

Missing in America Project seeks out the forgotten vets

To many, it seems inconceivable that, after death, a veteran's remains should sit on a shelf in a funeral home, or forgotten in a closet at a state hospital.

Bud Thieme knows too well that it does happen.

"There are more reasons for it than I have time to tell," he says. "Sometimes families couldn't pay the bill or the deceased was indigent -- died by the railroad tracks and no one knew them. No one makes the effort to research their past."

Thieme serves as national financial director and the Southern Oregon coordinator of the Missing in America Project (MIAP), which has undertaken to find the forgotten remains of veterans, and locate family or see to it that the remains are interred with honor.

He spoke Wednesday, April 1, before the American Legion Post 70 & Auxiliary Post 70 members at Glenn Morrison American Legion Hall in Cave Junction.

MIAP began in Oregon three years ago, and has spread to 44 states. Its mission is to locate, identify and inter the unclaimed cremated remains of U.S. veterans through the joint efforts of private, state and federal organizations. So far almost 600 veterans have been identified, and close to 400 interred.

Thieme contacts funeral homes and asks to see their unclaimed remains. They are generally kept together in a locker; some have been on

the shelf for decades. He then researches the records, to try to determine which might have been veterans. Those names he sends to National Personnel Records Center at Jefferson Barracks, Mo. for verification.

"The one thing we really want to stress is that funeral homes keep the cremains, because they really want someone to claim them," he said. "It's a great thing in that the funeral homes have a right, after 12 months, to dispose of them, but they don't."

When a veteran is located, MIAP contacts a national cemetery and arranges for a burial. In June 2008, amid a thunderous crowd of motorcycles, MIAP escorted 14 veterans on their "last ride," from Hull & Hull Funeral Home in Grants Pass to Eagle Point National Cemetery in Jackson County.

On May 21, 2009, MIAP and other riders will leave Sacramento to escort the remains of Silver Star recipients Johnnie Franklin Callahan and James William Dunn to their final resting place at Arlington National Cemetery. In Kansas, the escort will convene with another group from Arizona with the remains of one Isaiah Mays.

Mays, a U.S. Army corporal in 1889, earned the Medal of Honor for the heroic defense of an Army payroll during a bandit attack in Southeastern Arizona. In 1923, Mays applied for and was denied a government pension, and the former Buffalo Soldier was eventually

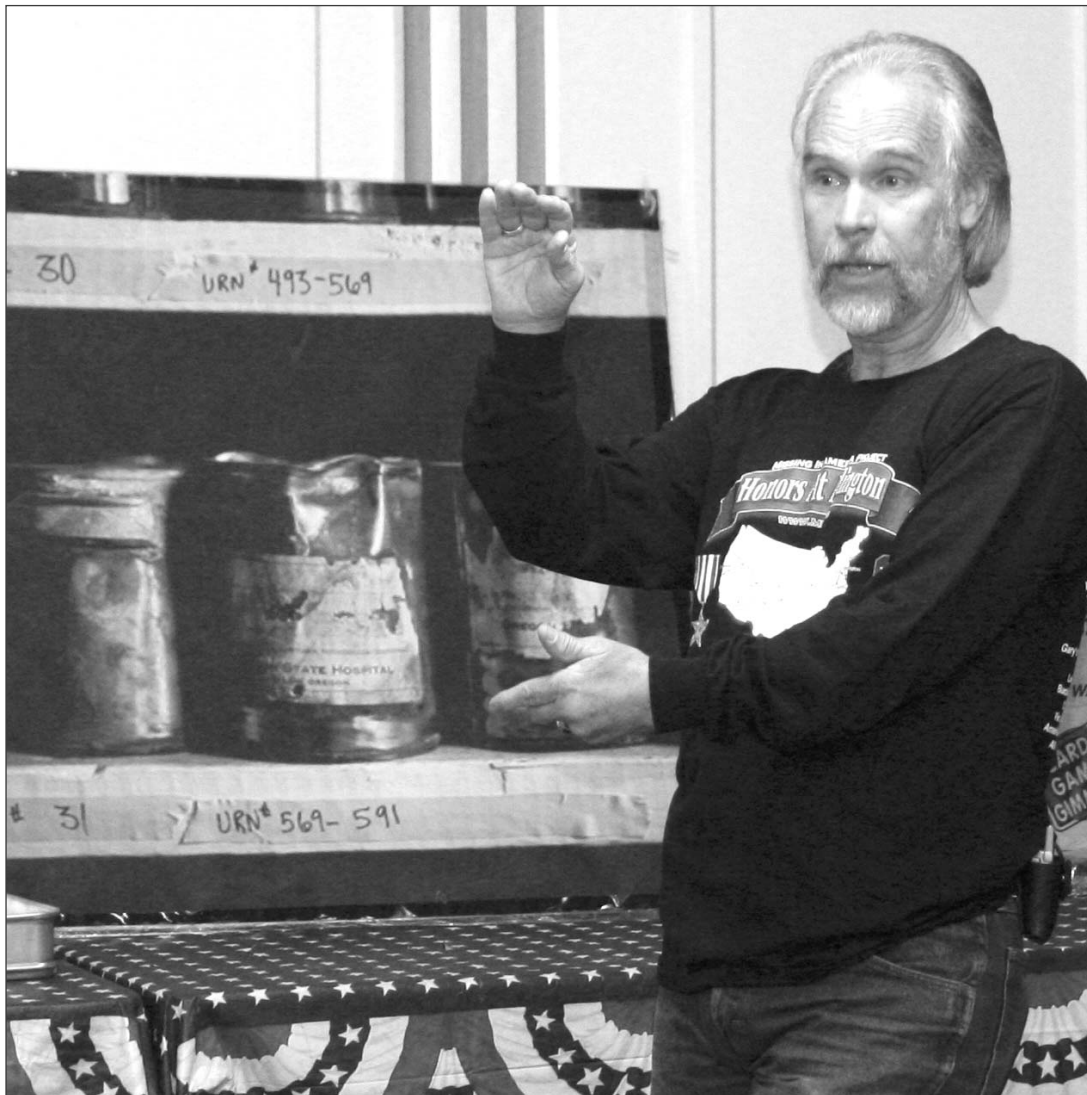
committed to the Arizona State Hospital, which housed not only mental patients but tuberculosis patients and the indigent.

