

Lost and Found

VFW regional office in Arizona finds rightful home for WWII Purple Heart

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The package arrived at the VFW Regional Benefits Office in Phoenix, Ariz., on Aug. 18. It was a bulky package with no return name or address, only a letter explaining what to do with a smaller box inside.

The longhand letter began with — “This was found in my deceased mother-in-law’s estate from her second marriage. Appreciate if you can find relatives of this brave young man and return it to them” — and concluded with a thank you from “Liz.”

Stacey Boren, who received the package that day, read the letter and proceeded to open the smaller box.

What Boren found inside was a pristine Purple Heart medal engraved with the name of 1st Lt. John L. Carmody, along with a Presidential Memorial Certificate signed by Harry S. Truman on behalf of Carmody.

“When I opened it and saw the presentation case and then the Purple Heart, I got goose-bumps,” said Boren, an administrative assistant at the VFW Regional Benefits Office. “After reading the note that accompanied it, it became our mission to get it back to the rightful owners.”

The medal was addressed to an Edna M. Carmody by the War Department, and it came accompanied with an enclosed note from Robert P. Patterson, the Secretary of War between September 1945 and July 1947.

“The search for 1st Lt. Carmody’s relatives began that very afternoon,” Boren said. “And within a couple of hours, we had found obituaries for 1st Lt. Carmody and his sister, Joan Hirth, on findagrave.com.”

Boren used findagrave.com to message the grave managers, passing along contact information in order to reach surviving family members of 1st Lt. Carmody.

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“When I didn’t hear anything towards the end of the day, I started searching for relatives that were listed in Joan Hirth’s obituary,” Boren said. “While discussing my frustration with my boss, Ken Deist, he suggested I call the cemetery where both brother and sister are buried.”

Boren’s search led her to Mount Carmel Catholic Cemetery in Hillside, Ill., where 1st Lt. Carmody and his sister, Joan, were buried. She contacted a representative over the phone and was asked to fax a letter explaining the situation.

“He told me he would forward the contact request to the family,” Boren said. “So again, I waited. For the next 15 days, I constantly checked our voicemail and email for any communication from one of the family members.”

On the early morning hours of Sept. 10, Boren finally received a call from a Marybeth Kelly, who introduced herself as 1st Lt. Carmody’s niece.

“She informed me that she would be thrilled to care for her uncle’s medal. She stated her mother, Joan, would have loved to have had it,” Boren said. “I was just relieved that such a special award was going to a loving home.”