

Colorado Springs Firm Handles Astronaut's Rites

Irwin Was Close to Shrine of Remembrance

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Only Twelve men have walked on the moon. The first of these heroes to die was 61 year old Colonel Jim Irwin, the Apollo 15 astronaut. He went to the moon in 1971, operated the first vehicle on the moon and discovered the gleaming, white Genesis Rock on the dust covered lunar surface.

Funeral services were held in Colorado Springs where Colonel Irwin and his family lived when he was not on his frequent world wide speaking tours. He died following a heart attack in the Colorado mountain town

of Glenwood Springs. His wife, Mary Irwin, contacted the Shrine of Remembrance Funeral Home in Colorado Springs prior to any public awareness of her husband's death. The Irwin family has a close relationship with the Shrine of Remembrance and with one of its directors, retired Air Force Colonel Jim Rix. In 1987, the astronaut had dedicated the Space Shuttle Memorial plaque at the Shrine of Remembrance's Veterans Honor Court.

Upon receiving the word of Colonel Irwin's death, the Shrine of

Remembrance immediately realized the protocol and news impact involved in handling funeral arrangements for such a world wide renowned person. The Colorado Springs funeral home and mausoleum had not previously handled arrangements for such a famous person. They formed a task team to coordinate the vast array of details that would need to be rapidly coordinated and acted upon. The three person team consisted of the Shrine of Remembrance President, Costas Rombocos; Retired Colonel Jim Rix, Director of Veterans and Military



Astronaut James B. Irwin in the Shrine of Remembrance Veterans Honor Court at the Space Astronaut Memorial Dedication ceremony (1987).

Affairs; and Tom Vien, the funeral home manager.

The astronaut and his wife had a deep religious faith. This meant that all of the arrangements would be governed first by having a religious service in their local church; of second importance was the Colonel's space exploits.

On the day following the death, the first public press conference to announce the astronaut's sudden death was held at the funeral home chapel by Colonel Rix. The Irwin family and the funeral home had been inundated by phone calls from the international and national press which had learned of the death from Glenwood Springs officials. But the Shrine of Remembrance held firm and deferred comments until their scheduled press conference, as it was the wish of the Irwin family to have some private time to make decisions.

The televised press conference, held at the funeral home chapel, was how the public was first officially informed of the astronaut's death and revealed for the first time the cause of death as a heart attack. The details given at the press conference were reported by all national television networks. Colonel Irwin's heart condition had existed since he took the trip to the moon. Colonel Rix of the Shrine of Remembrance, with permission of the family, provided considerable detail of Colonel Irwin's rich military and personal history. The two Colonels had been in the Air Force and had traveled to China together.

The local and national press, including The New York Times, had extensive coverage of the death followed by featured articles in the front page of the Colorado papers.



Jim Irwin salutes the flag at his Apollo 15 landing site on the moon. His funeral services were provided by the Shrine of Remembrance of Colorado Springs. Irwin at age 61, was the first lunar astronaut to die.

The funeral home immediately brought the remains to Colorado Springs when they learned of Jim Irwin's death. They went by car to the mountain town of Glenwood Springs, which is four hours from Colorado Springs, so that timely and proper preparation of the body could be ensured. Then the funeral home team developed, for the family's consideration, three options of service arrangements and schedules. The options considered extensive media attention, the religious feeling of the family, numerous personal friends, and the protocol involved with a national hero. NASA and the U.S. Air Force were contacted early in the planning.

The selected option resulted in the astronaut's body lying in state for one day in the funeral home chapel. The following day a full traditional funeral service was held at the family's church in Colorado Springs. The church service was followed by a three mile cortege and funeral procession returning to the Shrine of Remembrance for a military honors ceremony at their famed Veterans Honor Court.

The actual visitation was with the casket closed (at the family's request) and draped with the American flag. Jim Irwin was privately visited by all his family and selected friends with the casket opened. He was dressed with his astronaut's jumpsuit, typical of what all astronauts wear. The public visitation was heavily attended with many out of town people joining the local community. For this, the funeral home set up a display of Colonel Irwin's numerous awards and decorations, some of which had been given to him by foreign officials. The monetary value of this display was significant, and as collector items the values were priceless. Therefore, the funeral home requested and the United States Space Foundation continuously provided volunteer guards to be in the funeral home chapel.

The press was allowed in the funeral chapel only for one short period for photographs, and all the media questions for the family were handled by the Shrine of Remembrance.

The funeral service itself filled the 1,200 seat Radiant Church. Six former astronauts came from across America to act as pallbearers:

Apollo 11	Col. Buzz Aldrin (USAF, Ret)
Apollo 12	Capt. Alan Bean (USN, Ret)
Apollo 15	Col. Al Worden (USAF, Ret)
Apollo 15	Col. Dave Scott (USAF, Ret)
Apollo 17	Capt. Gene Cernan (USN, Ret)
Skylab	Col. Bill Pogue (USAF, Ret)

Prior to the funeral, the astronauts had a private visit to the Space Astronaut Memorial at the Mausoleum's Veterans Honor Court, where they placed a wreath during a brief ceremony with the news media present. It was a rare occasion for these astronauts, who had all been on the moon, to be together for this occasion.

The full staff of the funeral home was at hand to handle the directing

and take care of the protocol and media requirements. Congressmen and Civic Leaders were identified upon their arrival by the funeral home staff and escorted to the reserved areas. A funeral home member acted as the photographer to prepare a photo album. The press was excluded from the actual funeral service and was provided an area outside the church behind the five limousines that were used for the family, the visiting astronauts, and the active and honorary pallbearers. Assisting again were United States Space Foundation volunteers as escorts for the visiting astronauts.

