



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



“MISSION COMPLETE”

7 JANUARY 2025

USMC SGT Robert Van Heck

MISSING: In November 1943, Van Heck was a member of Company A, 2nd Amphibious Tractor Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and Sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese forces were virtually annihilated. Van Heck died on the first day of battle, Nov. 20. A memorial marker for Van Heck was placed in Cemetery 11.

Van Heck's name is recorded on the Courts of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific along with the others still missing from World War II. A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for.



RECOVERY: In 1946, the 604th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company centralized all of the American remains found on Tarawa at Lone Palm Cemetery for later repatriation. Almost half of the known casualties were never found. The remains that were recovered were sent to Hawaii for analysis. Those that could not be identified or associated with one of the missing were buried as Unknowns at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, also known as the Punchbowl, in Honolulu, including one set designated Tarawa Unknown X-265.

In 2017, one set of remains — labeled as Tarawa Unknown X-265 — was disinterred for analysis. Scientists were finally able to identify Van Heck's remains through anthropological analysis and mitochondrial DNA. Van Heck was officially accounted for on April 13, 2023, and his family was briefed on his identification by the DPAA said.

INTERMENT 7 January 2025

The inurnment service was held at Queen of Heaven Cemetery in Hillside, IL and came more than a year after Van Heck's remains were returned to his family last October.

SGT Van Heck was escorted to the cemetery from Drake & Sons Funeral Home. Rolling Thunder, IL Chapters 1 and 2 stood as an honor guard to pay our respects as the urn containing the Marine's cremated remains was carried into the Queen of Saints Mausoleum by the Marine Corps Honor Guard to be placed into the family crypt, next to his mother.

Despite decades of time, the ceremony brought a sense of closure to the family, comfort to his friends, warmth to his fellow Americans, and pride to his Veteran brothers and sisters.



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ROLLING THUNDER CHAPTER 2-IL ATTENDEES (9) Andy Haszlakiewicz, Wayne Kirkpatrick, Mary Kirkpatrick, Neil Joslun, Rich Gruner, Nick Bender, Dave Bakke, Bill Fulton and Ron Carpenter.

ROLLING THUNDER CHAPTER 1-IL ATTENDEES(4) Dave "Roadie" Skinner, Dennis "LT" Reiter, Jim "Snipe" Murray, Milan "Moe" Kondich"

POW/MIA FLAG: A National POW/MIA Flag, will be presented to the next of kin and family members. The POW/MIA Flag symbolizes a "test of our metal" in supporting the on-going efforts to ensure the remaining 81,000 plus servicemen, servicewomen, and civilians, unaccounted for, are returned to our Country and to their loved ones.

MEMORIAL BRICK: A Commemorative Brick will be added to the KIA / POW / MIA section of the Veterans Memorial at Woodstock Harley-Davidson, memorializing U.S. Marine Corps SGT Robert Van Heck.

MEDEIA COVERAGE

<https://wgntv.com/news/chicago-marine-sgt-robert-van-heck-burial-honors-dna-hillside/>

<https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/world-war-marine-funeral-illinois-82-years-after-death/3640193/>

<https://abc7chicago.com/post/marine-corps-sgt-robert-van-heck-laid-rest-queen-heaven-cemetery-decades-after-war-world-ii-death/15771549/>

<https://abc7chicago.com/videoClip/15773442/>