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FEATURED

Montana bikers help deliver Civil War vet to final resting place

By JORDON NIEDERMEIER jniedermeier@billingsgazette.com Aug 3, 2016



CASEY PAGE, Gazette Staff

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Lewis Wendt, right, and Jack Lewis, center, of the Patriot Guard of Montana, transfer the remains of Civil War veteran Jewett Williams to fellow Patriot Guard of Montana riders Wes Lambert, front, and Bob Newman, back left, at Beartooth Harley-Davidson on Wednesday.

The remains of a long forgotten Civil War veteran passed through Billings on the back of a motorcycle Wednesday on their way to the man's hometown and final resting place in Maine.

The Patriot Guard Riders, an organization of motorcycle riders who attend military funerals, are transporting the cremated remains of Union soldier Jewett Williams across the country to honor his service and recognize his life. Montana state chapter members transferred the ashes at Beartooth Harley-Davidson before completing the next leg to the Wyoming border.

Former Montana Patriot Guard captain Wes Lambert received the ashes in Billings from current captain Lewis Wendt, who carried the remains from the Idaho/Montana state line.

Lambert said the group does similar state-to-state escorts about twice a year, but this is the first Civil War veteran he can remember.

"It's kind of a record for me," he said. "One of the mottoes in Patriot Guard is that we remember everyone, and I think this is a prime example."

Williams served in the 20th Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment and fought in the Battle of Gettysburg. After the Civil War he moved west to Washington and later to Portland, Ore. He suffered from dementia toward the end of his life and in 1922 was admitted to an insane asylum, where he would die a few months later at age 78.

Williams' body was cremated, and his ashes were never claimed. His urn was one of more than 3,600 discovered in the old Oregon State Hospital in 2004.

The Patriot Guard began the relay in Salem, Ore., on Aug. 1 and plan to deliver Williams' remains to Maine by Aug. 22. He'll be buried with military honors at Togus National Cemetery.

Jordon Niedermeier

General assignment reporter for the Billings Gazette.