



*July 9, 2007*

I would like to explain in detail, the “Missing In America” project that began in Boise, Idaho.

Just a little over 9 months ago at a meeting one of the attendees asked a question. “Have you found out how many Veterans cremains are still being held by funeral homes in the state?”

We decided to send a letter to each funeral home to solicit their help. We included a post card to make it easier to respond. We received 52 responses from the 90 mailed letters and cards. For the most part they stated they had no cremains and that we did not need to re-contact them. The surprising response however was that there were several funeral homes that asked us to call them. When we made the next contact we discovered there were questions from the funeral homes. They wanted to know just what type of information we were looking for. Our request was actually very

simple; just provide the full name, social security number, date of birth and date of death of all of the held cremains. We would then contact the Veterans Administration with that list to see if any qualified as honorably discharged veterans and therefore eligible for interment.

Within a few days we discovered 15 veterans from just two funeral homes locally that were eligible for interment. Two days later we received a call from Representative Otter’s office that there might also be a veteran and his spouse in a storage unit in Meridian. Follow-up to that call revealed that a family had not paid the lease on their unit and that it had been purchased at auction. The person who won the bid discovered military documents and two cremains in the storage unit. We were also able to secure those two cremains after verifying that the veteran was a retired Army spec 5 who had been awarded two purple hearts for action in Korea.

We were now holding 16 veteran cremains and one spouse for interment. The results of this initial response caused us to review and then begin a phone survey to all of the funeral homes again even those that stated they had no cremains of veterans. Within the next week we recovered another 5 eligible cremains from one funeral home in Caldwell.

On November 9, 2006 at 11:00 AM we held a single service to honor all of those we have discovered to date. We feel very strongly that these men and women need to be given their deserved final resting place among their peers and comrades.

We have followed up with a phone call to the funeral homes as a continuation to elicit their help in identifying if any veteran was abandoned in their location. We were told by several funeral homes that they thought they might have a veteran or two on the shelf but didn’t have the time to research.

We believe that the best approach at this point was to physically go to each funeral home and make the request in person. Armed with a copy of Idaho Code 54-1144 (attached) which gives state authority to secure these cremains.

This has another effect due to the two year window for application of the \$300.00 plot allowance from the VA. Instead of our veterans languishing on a shelf somewhere they will be given proper military honors and the cost will not be borne by the public sector.

We established a memorial walk at the Idaho State Veterans Cemetery and sell bricks for \$100.0 to be used for this project.

Our on hand cremains for this project are now 34 Veterans and 2 spouses.

This is not an isolated event. Recently the Patriots Guard Riders reported they had discovered 30 veterans’ cremains in Reno as a direct result of attending our honors ceremony.

Richard Cesler, Director  
Idaho State Veterans Cemetery