LAID TO REST

Korean War veteran's remains returned home after 59 years

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Larry Hale, a member of the Red Feather Society, guards the flag-draped casket of Sgt. 1st Class Arthur F. "Bluie" Jewett at his funeral held in Eagle Butte on Sept. 25.

A slow, rumbling drum beat echoes across the hillsides of the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation as drummers lead a somber procession down a gravel road toward a small, prairie cemetery near the banks of Jewett Creek. At the center of this march is a polished, wooden casket resting quietly on a horse-drawn wagon.

An American flag respectfully covers the casket, and several like it can be seen in the hands of the many family, friends and tribal honor guard members who walk nearby as they escort the fallen Soldier's remains to their final resting place. The wagon driver stops outside the front gates of the cemetery, and a senior noncommissioned officer in an Army dress blue uniform steps down from the seat next to him and onto the ground.

As the pallbearers prepare to carry the casket through the gates, the Soldier moves to his position near the entrance and stands at attention. It has been his solemn duty to escort the remains here from Hawaii, and he salutes as they are carried past him toward a waiting burial plot.

Inside the cemetery, members of the South Dakota Military Funeral Honors team are ready to carry out their duty to this fallen veteran by conducting a full military burial. The service will include a color guard, rifle volley, the playing of taps by a lone bugle, and the folding and presentation of the American flag to the surviving family members, who have been waiting 59 years for this day to come.

On September 25, 2009, family members of Army Sgt. 1st Class Arthur F. "Bluie" Jewett, a member of the Cheyenne River Indian Tribe and a Korean War veteran declared missing-in-action after 1950's Chosin Reservoir Campaign, were finally able to say goodbye to their cherished loved one by laying him to rest near the ranch where he was born.

Jewett was born on August 26, 1928, on a ranch east of White Horse. The fourth of ten children, Arthur was just minutes older than his twin brother, Albert, and quickly acquired the nickname that he would carry throughout his life.

"They wrapped him in a blue blanket," said Louis Jewett, Arthur's older brother, about his birth. "A few minutes later the other one was born, so they wrapped him in a pink blanket. Nobody knew them as Arthur and Albert, it was always 'Bluie' and 'Pinky'."

Like the rest of his siblings, Arthur grew up working on his family's ranch and riding horses bareback across the prairie hills around their home, said Louis.

After graduating from high school, Jewett enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1948 at the age of 19. He was stationed in San Francisco and Japan before being sent to Korea as a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment under the 7th Infantry Division.

The last letter Jewett's family members received from Bluie was dated in late November, 1950, while his unit was moving north, up the Korean peninsula. In it he talked about his plans for Thanksgiving.

"He made the comment 'We'll be eating our turkey on the run'," said Army Sgt. 1st Class Thomas H. Forbes, the casualty assistance officer assigned to the Jewett family by the South Dakota Army National Guard. "The battle of the Chosin being what it was, with the battle lines changing constantly, (Jewett's) platoon ended up being wiped out."

The Chosin Reservoir Campaign began on November 27, 1950, when a force of roughly 60,000 Chinese attacked and surrounded 30,000 United States Soldiers and Marines at the Chosin Reservoir, in the mountains of northeastern North Korea. The battle continued for 17 days, through snow and sub-zero temperatures, as the U.S. forces attempted to break out of the Chinese encirclement.

On January 13, 1951, almost six weeks after the Jewett family received Bluie's last letter, the county sheriff delivered a government telegram to his parents at their ranch, telling them that their son was M.I.A., said Louis.

"It was just a shock," he said. "They just could not believe it. My dad went up on a hill behind the house, gave out a yell and cried. The saddest moment of my life was hearing my dad cry."

Jewett's body was never recovered after the battle, and it was only later that the Army changed his status from Missing-In-Action to Killed-In-Action, using the date of December 2, 1950, said Forbes.

Louis said the uncertainty of Jewett's status, and the confusion surrounding the circumstances of his death haunted his family from then on.

He said that until her death many years later, his mother, Keva, developed a habit of peeking out the window of the ranch toward the road, and his grandmother, Julia, would pray with her rosary every night before bed, hoping that Bluie was all right, and would soon return.

Though Jewett's death was a hard blow to overcome, it also held the family together through the years, with stories of his life passed down to his nieces and nephews and their children.

