

# Press



# Release

## Flag is raised at WWII soldier's gravesite

Pvt. James Wilkins of Humboldt was killed on Iwo Jima

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Deceased WWII Veteran receives flag pole dedication in Humboldt: Pvt. James Wilkins Flag Pole Dedication Service was held at Rose Hill Cemetery, Saturday, March 29, 2014. NICHOLE MANNA and KENNETH CUMMINGS/The Jackson Sun



my company, the 34th Marines, ashore and we, too, had the gruesome task of stepping over piles of dead Marines for nearly 50 yards, through that knee-deep, black volcanic ash. And when we were off the beach, the (Japanese) turned loose a barrage of mortar fire on us that killed two of my men, and wounded five others. I look down at James Wilkins, a 17-year-old lad from Memphis, who wore a tiny American flag in his pocket. He loved his country! Ten feet away was the body of 18-year old Corporal Hubert Duverny, from Jersey City. He had counted on me to get through that shifting black sand to a place of relative safety. Only thing on Iwo, there was no such place!"

Wilkins' body was brought back to America and he was laid to rest in Rose Hill Cemetery in Humboldt.

His grave went unnoticed until a couple years ago when Humboldt Mayor Marvin Sikes and his brother came across it. It was then that Sikes and the Humboldt Historical Society began digging into Wilkins' background, uncovering more information about his time in the war and finding Hess and other of Wilkins' distant relatives.

On Saturday at 1:30 p.m., Sikes, Wilkins' family, the Humboldt Historical Society and members of the Marine Corps League gathered at Rose Hill Cemetery for a flag-raising ceremony in Wilkins' honor.

William Hess used to dress up in his uncle's Marine uniform when he was a child.

"I was going to go save my uncle," he said.

His uncle, Pvt. James Wilkins, was a soldier in World War II and was killed on Iwo Jima.

Even though Hess was born four years after Wilkins' death, he said he felt like he grew up knowing his uncle. Having Wilkins as an uncle was one of the reasons why Hess, who is a retired captain from the U.S. Army, decided to go down the path of military service.

Wilkins was killed on Iwo Jima on Feb. 25, 1945.

The story of the day of his death was told by one of his commanding officers, Jim Rundles: "Black Marines (the Eighth Ammunition Company) were among the first to go ashore. I led



The flag of the United States of America was raised in honor of Pvt. James Wilkins during a flagpole dedication service Saturday at Rose Hill Cemetery. Wilkins was killed on Iwo Jima in World War II. / KENNETH CUMMINGS/The Jackson Sun



“I’m real proud of it,” Hess said about the ceremony. “I appreciate the city doing this.”

Now, Wilkins’ plot is next to a large pole topped with an American flag with the Marine Corps flag underneath.

The first American flag, which was raised by members of the Marine Corps League, was brought back down, folded and given to Hess. The group then raised the second American flag and then the Marine flag.

Charles Allison, with the Humboldt Historical Society, said holding the flag dedication was important to honor Wilkins and to let his legacy live on.

“Very few people knew about him,” Allison said.

Mayor Sikes agreed.

“We can’t forget this today,” Sikes said. “We’re going to make sure he’s honored every day.”

Before Wilkins’ service in the U.S. Marine Corps, he attended Stigall High School in Humboldt and also served as the assistant Sunday school superintendent at Morning Star Baptist Church.

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