private funeral home," he said.

The laws regulating how long funeral homes are required to keep remains vary from state to state, and 13 states, such as Maryland and Nevada, don't have any laws governing unclaimed remains.

There are 19,903 funeral homes in the U.S. according to the National Funeral Directors Association, and nearly all of them have unclaimed cremated remains.

Last Thursday Republicans Pat Tiberi and Steve Stivers introduced the Missing in America Act, which would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to help determine if unclaimed remains are eligible for burial at a national cemetery. The bill also asks the VA to work with veterans service organizations and other groups, including MIAP, in possessing the abandoned or unidentified remains.

An earlier version of the bill was introduced in 2009 when the House was controlled by Democrats, and it fell short of the required number of co-sponsors.

Salanti said, "The chances of getting this law passed now are tremendously better and it's just exciting that we're getting some recognition at the national level."

For now, MPIA continues searching funeral homes and tracking down documents, working without pay. The organization is run by individual donations, without any corporate sponsors. It's tough, at times, Salanti says, "We're in tears and crying half the time. My nickname is waterworks."

But for him, in the end, it's worth it.

"We represent what those guys lived for. Otherwise they're going to be alone going on their last journey."



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Lt Col Shadish served in the Army for 20 years, retiring in 1966. He endured 1010 days as a POW in North Korea. He also served on several Veterans and ex-POW Boards both nationally and locally. He served as chairman of the Board for the Northern California Emergency services for 10 years. In 2007 he published his novel "When Hell Froze Over" which detailed his account of serving as a combat physician in Korea.

With a heavily overcast sky 21 Members of MIAP, and PGR, showed honor and respect to United States Army Lt. (ret) William R. Shadish, a Korean War POW (1,010 days), by escorting him, as well as family and friends, to his final resting place at the Northern California Veterans Cemetery, in Igo. His wife, Karen, thanked us profusely for a beautiful escort. I personally felt much honor in seeing such a beautiful job by the MIAP personnel at all intersections and flags flowing behind their bikes. I offer my thanks to all who were able to assist and stand. God Bless America.



Kula's bill allowing for respectful burial of veterans' remains advances in the House

HARRISBURG, May 27 – A bill sponsored by state Rep. Deberah Kula that would allow for the respectful interment of unclaimed veterans' remains is poised for final passage in the House.

[House Bill 973](#) would require that if a funeral establishment ascertains that unclaimed cremated remains are of a veteran, and it has not received final arrangement instructions from the legally authorized person in control, it would have to relinquish those remains to a veterans' service organization so they can be interred in a national cemetery. "It is a very sad fact that there are unclaimed remains of veterans in state hospitals and funeral homes all across the country that should be given a respectful burial," said Kula, D-Fayette/Westmoreland. "By allowing veterans' service organizations, such as the Missing in American Project, to claim these remains we can ensure that those who served this country are laid to rest with honor."

The Missing in America Project's mission is to locate, identify and inter the unclaimed cremated remains of veterans through joint efforts of private, state and federal organizations. So far MIAP has located, identified and interred over 630 veterans with honor.

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H. R. 2051

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to assist in the identification of unclaimed and abandoned human remains to determine if any such remains are eligible for burial in a national cemetery, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

May 26, 2011

Mr. TIBERI (for himself and Mr. STIVERS) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to assist in the identification of unclaimed and abandoned human remains to determine if any such remains are eligible for burial in a national cemetery, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the `Veterans Missing in America Act of 2011'.

SEC. 2. SENSE OF CONGRESS.

Congress recognizes the tireless work and dedication of the members of the Missing in America Project, in conjunction with numerous veterans service organizations, in identifying the unclaimed remains of veterans.

SEC. 3. IDENTIFICATION OF UNCLAIMED AND ABANDONED HUMAN REMAINS.

(a) Identification of Unclaimed or Abandoned Human Remains- The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall cooperate with veterans service organizations to assist entities in possession of unclaimed or abandoned human remains in determining if any such remains are the remains of veterans or other individuals eligible for burial in a national cemetery.

(b) Burial of Unclaimed or Abandoned Human Remains- If the Secretary determines that any unclaimed or abandoned human remains are the remains of a person who is eligible for burial in an open national cemetery under the control of the National Cemetery Administration under section 2402 of title 38, United States Code, the Secretary shall provide for the burial of the remains and cover the cost of the burial of the remains and the cost of preparing the remains and transporting them to the place of burial, if the Secretary determines, with respect to the remains--

(1) that there is no next of kin or other person claiming the remains; and

(2) that there are not available other sufficient resources to cover burial and funeral expenses.

(c) Creation of National Database- The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish a database in which the Secretary shall enter the names of any veteran or other individual identified pursuant to subsection (a). The Secretary shall ensure that the database is publicly accessible.

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