

FREEDOM'S ROOTS RUN DEEP

The 'Freedom Tree' had stood in front of the Las Vegas state office building for nearly 35 years as a memorial to the nation's missing soldiers. Now, thanks in part to help from NDOT, the tree has been moved to a new home where it flourishes as a symbol of freedom.

The olive tree was planted in 1972 to honor military heroes missing in action, particularly William "Skip" Skivington Jr., a 19-year-old Las Vegas soldier missing in action in the Vietnam War. When renovation begun last year on the state building that the tree stood near, there were no plans for saving the memorial tree. But, Division of Parole and Probation Sergeant Merritt Carlton soon took interest in the tree outside of his office building and got to the root of its meaning. Carlton was able to track down Skivington's father, William Skivington Sr., and unravel a story that had begun nearly 40 years before.

Skip's heroic story so inspired Parole and Probation's Merritt Carlton that he and other volunteers raised over \$20,000 to preserve and move the tree that was dedicated to Skip's memory. That's where NDOT came in.

Following inter-agency coordination from NDOT District 1 Engineer Mary Martini, Crew 150's Chad Pollock designated a safe moving route for the overheight 30-ton tree, and arranged for the help of heavy-moving specialists Dielco Crane. Willie Washington and Kenny Smith, also of Crew 150, pitched in to set up safe traffic control and refill the hole left by the tree. Meanwhile, Chad Pollock joined the Nevada Highway Patrol and National Guard in providing safe escort and traffic control as the large tree ventured nearly 30 miles down U.S. 95 to its new home at Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Boulder City.

SKIP'S STORY



In the late 1960s, William Skivington, Jr., known as "Skip," graduated from Las Vegas' Western High School and went on to college in Idaho. But, the Vietnam War weighed heavily on the patriot's mind. After signing up for military service, Private First Class Skip Skivington found himself in Kham Duc in South Vietnam. The U.S. military observation post had been heavily hit by enemy grenade attacks, and as radio operator, Skip was positioned directly on the right of his lieutenant when enemy forces overran his team. The last radio communication from Skip's group came when the lieutenant radioed battalion headquarters that they were shooting the enemy as they came through the door. Then the radio went silent. It was Mother's Day 1968, and Skip had been officially missing since that time.

There, a rededication ceremony saw the tree replanted with full military dignity, including a 21-gun salute, color guard and “Taps.”

“It was quite an experience, and we couldn’t have done it without NDOT,” Carlton said of the rededication ceremony he organized.

“It was great. It was one of the most rewarding projects I have been part of,” Pollock echoed. “We all felt very patriotic.”

The moving of the tree was not the only recent chapter in Skip’s story. During the same time the tree was moved, the military’s joint POW/MIA Accounting Command recovered



the soldier’s wallet and high school ring from below six feet of dirt on the Vietnam mountaintop battleground where he perished, and identified his remains. Skip is now laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery.

The military burial was bittersweet for Skip’s father, William Skivington Sr. The World War II veteran has seen his other two sons die, one from a rare lung ailment and another from cancer believed to be caused by Agent Orange.

