



VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA
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Board of Directors

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Release

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**Vietnam Veterans of America and Olinger Hampden and Eastlawn Cemeteries
to Inter Unclaimed Remains of 30 Veterans**

June 25th at 10:30am at Fort Logan National Cemetery

(Lakewood, CO) – VVA #1071 will conduct a final roll call and interment of the unclaimed, cremated remains of 30 veterans at Fort Logan National Cemetery, 3698 S. Sheridan Blvd, Denver CO (303) 761-0117, at Columbarium No. 1 on Saturday, June 25, 2016 at 10:30am – rain or shine. The public is invited. There is limited seating, reserved for those unable to stand for the 30 to 40 minute ceremony. Close-in parking is limited, but a circulating shuttle will pick up at shelters A, B and C as well as the visitor's center. ([Cemetery Map](#)).

Many of these remains have been temporarily inurned for many decades, without next of kin claiming or providing instructions for their disposition. Acting in accordance with Colorado law, VVA #1071 has located, researched and applied for interment for this first group of veterans. The VVA Chapter anticipates providing similar honors for many hundreds more over a period of several years.

All veterans are entitled to burial or committal with military honors. This first group of cremains were recovered from temporary inurnment at Olinger's Eastlawn Mausoleum. Veterans being honored include WW II, Korean and Vietnam War periods, having served in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps. Ranks range from Private to Lt. Colonel, with several having earned awards for valor.

The commemoration will be supported by VVA #1071 staff members, Ft. Logan Cemetery staff, Olinger Cemeteries and Mortuary, and the Aerospace Data Facility (Buckley) – Colorado Joint Color Guard. Guest speaker will be Major General H. Michael Edwards, the Colorado Adjutant General. Urns have been lovingly hand-crafted by Colorado Woodworker's Guild, Dog Tags have been faithfully recreated by Authentic US Military Dog Tags.

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"Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another"

BACKGROUND SUPPLEMENT TO PRESS RELEASE 6-01

The Lakewood Elks have adopted our Chapter 1071 of the Vietnam Veterans of America by providing use of their facilities for our monthly meetings. We cleverly timed these meetings to immediately follow the Elks' Pancake Breakfast held on the 3rd Saturday of every month, so we have a congenial place to socialize and enjoy their excellent food prior to doing the business of the chapter. It was during the breakfast banter last June that one of our members brought up a story about "Vets on a Shelf". That spark invited curiosity and further research that confirmed a nationwide inventory of unclaimed cremated remains held at virtually every funeral home and crematorium in the country. It seems for a variety of reasons, people do not follow up cremation with claiming and disposing of the resulting ashes (cremains). These cremains are retained by these facilities for future claim by a next of kin, or others in a cascading order of assigned right to final disposition. The results are that many thousands of cremains are held in limbo across the nation.

Among these abandoned cremains are a fair percentage of veterans who as a benefit of having served honorably in the U.S. armed forces have the right to a burial or committal in a National Cemetery with full military honors, 38 USC 2402. Our chapter voted to pursue this goal of locating and identifying eligible veteran remains wherever possible.

On a chance meeting during an award ceremony at a sister chapter last July, Lloyd Swint, General Manager of Olinger Hampden and Eastlawn Cemeteries and Mortuary mentioned that he had unclaimed remains on hand in his mausoleum at Eastlawn. Most were many decades old; the oldest was later found to have died in 1934, and as with the majority, were transferred with the chain of custody finally arriving at Eastlawn. Many of the original crematoriums went out of business or otherwise were absorbed by other entities. Olinger coordinated with us to inventory and record their stored cremains.

The chapter then began negotiations with the V.A.'s National Cemetery Administration to submit names directly to their Scheduling Office's Eligibility Verification Division. There was reluctance initially because another organization, the Missing in America Project (MIAP) was already active and doing the same thing, primarily on the east coast and Utah. They were not active in Colorado, and as a 501(C)3 non-profit had a strong emphasis on fund raising to accomplish this task; see www.miap.us We assured the V.A. that we were already organized and self-funded as a 501(c)19 veteran's organization, and that the volunteers were already in place. We filed all necessary paperwork and were soon ready to submit names. MIAP had greased the ways for us, and we are indebted to them for their ground-breaking work.

