

Marine Corps League Mineola Detachment Veteran Report

Below I have listed the links to that you can review the actual news coverage. Then, below are the stories from the news channels.

Initial story ran in Tyler, Texas.

<http://www.kltv.com/story/32969688/east-texas-veterans-searching-for-owner-of-lost-military-storage-chest>

This is the link to the follow up story once Commandant Smith located Sgt. Cook.

<http://www.kltv.com/story/33018310/owner-of-military-foot-locker-lost-in-east-texas-found>

Below is the link to the story that the news channel in Virginia ran.

<http://www.wcyb.com/news/virginia/russell-county/local-army-veteran-gets-missing-personal-treasures-returned/73903551>

TYLER, TX (KLTV) -

A military organization in one East Texas city is trying to find the veteran behind a lost storage chest. Medals, letters, photos and even an army uniform were found in a storage unit in Quitman.

The items were then passed on to The Marine Corps League of Mineola. Kelly Smith with the Marine Corps League gave us a look at the items that offer a glimpse into the veteran's past.

"Of course this is the first time I've looked through it, so there's no telling what's in here," says Smith.

Piece by piece, Marine Corps League Commandant Kelly Smith and I began to uncover what was in this storage chest. Among the items was a group picture that Smith found.

"That might be helpful in trying to find... Fort Jackson South Carolina, and that's August 12 of 1988," says Smith.

As we dug deeper, we realized that we had probably found the owner.

"Look at all the medals he's received," says Smith.

We believe the owner to be a Sergeant Robert Cook Jr., and a face that kept popping up in every picture we found.

"This is date entered, active duty this period, one, twenty seven, ninety eight, (January, 27, 1998)," says Smith.

These records tell the story of a man who served in different time periods and campaigns. Kelly Smith then found a letter from a family member.

"Robbie, please accept this little memento or souvenir of your participation of the successful in Kuwait with Iraq," says Smith.

"I don't think it'd be fair to him to let these things go by the way side," says Smith.

The problem now was trying to find him.

"Somehow these things ended up in Wood County," says Smith.

A check with Triple G Mini Storage, the storage unit business in Quitman where the chest was found, yielded, no luck. A search of a previous address, didn't help either.

"Hopefully [I'll] get to meet him sometime and find out the story why he lost a lot of these items," says Smith.

With no location in Texas that we knew of yet, we were left staring at a medal from Kosovo, and pictures from what looks like a far away land.

"That's a lot of service, that's not just a tour. That's a lifetime to some," says Smith.

It's a lifetime reflected in a note of the fear he felt and his role in Desert Storm.

Part of the note reads as follows:

"I know beyond a doubt my life has changed, because of events and feelings I've tried to relay. These memories and emotions I can see, touch, taste and hear in my mind's eye, but can never be fully described to anyone"

While we weren't able to find out a Texas location, we did find out that Robert Cook may also have ties to Virginia and Connecticut.

Follow up Story

The owner of a military foot locker that was left behind in an East Texas town has been found.

We first brought you the story of the foot locker left in Quitman last week.

Medals, letters and photos, along with the name Robert Cook, were found inside. Cook was tracked down Friday, through Facebook and tips sent to the Marine Corps League in Mineola from our story.

We were able to speak with Robert Cook, who's now in Virginia, about the contents he says represent a time in his life he hasn't seen for many years.

"It's just something that I couldn't replace and it's just a whole big part of my life that was missing there," says Cook.

The items in this foot locker tell the story of Robert Cook's long service.

"It was unbelievable, I thought all those things were lost and I didn't think I'd ever seen them again. And it's a lot of time invested and people don't understand unless you've been through those kind of things," says Cook.

After the army, Robert Cook got an oil job and moved to Quitman; a few years later, in 2010, he moved back home to be with family, and somehow the foot locker was left behind.

"I was diagnosed with PTSD six years ago, and I had put a lot of those things up because some of the memories were painful," says Cook.

"And then I got through the difficult part of the PTSD and I just couldn't remember what had happened to them, and now I greatly regretted losing them," says Cook.

They're items like a small teddy bear.

"My kids had sent it to me when I went to Iraqi freedom two in 2004-2005, and just little things like that, I slept with that thing every night, and it helped me get through," says Cook.

Pictures we now know to be from Iraq, flags, one for a buddy lost in Kosovo, and another, for those lost in Iraq.

"Yeah, I had some friends that had lost their lives and I had one friend that had lost his leg over there, and it's just something I'd gotten as a remembrance," says Cook.

They're items that Cook is ready to see again. On Friday, Kelly Smith with the Marine Corps League in Mineola sent a video of them mailing the footlocker.

"I'll feel a little overwhelmed, I think, at first, seeing all those things again, but on the other hand I'll be really happy. And I'll be able to put them up and display them properly, and very proud to have them back, too," says Cook.

Cook says the foot locker should arrive tomorrow. He says even though his birthday was yesterday, he'll have to celebrate once again, when he's able to look through those items.

Virginia News Coverage

Local army veteran gets missing personal treasures returned

The mystery of a missing footlocker, belonging to a local war veteran has been solved.

Robert Cook of Lebanon, Virginia, thought his personal treasures were lost forever.

It was filled with photos, awards and memories... and found by a complete stranger.

News 5's Jessica Griffith was there as he opened the chest today for the first time in seven years.

Robert Cook thought he'd never see these items again.

"Army achievement award that I received. My name tag," Cook said.

"This is getting ready to deploy to Iraq from Belgium."

Cook lived in Texas for a few years, after serving in the Gulf War, Kosovo and Operation Iraqi

Freedom.

It was during that time, his storage chest somehow got misplaced, but luckily a woman found it and kept it.

"The one person who held onto it for three years but they didn't sell it or get rid of it or throw it away and thought that it was important enough to keep. That was the most amazing thing to me," Cook said.

A group of Texas veterans tracked down Cook, and mailed the box to his home in Lebanon, Virginia.

"All these would've been lost if it hadn't been for these nice people in Texas. Unbelievable," he said.

Surrounded by family members, Cook went through item by item, as he remembered his time in the army.

"A lot of emotions."

The most special items?

Two flags honoring two of his friends that were killed.

And a teddy bear his kids gave him before he left for Iraq.

"I slept with this thing every night in my bed. This is really important to me," Cook said.

Cook said he suffered from PTSD, and at one point, he didn't want to see these things again because it was too painful.

"Now that I've gotten over a lot of that, I've been looking for them and missing them," he said.

Now, Cook has found some closure.

"I'm so thankful."

"This is why we do what we do for our veterans." Kelly Smith