

MISSING IN AMERICA PROGRAM

By Larry Jasper, Sr. Vice Commander, JWV Department of Florida, Commander, Post 373 Tampa

On Thursday, September 26th, 12 veterans and 5 spouses were interred to their final resting place at the Sarasota Florida National Cemetery. So what was significant about this day? The cremains of these veterans and spouses previously sat in boxes unclaimed for as long as 14 years.

Thanks to the nationwide efforts of the Missing In America Project, nearly 20,000 cremains have been found; over 4,500 have been identified as veterans and over 4,100 have been interred.

The greatest question is why have these veterans been forgotten? Many of them were homeless, many had no next of kin. Their bodies were cremated and their ashes put in a box and left on a shelf. With all the money this country spends on both citizens and non-citizens, why have so many veterans been ignored? Why are there any homeless veterans in this great country?

It is disgraceful that funeral homes, city/county morgues, and hospitals have not tried to establish the veteran status of these cremains and work to getting them a proper final resting place. Fortunately, the Missing In America Program was founded in 2006 to locate, identify, and inter the unclaimed remains of veterans through the joint efforts of private, state, and federal organizations. One hospital recently announced that they had over 3,500 cremains on shelves to be identified. It is estimated that over 1,000 of those are veterans, dating from the 1890's to 1971. There are similar stats all over the country.

The Missing In America Project intends to ultimately identify every forgotten veteran and ensure that they are interred with the honor and dignity they deserve. Without these heroes, we would not have the freedoms we enjoy. America needs to show them the respect they earned.

On Thursday over 400 people were in attendance, the largest in recent years. There was a motorcade of veterans and county police led by Guns and Hoses Pipes and Drums, a Flag Detail, a ceremony to include an Honor Guard comprised of members of all branches of the U. S. Military, singing of the "National Anthem", a reading of the names and ringing of the bell for each veteran, taps, and a heart-warming rendition of "God Bless America". Following this, pall bearers, flag bearers, and flower bearers for the spouses, carried the handmade urns to be placed in a columbarium niche. I was honored to have the privilege of carrying the cremains of PFC Charles William Livingston, a WWII veteran, who passed away in 2011 at the age of 85.

It is said that a person dies twice – the first time when they take their last breath and the second when their name is forgotten. The Missing In America Project, in conjunction with the Veterans Administration and the National Cemetery system, ensures that no servicemember will ever truly die. Rather than their unclaimed ashes sitting in a box on a shelf in an unknown location, forgotten forever, they will receive a dignified interment with their name on a columbarium niche and be forever remembered for their selfless dedication to their country.

Representing the Jewish War Veterans were Dept. of FL Sr. Vice Commander Larry Jasper, Post 373 Jr. Vice Commander Georgi Jasper, Post 373 member and WWII Veteran Boris Stern, and Dr. Bill Luria, Post 373 Patron and photographer.



Motorcade arriving with the Pipes and Drums.



Carrying the cremains to the Columbarium to be interred.



A final salute to a WWII hero.

You can help by volunteering or donating to the Missing In America Program at www.miap.us.