"Our family has stayed intact," said Julie Marshall, Arthur's oldest surviving sister, who was 10 years old at the time of her brother's death. "Every one of us has thought, everyday in our lives, 'Are we going to find him?', 'Is he going to come home?' We didn't say it out loud, but we were all thinking about it."

These lingering thoughts continued through the year 2000, when tentative steps were taken in an attempt to bring closure to Jewett's family. A class of elementary students and their teacher from Spearfish, took it upon themselves to research South Dakota service members who were listed as M.I.A.

"They contacted my dad and asked if he could tell them more about his brother, Arthur," said Jennifer Schoelerman, Bluie's niece and daughter to his younger brother, Keith. "They began talking about how (the U.S. government) uses DNA testing. At that point it was just this big dream in the future."

With the information gained from talking to the student's teacher, Keith contacted the U.S. government, asking to be placed on their lists for possible DNA testing should any remains be found, Schoelerman said.

In 2002, unbeknownst to the Jewett family, North Korea allowed a team from the U.S. into their country to recover remains of service members who were lost during the Korean War, said Forbes. Once there, the team was led to a site where they discovered the remains of seven people, five of which were Americans.

Sgt. 1st Class Arthur F. Jewett

These remains were taken to Hawaii, where anthropologists and archeologists went to work in an attempt to discover their identities, he said.

Schoelerman said that it was 2005 when the government tried to get in contact with her father, hoping he could submit a DNA sample to compare with that of the remains found three years earlier. By this time her father Keith had been diagnosed with leukemia, was very ill and was unable to be reached, she said. So they contacted her uncle Louis.

Louis gave his DNA sample in January, 2006, as did his sister, Iyonne, and after three more long years, the results had finally come in.

Arthur 'Bluie' Jewett had finally been found.

On August 25, 2009, Forbes and Rena Thompson, a mortuary affairs specialist from the Department of the Army's Headquarters for Mortuary Affairs, the agency who had found and identified the remains, arrived in White Horse to meet the Jewett family and to start the preparations to bring their long lost brother back to South Dakota.

Arthur's remains would be flown from Hawaii to South Dakota on a military aircraft, escorted the whole time by a member of the U.S. Army, to be buried with full military honors by the country he gave his life defending.

For the Jewett family, the news was met with a combination of shock and relief, said Schoelerman, but there was also a great deal of sorrow for those who were no longer alive to hear it.

In the 59 years that had passed since 1950, Arthur Jewett was joined in death by his grandparents, parents and six of his brothers and sisters, including Keith, Iyonne and his twin brother Albert. Only his brother Louis and younger sisters Julie and Juanita remain.

"When we heard (that Arthur had been found) I was so shocked," Julie said. "I couldn't say anything. I just sat there and thought that the day is finally coming that we are going to bring him home, and there are only three of us left. All the rest are gone. It was bittersweet."

Though it is hard to ignore the feelings of sadness for those who couldn't see it, little sister Juanita Gable, only 8 years old when he died, is simply happy to have her brother home.

"It is just so amazing that this could happen," Gable said. "I think we are lucky that we have found our brother, and if this happened to us, it could happen to anyone who has someone still missing. This is a good thing."

As friends and loved ones crowd closely around them, Louis, Julie and Juanita look on quietly as the Military Funeral Honors team concludes their honorable ritual.

The rifle volley is fired, the haunting notes from the bugle are sounded, and the American flag is taken from the casket, folded crisply and presented to the family. Words of comfort are spoken by both priest and medicine man, and the casket is lowered to its final resting place, while traditional songs are sung to the beat of a tribal drum.

As the crowd begins to leave, and members of the family begin to respectfully cover the casket with earth, two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters from the South Dakota Army National Guard fly slowly above their heads before disappearing over the horizon.

From the ranch where he was born and raised, to the freezing, mountainous battlefields of Korea where he gave his life, and back again 59 years later, Sgt. 1st Class Arthur F. Jewett has been on a long journey. Now, in his resting place on the banks of Jewett Creek, that journey has finally come to its end.

Members of the South Dakota Army National Guard Military Funeral Honors team fold an American flag during the burial ceremony for Sgt. 1st Class Arthur F. "Bluie" Jewett at St. Theresa Catholic cemetery near White Horse on Sept. 25.