

## 'Missing in America Project' honors Idaho veterans



Brick by brick, marker by marker, the state of Idaho is slowly building a monument to its fallen and sometimes forgotten veterans on 76.5 acres of ground nestled in the Boise foothills.

Through a project called "Missing in America", the Idaho Division of Veterans Services is searching for the cremated remains of veterans and their spouses so they can be properly buried.

Just recently, two sets of cremains were discovered in an abandoned storage unit in Meridian that had been auctioned off. The sister of a Meridian POW-MIA group member bought the contents of the shed, opened it and discovered veterans documentation and two sets of cremains.

Those cremains were Richard and Martha Trueman, "He was a Korean and Vietnam veteran who retired in 1968 and had received two purple hearts. Basically, they were just left abandoned in a storage shed."

By contacting funeral homes throughout the state and requesting names, social security numbers, dates of birth and dates of deaths of all cremated remains they had in their possession, the cemetery was able to recover 20 other Idaho veterans at two Boise and one Caldwell mortuary. They are also checking into rumors that a Kellogg mortuary may have in excess of 300 cremains dating back 40 or more years and certainly some may be veterans.

The Truemans, along with 20 other veterans, were interred in granite-covered niches in the cemetery's special columbarium wall last Thursday, with full military honors, including a Black Hawk helicopter flyover, simultaneous folding of flags from all five service branches, a rifle salute and other special ceremonies.

To find and claim the ashes of veterans, the Idaho Division of Veterans Services relies on a state law passed in 2003 that allows nationally recognized veterans service organizations and the veteran's cemetery to take possession of cremated remains of veterans and their spouses that have been unclaimed in a mortuary for a year or more.

The Missing In America project is designed to find abandoned cremains in funeral homes to be interred under the cemeteries indigent and hardship fund.

The state was able to inter the 21 veterans and one spouse, who were past the two-year mark, through a donation from the Idaho Elks organization, which provided a \$5,000 grant. In addition to the grant, each of the 21 Elks lodges represented at the recent state Elks convention in Mountain Home bought a brick to be inscribed and placed in the cemetery's memorial brick walk.

According to the Nov. 9 ceremony program, the purchase of a brick for the Veterans Memorial Walk supports the cemetery's mission "to research every funeral home in Idaho until all veterans are accounted for and given the opportunity for honorable interment at the Idaho State Veterans Cemetery."

<http://miap.us/index.html>