On Halloween Day 2015, eighteen members of VVA 1071's Honors Committal Committee spent ten hours inspecting every box or container of cremains at Eastlawn Mausoleum. With nine laptops working, a total of 868 cremation certificates were transcribed using custom software that collected all information found on each cremation certificate, along with the storage location and identifying catalog numbers. At the end of the day each team's records were combined to a master spreadsheet, which allowed Olinger's to rapidly locate any particular box of cremains, should the need arise.

Unfortunately the information contained on cremation certificates is insufficient to provide the required three points of identification required by the V.A. to uniquely identify a person to be verified eligible for

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burial in a National Cemetery. Death certificate information would be required to fill in the blanks, mostly social security numbers, and dates of birth and death. Place of birth and race and ethnicity would provide further corroborating evidence of correct identification. Regrettably, death certificates were not readily available from funeral home records, and privacy concerns proved to be a major roadblock to developing sufficient data for submission.

A sustained effort to develop standing to access official records was well underway when we identified a section of law enacted by the 2009 Colorado Legislature at the urging of the Colorado Patriot Guard Riders, CRS 15-19-106 (4)(b)(II). This section specifically gives us, as a veteran's organization, authority to access remains *and the records thereto*, in order to identify veterans for transfer to a National Cemetery. This opened the doors for us at the Colorado Center for Health and Environmental Data, the State's repository for vital records and statistics. With the enthusiastic support of the Manager of the Vital Statistics Program, Kirk Bol and his staff, we quickly parsed our 868 names down to a first pass group of 675 names, sufficiently filled out with computerized data gleaned from many decades of records. The remaining names are being processed by hand because much of the older information was never entered into electronic format.

The returned list had an additional *Armed Forces* field, which was added to death certificates in the '70s. This field gave us a heads-up on 90 of the 675 useable names, cherry-picking the likely veterans for us. The 30 approved names in this first commemoration are from this first group, and an additional 36 names are already approved as of this writing and are to be interred in subsequent ceremonies. We expect to revert to a 20% hit rate when we exhaust these first 90 applications.

As names are submitted to the Scheduling Office, a labor intensive effort begins the verification process by first qualifying identification of the individual and then scouring the various databases and paper records to establish active duty in one of the branches of the armed forces. There are statutory bars to burial that require coordinating with FBI records as well. A person may be a veteran but if convicted of certain serious felonies or having a disqualifying court martial in his records, that would preclude eligibility for burial. Further complicating this research are the many personnel records that were destroyed in the 1973 fire at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis.

The Scheduling Office in St. Louis is staffed by 17 analysts who must provide this same verification service to the entire country. As veterans age and pass away in greater numbers, this small staff must keep up with all the fresh deaths first – they're obviously top priority. New Pre-Need and Dependent-Need programs have recently been added to their workload, and yet they find the time and resources to support us, always kind and helpful. We salute their dedication.

We have been agreeably surprised at the awe-inspiring support this project seems to draw from folks from all walks of life. It seems there is an ineffable element at play here, the core of which is the pure altruism expressed through this process – the beneficiaries can't even say thank you. This is not so much a righting of a wrong as it is a fulfillment of a promise made and not yet kept. We are all so blessed to be allowed to be a part of it. The urns our found veterans will spend the rest of eternity in have been lovingly hand-crafted by the wonderful folks of the Colorado Woodworkers Guild. Each of these vessels is truly a work of art with the seal of the appropriate service branch engraved in the wood. The debossed name plate is a period authentic dog tag, devotedly created for each individual by Authentic US Military Dog Tags. Offers to defray expenses have been summarily refused, such is the dedication of these selfless people.

