

Once-forgotten vets receive moving memorial service Saturday

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson
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LAKEPORT — Two local veterans were honored in a special ceremony Saturday that drew dozens of people from throughout Northern California and the county.

Although the event may have appeared, at first glance, to simply be another veterans' funeral, it had a special significance, since both the men had no relatives and, in the case of one of them, his remains had gone unclaimed and unburied since his death five years ago.

Lawrence John Quinn died Sept. 11 at age 79; Robert Kincaid died on June 10, 2003, at age 76. Both men served in the Navy and died, for the most part, without family or friends to take care of them.

They received a military funeral on Saturday at Veterans Circle, located at Hartley Cemetery.

Approximately 55 motorcycles ridden by members of the Patriot Guard Riders escorted the cremains of the two men to the cemetery.

Two Naval officers, dressed in stark white uniforms, carried the small boxes of cremains to the center of Veterans Circle, setting them on two small benches next to U.S. flags folded into careful, star-studded blue triangles. A bagpiper and a bugler played the men to their rest, and the United Veterans Council Military Honors Team fired a salute.

Capt. Herman "Woody" Hughes, a retired US Naval Reserve officer and chaplain for the United Veterans Council, said Quinn and Kincaid died alone and with few friends.

Hughes said it was important to remember them and their sacrifice, and quoted English poet John Dunne's words, "No man is an island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent ... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind ..."

As veterans, the two men were part of the World War II and Korean War conflicts, according to their records.

"There are no unimportant jobs in the armed forces," said Hughes. "There are no unimportant people in the armed forces."

Dean Gotham, president of the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 951, accepted Quinn's flag from the Navy representatives, while Slick Hultquist of Lakeport, a Patriot Guard Rider member who also is involved with the Missing in America Project, accepted Kincaid's flag.

Relatively little is known about Quinn and Kincaid. The United Veterans Council was able to acquire basic information on Kincaid, who was born July 23, 1927, and served as an apprentice seaman in the Navy from 1945 to 1946 during World War II.

Slightly more is known about Quinn, whose discharge records was obtained by the United Veterans Council. Quinn, who was originally from Syracuse, New York, was born Feb. 2, 1929 and died this past Sept. 11.

Record show Quinn served in the Navy from January of 1953 to January of 1956. For his service he earned a Korea Service Ribbon, United Nations Service Ribbon, Navy Occupation Service Medal with a European clasp, China Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal and an American Area Campaign Medal.

He also received a World War II Victory Medal, which was given to any member of the armed forces who was on active or reserve duty from Dec. 7, 1941 to Dec. 31, 1946. Local vets suggested he may have had previous service during World War II that didn't show on the last discharge records.

Both Kincaid and Quinn were discharged honorably, according to military records.

Missing in America Project works on behalf of forgotten veterans

Playing an important part in Saturday's burial was the Missing in America Project (MIAP), a group whose mission is to locate, identify and inter the unclaimed cremated remains of veterans. Lake County News profiled the group in a May 2007 article, Missing in America Project searches for forgotten veterans.

MIAP, which incorporated in February of 2007, has a massive task ahead of it, considering the untold thousands of veterans — some of them having served in wars across a timespan that stretches into the 19th century — believed to be unburied and sitting on storage shelves in mortuaries, hospitals and institutions around the nation.

In many cases, the veterans have no living family or friends, and so they're left in the care of funeral homes. After a waiting period, the funeral homes must then decide what to do with the remains.

Oregon resident Fred "Ducpho" Salanti, executive director of MIAP's veterans recovery program and a Vietnam veteran, attended Saturday's ceremony.

Since May of 2007, when Lake County News first reported the group's efforts, significant progress has been made, said Salanti.

So far, MIAP has succeeded in retrieving and interring the cremains of 346 veterans — including Kincaid — which had been in storage and unclaimed by next of kin, said Salanti.

They've located another 6,300 stored cremains, of which between 10 and 30 percent are expected to be veterans. Salanti said they've also visited 620 funeral homes to inquire about helping inter unclaimed cremains.

Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney (D-NY) is drafting a bill that Salanti expects to be introduced in the 111th Congress next year; he said the legislation will assist in setting time limits that cremains can be held before being interred.

"We finally have some national sponsorship," said Salanti.

Seven states — not including California — are working to have those time limits reduced before turning

over information either to the Department of Defense or the MIAP, which can then verify if an individual is a veteran. That will then allow open the way to arranging for interment.

Kincaid is the first Lake County veteran whose cremains were interred through the efforts of MIAP working with local funeral homes. Hultquist is working with mortuaries in Lake and Mendocino counties to continue the process of interring lost vets.

For more information about the MIAP's local or national effort, contact Hultquist at 263-8105, Salanti at ducpho@miap.us or visit www.miap.us.

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