AFTER ACTION REPORT
Nov. 6th 2026
Fort Smith National Cemetery, Fort Smith, Arkansas

## Arkansas Service for Unclaimed Veterans and 1 Spouse

**Date:** Friday, November 6, 2026
**Location:** Fort Smith National Veterans Cemetery
**Prepared by:** Gina Gustafson, Arkansas State Coordinator
**Estimated Attendance:** 75

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## 1. EVENT OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

The Arkansas Missing in America Project (MIAP) service was conducted on Friday, November 6, 2026, at Fort Smith National Veterans Cemetery.

The purpose of the service was to provide a dignified and honorable final resting place for three unclaimed veterans and one veteran's spouse, ensuring that their lives, military service, and sacrifices were recognized and honored.

Overall, the service was extremely successful. Weather conditions were beautiful, and the ceremony proceeded in a respectful and dignified manner.

## 2. CEREMONY AND EXECUTION

The veterans and spouse were brought to the cemetery in a ceremonial procession led by CVMA Chapter 7-1's Caisson, accompanied by members of the VFW Riders and other patriotic motorcycle riding groups.

Upon arrival, the urns were ceremoniously escorted to the committal shelter by veterans representing each branch of the United States Armed Forces that the Veterans served in. This meaningful tribute provided a powerful display of respect, unity, and brotherhood among those who have served.

Gina Gustafson, Arkansas State Coordinator for the Missing in America Project, welcomed those in attendance and served as Master of Ceremonies.

The Arkansas MIAP team was honored to have MIAP Board Members Joe and Linda Smith in attendance, along with MIAP National Director Don Gerspach and his wife, Bridgett. Their presence demonstrated the continued support and commitment of MIAP leadership to its mission.

## 3. GUEST SPEAKERS

The service included remarks from several distinguished guest speakers:

- **Don Gerspach** – National Director, Missing in America Project.

- **Linda Johnson** – VFW Department Commander.
- **Zach Johnson** – Retired combat Army veteran and keynote speaker.

Zach Johnson delivered the keynote address, bringing a meaningful perspective as a combat veteran and reinforcing the importance of ensuring that no veteran is forgotten.

## 4. MILITARY HONORS AND PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Several veteran organizations and military personnel played essential roles in making the service a success.

- **VFW Post 8245, Huntington, Arkansas:** Provided the rifle team for military honors.
- **VFW Post 6245:** Provided the colors and performed Taps.
- **Active-Duty United States Navy Personnel:** Conducted the ceremonial folding of the American flag, which was presented to the daughter of one of the unclaimed Navy veterans.
- **Jerry Anderson, Retired Navy Veteran:** Read the names of each veteran being honored.

The presentation of the folded American flag to the Navy veteran's daughter was a particularly meaningful moment, providing a personal connection and an opportunity for family recognition during the service.

## 5. ATTENDANCE AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Approximately 75 people attended the service, representing MIAP leadership, veteran organizations, motorcycle riding groups, community supporters, family members, and fellow patriots.

The turnout demonstrated strong community support for the Missing in America Project and its mission to ensure that veterans who have been forgotten or left unclaimed receive the dignity, respect, and final honors they deserve.

## 6. PLANNING, COORDINATION, AND AGENCY COOPERATION

Coordination with Fort Smith National Veterans Cemetery was successful. Communication and arrangements with cemetery personnel went smoothly, allowing the ceremony to proceed as planned.

**Ocker Funeral Home of Alma** was instrumental in assisting with research and providing the information necessary to establish the military service of the unclaimed individuals. Their assistance was an important part of ensuring these veterans received the recognition and honors they deserved.

**The Saline County Coroner's Office** was also wonderful to work with throughout the process. Their cooperation and willingness to assist helped make the arrangements possible.

The successful collaboration between the funeral home, coroner's office, cemetery personnel, MIAP, and participating veteran organizations demonstrated the importance of community partnerships in fulfilling the Missing in America Project's mission.

## 7. CHALLENGES AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

No significant issues or challenges were encountered during the planning or execution of the November 6, 2026, MIAP service.

Coordination among the participating agencies, veteran organizations, cemetery personnel, and volunteers was successful. The ceremony proceeded as planned, with participating groups fulfilling their respective responsibilities.

The cooperation, communication, and dedication demonstrated by everyone involved contributed to the overall success of the service.

## 8. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The successful execution of this service reinforced the importance of establishing and maintaining strong working relationships with funeral homes, county coroners, national cemetery personnel, military representatives, and veteran service organizations.

Recommendations for future services include:

- Continue building relationships with funeral homes and county coroners to identify unclaimed veterans.
- Maintain early communication and coordination with cemetery personnel.
- Continue involving veteran organizations and active-duty military personnel in ceremonial honors.
- Encourage participation from patriotic motorcycle organizations to provide ceremonial escorts.
- Continue community outreach to increase awareness and participation in the MIAP mission.

The participation of active-duty military personnel, veteran organizations, and patriotic motorcycle groups added dignity and meaning to the ceremony and should continue to be encouraged at future Arkansas MIAP services.

## 9. SPECIAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The success of this service was made possible through the generosity, dedication, and support of numerous individuals and organizations.

Special recognition and thanks are extended to:

- **Tom Jones** – For his generous donation of handmade wooden urns.
- **Tables Matter** – For donating seating for guests attending the service.
- **Brian Mowrey** – For providing bagpipe music, adding a meaningful and solemn tribute to the ceremony.
- **CVMA Chapter 7-1** – For providing the ceremonial Caisson and participating in the procession.
- **VFW Riders and other patriotic motorcycle groups** – For their participation in escorting the veterans and spouse to their final resting place.
- **VFW Post 8245, Huntington, Arkansas** – For providing the rifle team.
- **VFW Post 6245** – For providing the colors and Taps.
- **Active-duty United States Navy personnel** – For conducting the ceremonial folding of the American flag and presenting it to the veteran's daughter.
- **Ocker Funeral Home of Alma and the Saline County Coroner's Office** – For their invaluable cooperation and assistance in identifying and documenting the veterans.

We are sincerely grateful to every individual, organization, and volunteer who contributed their time, resources, and support. Their willingness to come together ensured that these veterans and their loved one received the dignity, recognition, and honors they deserved.

## 10. OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSION

The Arkansas Missing in America Project service was a tremendous success.

With approximately 75 people in attendance, strong participation from veteran organizations, active-duty military personnel, MIAP leadership, and community supporters, the service successfully fulfilled the mission of ensuring that three unclaimed veterans and one spouse were laid to rest with dignity and honor.

The cooperation between MIAP, Ocker Funeral Home, the Saline County Coroner's Office, Fort Smith National Veterans Cemetery, and the many participating organizations demonstrated what can be accomplished when individuals and organizations come together for a common purpose.

This service was a reminder that military service and sacrifice should never be forgotten, and that no veteran should be left behind simply because they have no one to speak for them.

**We are honored to have played a part in ensuring these veterans received the recognition and final honors they earned.**

*It is the right thing to do.*

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**Respectfully submitted,**

Gina Gustafson
Arkansas State Coordinator
Missing in America Project