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The ceremony will be relatively short, lasting somewhere around 30 to 40 minutes. We are honored to have Major General H. Michael Edwards, The Adjutant General for Colorado as our guest speaker, and Yeoman Mark Stallins (ret) to perform taps. The Colorado Joint Color Guard will present the colors and the twenty-one gun salute will be provided by the Air Force. Chapter Chaplain John Altfeltis will solemnize the invocation and benediction. The reading of names will incorporate an answer-back from a uniformed service member, attesting to the presence of that individual's remains. This commemoration will be conducted in a dignified, yet militarily brisk manner. The time for mourning was had in every instance many, many years ago. These precious souls have been in God's embrace for a very long time. We seek only to return these earthly remains to the company of their brothers-in-arms in a proper and dignified resting place.

Our brothers being memorialized are: (PH = Purple Heart, BS = Bronze Star)

Beaird, Patrick S.	CPL	Army	Korea	11/19/1929	-	10/15/1985	
Blackburn, William G.	TSGT	Army	WW II	7/13/1914	-	1/20/1994	
Boucher, Paul Edwin	AMM1C	Navy	WW II	6/12/1912	-	2/24/1991	
Bronson, Robert E	A2C	Air Force	Korea	6/10/1932	-	7/22/1993	
Capps, Ray W	GMG1	Navy	WW II + Korea	12/22/1918	-	/ /	
Clapper, Paul Clair	PVT	Army	WW II	1/27/1917	-	9/29/1974	
Clark, John C	TEC 4	Army	WW II	8/25/1905	-	5/18/1981	
Conrad, Melvin Earl	SN	Navy	Korea	1/5/1936	-	12/17/2010	
Garrett, James Kenyon	SGT	Army	WW II	6/15/1919	-	5/9/1985	
Gould, Everett K.	SGT	Army	WW II	5/10/1906	-	1/9/1984	
Grenfell, John Thomas	SR	Navy	None	4/24/1944	-	10/30/1995	
Guellow, Creighton N.	LT	Navy	WW II	3/13/1909	-	1/12/1992	
Kistner, Maurice Adrian	PFC	Army	WW II	4/28/1924	-	12/18/1993	PH + BS
Ljung, Bertil E.	CPL	Army	Korea	5/19/1927	-	3/3/2002	
McGinniss, Harry Wilkeson	LTJG	Navy	WW II	2/23/1917	-	11/15/1993	
McVicker, Lyman Leroy	TEC 5	Army	WW II	3/15/1917	-	8/29/1981	
Mills, Joseph L.	SP4	Army	None	1/13/1938	-	10/9/1994	
Polley, Curtis Alexander	SSGT	USMC	WW II + Korea	10/5/1924	-	3/17/1983	
Praeger, Frederick A	1LT	Army	WW II	9/16/1915	-	5/28/1994	BS
Sanders, Lawrence	SGT	Army	None	2/22/1952	-	3/16/2000	
Schumacher, Kenneth Wayne	PFC	USMC	WW II	11/8/1922	-	1/8/1982	
Sinclair, Ervin N.	PFC	Army	WW II + Korea	9/24/1921	-	1/30/1994	
Small, Donald Mclean	MM3	Navy	WW II	8/13/1912	-	2/15/1994	
Smith, Raymond Augusta	CAPT	Army	WW II	10/20/1915	-	9/3/1996	
Sperry, Robert A.		Navy	Korea	5/19/1930	-	6/12/1994	
Sutherland, Douglas	LTC	Army	WW II	3/25/1911	-	6/28/1985	
Syder, Charles T.	SGT	Army	WW II	9/24/1911	-	2/6/1995	
Thompson, Earl Edmund	SN	Navy	Vietnam	10/10/1953	-	10/7/2005	
Thompson, Earl Wilford	LTC	Army	Vietnam	3/15/1946	-	9/20/2005	
Williams, Richard Eugene	LT	Navy	WW II	12/31/1923	-	4/12/1992	

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