Mays was buried in the hospital's pauper's graveyard with only a numbered brick to mark the site. Through efforts of veterans' groups, a proper Medal of Honor headstone was erected in 2001. But the gravesite is isolated in a vacant field on the hospital grounds.

On March 5, 2009, MIAP was granted permission through the Superior Court of Arizona to recover Cpl. Mays' remains. His service at Arlington will include six casket bearers, a rifle team to fire three volleys, and a bugler to sound *Taps*.

In the wake of news reports in the *Oregonian*, *Statesman-Journal* and *New York Times*, among others, of some 3,500 decades-old canisters bearing cremains warehoused at Oregon State Hospital, MIAP has worked with Oregon Senate President Peter Courtney to build a database of the remains. When the database is released, Thieme believes that many more veterans will be located, largely because what used to be called "shell shock" during World Wars one and two -- more recently known as PTSD -- was often diagnosed as a mental disorder.

"What did you do with somebody who wasn't quite stable?" Thieme asks. "You put them in the state hospital, never to be heard from again. That's what they did."



Bud Thieme describes the canisters found at Oregon State Hospital. Behind Thieme a photograph, taken by Rob Finch of the *Oregonian*, depicting the dilapidated containers.

"We have found that of those on the shelf in the funeral homes, around 20 to 30 percent are veterans," he said. "We think that the percentage will be 30 percent or higher in the state hospital."

After his presentation, Thieme, on behalf of MIAP, was given a certificate of appreciation from American Legion Post 70. Veterans groups such as American

Legion help to support the MIA Project, though help is accepted from any quarter, Thieme said.

"We are more than will-

ing to have anyone help us."

More information about the Missing in America Project can be found online at miap.us.

~ Michelle Binker

Klamath-Siskiyou Ecology conference set May 28-30

"Sustaining Biodiversity in a Changing Environment" is the title of the May 28 to 30 Third Conference on Klamath-Siskiyou Ecology in Selma.

This conference -- co-announced by The Deer Creek Center for Field Re-

search & Education, the Siskiyou Field Institute and Southern Oregon University at Ashland -- will bring together scientists, resource managers and engaged citizens to discuss the scope and consequences of environmental change in the ecologi-

cally diverse Klamath-Siskiyou bioregion.

The conference will include a broad spectrum of topics including forest ecology and management, watersheds, rivers, and fish. Also wildlife ecology, endemic and sensitive species, forest pathogens and invasive species, and hidden diversity ("the small things that run the world").

"One of our main goals is to advance knowledge about environmental change," said Andrew Englehorn, conference coordinator. "The Siskiyou have long been known among ecologists as

one of the most biologically diverse places in North America. The research presented at this event will bring science to the public, providing a forum to discuss the impacts of a changing environment in this bioregion."

Dr. Susan Harrison, Department of Environmental Science and Policy, University of California, Davis will deliver the keynote address, "Revisiting Robert Whittaker: Botanical Responses to Climate Change in the Klamath-Siskiyou."

Visit thesfi.org for updates and registration information.

BLM seeks OHV comments

Medford District BLM has extended the comment period for the Draft Timber Mountain Recreation Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to May 13.

"We recognize that many people have an interest in this plan, and we want to make sure everyone has a chance to study the Draft EIS and offer their comments," said Tim Reuwsaat, district manager.

The Timber Mountain area, commonly referred to as John's Peak, is generally situated to the west of the city of Jacksonville and south of the Interstate 5 corridor in

Jackson County. Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) enthusiasts "recreate" in the Timber Mountain Special Recreation Management Area and use has significantly increased in recent years. The draft plan will identify trails and roads to be designated and managed for OHVs.

Questions and comments about the plan should be directed to Kristi Mastrofini of the BLM Medford District Office at (541) 618-2384. Additional information about the draft plan also is available online at: www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford/recreation/timbermountain.

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