Famed evangelist Nicky Cruz, delivered the message, and "reflections" were given by Paul Crouch, President of the Trinity Broadcasting Network. Michael English, a recording star from New York, provided vocal selections.

Following the funeral, family and friends returned by auto procession to the Shrine of Remembrance. The procession was organized by city police in the same manner as they

control traffic when the U.S. President is driving through town. Main boulevards having limited access were used through financial business areas that normally handle 60,000 automobiles daily so that all other traffic was blocked off. The four and a half mile line of vehicles was the largest procession in the memory of the police department.

The outdoor Veterans Honor Court of the Shrine of Remembrance Mausoleum was the site of the special military honors ceremony. This unique ceremony was arranged by Colonel Rix with full cooperation and participation of the Air Force Space Command headquarters from nearby Peterson Air Force Base. Here, below the bronze Space Astronaut Memorial which is mounted on a 30 x 40 foot granite wall, the full military tradition of honor to a fallen hero was displayed. Local and national television broadcast the ceremony at the Veterans Honor Court.

The impressive Space Astronaut Memorial had been dedicated there in 1987 by Colonel Irwin, at this garden site which is also the scene of the tallest flagpole in the state, dedicated in 1987, by Congressman Joel Hefley. This Shrine of Remembrance site is perhaps the most impressive and unique veteran and military display in the region. Also on the granite wall is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, dedicated in 1989 by General John Piotrowski, the Commander in Chief of NORAD

The Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Memorial was unveiled by General Donald Kutyna, the Commander in Chief of U.S. Space Command and dedicated by the Governor of Colorado, Roy Romer, on Memorial Day 1990. The Veterans Honor Court itself was dedicated by Congressman Joel Hefley in 1986 at the



The Veterans Honor Court at the Shrine of Remembrance was the scene of a rare gathering of five astronauts. They placed a wreath before the Space Astronaut Memorial (center plaque on wall) prior to funeral services for Col. Jim Irwin. Shown left to right are Col. Jim Rix (USAF Ret.) of the Shrine of Remembrance; Capt. Alan Bean, Apollo 12; Capt. Gene Cernan, USN, Apollo 15; Col. Richard Gordon, Gemini 11; Mary Ann Bridges of High Flight Foundation; Col. David Scott, USAF, Apollo 15; Col. Buzz Aldrin, Apollo 11, the first human to land on the moon; and Costas Rombocos, president of the Shrine of Remembrance.

Shrine of Remembrance, which is a privately owned funeral home and mausoleum, usually termed the most beautiful in the Rocky Mountain Region. Matthews Bronze of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is the company that was commissioned to design and cast all the impressive military memorials for the Veterans Honor Court.

Following the outdoor military ceremony, the family visited with dignitaries who had been moved into the mausoleum's spacious interior reception room. Although the Air Force Honor Guard formed a barrier, many of the public asked to gain entry to the mausoleum to give condolences to the family. This also resulted in the astronauts providing their prized autographs on the specially printed memorial service programs. In fact, at this late time of the day, it seemed that the nation's space notables were holding a convention in the mausoleum. Many government, Air Force and U.S. Space Foundation officials used the opportunity to hold discussions. Again, the funeral home staff tactfully prevented media or curious public from interfering.

The Shrine of Remembrance arranged for the burial to be at Arlington National Cemetery. While military burial at Arlington is usually routine, the Irwin committal services at the grave site were coordinated by the Shrine of Remembrance with the White House, the office of Vice President Quayle, NASA, the U.S. Air Force in Washington, as well as Arlington National Cemetery.

The Demain Funeral Home in Arlington was selected to serve as they had assisted the Shrine of Remembrance, in an excellent manner, two weeks before with burial of another dignitary at Arlington.

Colonel Irwin was honored by military services at both the Shrine of Remembrance Veterans Honor Court in Colorado Springs and at Arlington. This was due to the unique setting of the Veterans Honor Court in Colorado Springs bearing the names of the nations lost astronauts on the Space Astronaut Memorial and the city's affiliation with space related activities. NASA and local military fully supported this double ceremony.

The military honors provided at Arlington National Cemetery included an Air Force Cassion with matching grey horses, The Air Force Ceremonial Honor Guard (a unit often seen at the White House) and also an Air Force Band from Bolling Air Force Base. Generals, U.S. Senators, and White House representatives heard Irwin's companion on the moon, Astronaut Dave Scott, give the eulogy at the grave site reserved for astronauts. A number of protocol, media, and official governmental contacts with whom the Shrine of Remembrance staff coordinated all details, were unusually complementary of the funeral home's handling of this momentous task. It was real-

ized that the funeral home was acting on behalf of the family in a reverent way while satisfying the public's interest, as well as pursuits of the media and the crowds.

Mrs. Irwin was especially gracious in her thanks to the Shrine of Remembrance, saying that her husband's Christian testimony and the dignity of his life had been revered by the unusual tasks accomplished by the staff of the Shrine of Remembrance.

The High Flight Foundation, founded by Astronaut Jim Irwin, continues to provide an active worldwide, evangelistic program. The universal emphasis is to inspire and motivate individuals to achieve their highest personal, social, and spiritual potentials. Tax free donations may be sent to High Flight Foundation, P.O. Box 1387, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80901. The telephone number is (719) 594-4489.



Six Apollo astronauts, including Irwin's two crewmates on Apollo 15 were pallbearers.
The Patriot Casket from York Company was chosen by the family.