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NEWSLETTER / NEWS RELEASE
From the Office of the Mayor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A PLAQUE DEDICATION TO HONOR FIRST LIEUTENANT MICHAEL J. BLASSIE, REPATRIATED VIETNAM ERA “UNKNOWN SOLDIER”, IS SET FOR 7:45 PM WEDNESDAY, MAY 30TH AT CORNER OF ST. JEAN & RUE ST. FRANCOIS DURING THE FIRST WEDNESDAY NIGHT OUT FESTIVITIES “PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN”

Mayor Thomas P. Schneider is proud to announce that the City along with Old Town Partners will host a dedication to unveil a plaque in honor of First Lieutenant Michael J. Blassie. This will be the 32nd Walk through History plaque in honor of someone who has made a significant contribution to the City of Florissant and/or the Nation.

The ceremony will be held on Wednesday, May 30th at 7:45 p.m. with military honors on the corner of St. Jean and rue St. Francois. The plaque dedication will take place during the first Wednesday Night Out festivities “Proud to be an American” which is being hosted by the VFW Post 4105 located at 410 rue St. Francois. The ceremony will conclude with “Taps” at the 8:19 p.m. sunset that evening.

First Lieutenant Michael Joseph Blassie (April 4, 1948 – May 11, 1972) was an officer in the United States Air Force. Prior to the identification of his remains, Blassie was the unknown service member from the Vietnam War buried at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery which is guarded by a special military detail 24 hours, 365 days a year. Michael Blassie is one of the 42 KIA/MIA names engraved on the Vietnam Memorial Obelisk at Koch Park which was dedicated in 1969.

After graduating from St. Louis University High School, Blassie entered the United States Air Force Academy, from which he graduated in 1970. He then attended Undergraduate Pilot Training, receiving his aeronautical rating as an Air Force pilot in 1971. He subsequently qualified as an A-37 Dragonfly pilot and served as a member of the 8th Special Operations Squadron, deployed to Southeast Asia. He was awarded the Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with Four Oak Leaf Clusters and the Purple Heart which was awarded posthumously. Lt. Blassie died during his 138th combat mission when his A-37B Dragonfly was shot down near An Lộc in what was then South Vietnam.

Partial skeletal remains were retrieved from the area of the crash five months after his aircraft was shot down and were initially identified by Mortuary Affairs as Blassie. The remains were reclassified as unknown when their projected age and height were judged not to match Blassie's.

Blassie's remains were designated as the unknown service member from the Vietnam War by Medal of Honor recipient U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Allan J. Kellogg Jr. during a ceremony at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on May 17, 1984 and were transported aboard the USS Brewton to Naval Air Station Alameda. The remains were then sent to Travis Air Force Base on May 24, and arrived at Andrews Air Force Base the following day.

Many Vietnam veterans, President Ronald Reagan, and First Lady Nancy Reagan visited Blassie as he lay in state in the U.S. Capitol. An Army caisson carried his coffin from the Capitol to the Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day, May 28, 1984. President Reagan presided over the funeral and presented the Medal of Honor to the Vietnam Unknown. The President also acted as next of kin by accepting the interment flag at the end of the ceremony. DNA identification had yet to advance to its current state when Blassie's remains were repatriated, and he lay in the Tomb of the Unknowns up to 1998, with visitors paying respects but unaware of his identity.

A CBS News report in January 1998 claimed the Vietnam unknown was Blassie, and articles in U.S. Veteran Dispatch in 1994 and 1996 had made the same claim, drawing on Defense Department records.

After Blassie's family secured permission, the remains of Blassie were exhumed on May 14, 1998. Based on mitochondrial DNA testing, Department of Defense scientists were able to identify Blassie's remains. On June 30, 1998, the Defense Department announced that the Vietnam Unknown had been identified. On July 10, Blassie's remains were transported to his family in Florissant, Missouri for a funeral mass at St. Dismas Catholic Church and were later reinterred at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery.

Following the removal of Lt. Blassie's remains from the Tomb of the Unknowns, the marker at Arlington was replaced with one that read "Honoring and Keeping Faith with America's Missing Servicemen." Advances in technology, such as those that allowed the identification of Lt. Blassie, may lead to the eventual identification of all interments marked "unknown" from Vietnam.