



ROLLING THUNDER[®], INC
CHAPTER 2 OF ILLINOIS
Wauconda, Illinois



“MISSION COMPLETE”

26 SEPTEMBER 2020

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS SGT. GEORGE REESER, also called “Raymond” or “Bud” by family and friends, was the oldest son of Levi and Esther Reeser, residents of Tazewell County, Illinois. Born in Goodfield on 3 June 1918, he spent much of his early life in and around the small city of Washington, attending school and helping raise his younger siblings Frances, Maxine, Jack, Donald and Lois. Bud went to work as a farmhand and a truck driver for a local garage before deciding on a career in the Marine Corps. He enlisted at a recruiting station in Chicago on 10 September 1940 and was dispatched to San Diego for his boot training. After his Sept. 10 induction, he was put on another train and arrived Sept. 14 at Camp Elliot in San Diego. He was assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, eventually achieving the rank of sergeant.



MISSING:

Sergeant George Reeser met his death on the island of Betio, Tarawa atoll as his battalion fought off a nighttime attack on 22 November 1943. Small groups of Japanese infiltrators found a gap in the lines between Able and Baker Companies and broke into the Marine positions, fighting with bayonets, grenades and rifle bullets. It was likely during one of these encounters that Reeser was shot in the head and killed. His body lay on the field until the following morning, until collected by a burial party and carried to a long trench grave. Reeser and 30 other Marines would lie there, undisturbed and undiscovered until early 2019.

RECOVERY:

In 2009, a not-for-profit organization, History Flight Inc., discovered the burial site of Reeser and others in Row D, Cemetery 33 on Betio. The remains were taken to a military laboratory in Hawaii, where since scientists have been working to make positive identifications. Reeser’s remains were analyzed using dental analysis and other evidence, with a positive identification announced on 27 March 2020.

After waiting almost 77 years, Reeser’s family finally began making burial arrangements in central Illinois.



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INTERMENT:

In early September 2020, in Hawaii, a Navy mortician prepared Reeser's remains for transport to Deiters Funeral Home in Washington, IL. At Naval Station Pearl Harbor, his remains were placed inside a casket. A Marine uniform was laid atop the remains before the coffin was shut tight before an American flag was draped across the top. On 24 September, a uniformed Marine escort accompanied the flag-covered casket to a Hawaiian commercial airport. There, the escort observed the coffin being loaded into the cargo bay. The Marine then boarded the plane for the flight stateside. After the plane's arrival in St. Louis the Marine escort witnessed the casket's removal from the cargo bay. Waiting nearby was the hearse from Deiters, along with members of the Reeser's family. On the tarmac, six Marines from St. Louis served as pallbearers, moving the casket into the hearse.



The hearse began the trip to central Illinois, accompanied by other vehicles carrying the six Marine pallbearers, the Hawaii escort and Reeser's family. Four Peoria-area veterans-support groups – consisting of about 50 motorcycle riders – escorted the procession from St. Louis to Washington.

Arriving about 6 p.m. at Deiters, the six Marine pallbearers carried the casket from the hearse into the funeral home, with the accompaniment of family, in preparation for pending arrangements.

On Saturday the casket was moved by Marines into a hearse for transport to Mt. Zion Cemetery outside Deer Creek, the final resting place of relatives of Reeser.

At Mt. Zion Cemetery a graveside service was held, the casket, draped in the flag. His grave is a double plot and double tombstone, shared with brother Donald, a Marine killed in action during the Korean War in 1952. Since then, the site had awaited George Reeser.

The service ended with full military honors and a 21-volley rifle salute rendered by the American Legion. After a bugler played taps, the pallbearers commenced a precision flag-folding ceremony. The flag was then presented to Ms. Lois Lauderback, SGT Reeser's youngest sister, and to Reeser's family.



USMC SGT George Reeser is finally laid to rest, more than eight decades after leaving home to give his all for his country.



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CHAPTER COIN and POW/MIA FLAG:

A National POW/MIA Flag and Chapter 2, IL challenge coin was presented to SGT Reeser's surviving sister, Ms. Lois Lauderback, by Richard Lanute, President, Chapter - Illinois, Rolling Thunder, Inc, during visitation at Deiter's Funeral Home and Crematory on Friday, 25 September 2020. The coin symbolizes the commitment of Rolling Thunder, Inc in supporting, and demanding, the on-going efforts to ensure the remaining 82,000 plus heroic servicemen, servicewomen, and civilians, unaccounted for, are returned to the United States of America and to their loved ones.



FUNERAL:

26 September 2020

Rolling Thunder, Inc, Illinois Participants:



ATTENDEES. Chapter 1 (7): Rick Montgomery, Rick Herr, Chuck Kimber, Maurice Dore, Steve Wozniak, Robert Parquette, Gary Vandebos. Chapter 2 (12): Mike Burghardt, Ron Carpenter, Larry Clucas, Bill Fulton, Deb Gille, Andy Haszlakiewicz, Wayne Kirkpatrick, Rich Lanute, Ted Makarewicz, Scott Seal, Mick Singer, Donna Swieton, Chapter 3 (2): Marlene Van Matre, David Van Matre