

## **The Promise of Remembrance: Two Veterans, One Mission, and the Sacred Trust at Maple Grove**

The winds of time have passed through Maple Grove Cemetery in Queens for 150 years, but the promise of remembrance never fades. Here, beneath canopies of oak and pine, stories are preserved not only in stone, but in the actions of those who carry out their sacred duties with honor and care.

On May 19, 2025, a quiet but powerful ceremony took place. The cremated remains of Stephen G. Militscher, a Master Sergeant in the United States Air Force, who grew up in Queens, were laid to rest. His family, due to circumstances beyond their control, could not attend. But the staff at Maple Grove, along with the Friends of Maple Grove Cemetery, ensured he did not take his final journey alone.

When his urn arrived at the cemetery office, the staff responded without hesitation and, with compassion, sought out the help of the Friends group. Volunteers were called, and a memorial service was planned. On that crisp spring afternoon, more than twenty-five people gathered, many who were strangers. None had known Stephen personally, but they all came because they learned what he had given. His military service to the nation, his life as a photographer and musician, and his quiet strength through a long illness. His service and story were honored with heartfelt reverence.

In attendance were Phillip Rash-Flynn, President of the Maple Grove Cemetery Association, and Joseph C. Galimi, the Cemetery Superintendent, both of whom stood with the community in solemn tribute.

His legacy, however, stretches far beyond the decades of his own life. Stephen Militscher descended from a family line rooted in American patriotism. He had ancestor who fought in the Revolutionary War to secure the nation's birthright of liberty, and he was also distantly related to Hannibal Hamlin, the first-term Vice President under Abraham Lincoln, a man who stood beside the Great Emancipator during the country's most trying hour. That thread of service and sacrifice, woven through generations, exemplified Stephen's own military journey. His burial at Maple Grove became more than a farewell. It was the continuation of a long-held family tradition and devotion to the country and duty.

Sean Miller had celebrated his college graduation just the day before. When he heard the call to be there for Stephen, he answered without hesitation. Over the years, Sean has built an extensive collection of military uniforms, and on this day, he wore a vintage World War II uniform. With solemn pride, he carried Stephen's urn in a procession from the cemetery office to the Militscher family plot. Sean stood at attention and rendered a final salute. A eulogy spoke not only of Stephen's biography, but of the sacred obligation to never let a veteran pass unrecognized. American flags marked the resting place. And the sound of TAPS echoed through the trees in a solemn farewell.

*“I was honored to participate in the funeral service for Stephen Militscher at Maple Grove Cemetery. Paying my respects to an Air Force veteran who served our country is something I hold deeply important. I come from a family of military veterans, and I believe all who have served deserve recognition and appreciation. It was a beautiful ceremony, and I was proud to be part of it.”*

*Sean Miller*

It was a beautiful ceremony. And it was not the first of its kind at Maple Grove.

In 1962, the remains of another veteran, 21-year-old Marilyn J. Monroe, who had served with the Signal Corps, were interred at the cemetery. She had answered her country’s call. The full details of her service have faded with time, as has the nature of the ceremony itself. We cannot say for certain who stood by her side that day, though we believe her family was present. But one detail remains, as is the solemn protocol, a young female soldier was assigned to escort Marilyn to her final resting place.

And though that soldier’s duty ended that day, the memory of Marilyn’s burial endured. Many decades later, that same soldier returned to Maple Grove Cemetery, not on assignment, not in uniform, but in remembrance. She came to honor a woman she had never truly known, but never truly forgotten. That simple act speaks volumes, not just about Marilyn, but about the kind of place Maple Grove is.

It is a place where stories rest but never sleep. A place where strangers become family. A place where veterans are honored not for headlines or crowds, but because dignity demands it.

From Civil War buglers to modern-day heroes, Maple Grove’s sacred grounds are the final resting place for thousands of veterans, including seventy-nine who were killed in action in World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. In moments like these, whether in 1962 or 2025, the cemetery fulfills its mission. To give the departed the care they deserve, regardless of whether family can be present.

These services are not mere obligations. They are sacred callings, each one a testament to love in action, to honor freely given.

The Friends of Maple Grove, the cemetery staff, and the dedicated community that supports them have created something rare and unique. A sacred trust between the living and the dead. One that says, no matter who you are or when you served, your life will be remembered. Your name will be spoken. You will not be forgotten.

And that is the true legacy of Maple Grove. A resting place, yes, but more than that, a living promise.



Procession for Stephen Militscher started at he Maple Grove Center. The cremated remains were carried to his family lot by Sean Miller wearing a vintage WWII uniform.



Maple Grove Cemetery Historian and the Vice President of the Friends of Maple Grove Helen Day help to direct attendees to the burial location.



At the end of the service Sean Miller bids a final salute.



The final burial location for Marilyn Joan Monroe, SP5 Signal Corps at Maple Grove Cemetery.