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By [Jessica Sacco](#)jsacco@wickedlocal.com

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Melrose honors Minor McLain during POW/MIA Day

Melrosians made a special dedication to a community hero during National Prisoner of War/ Missing in Action Recognition Day last week.

Residents, veterans and city and state officials gathered on Sept. 19 at the corner of Franklin and Albion streets to acknowledge the more than 83,000 missing U.S. soldiers labeled as POWs or MIAs.

The crowd also came together for the revealing of the Minor H. McLain Square, recognizing the Private First Class U.S. Army World War II veteran and German POW who died tragically last year.

On May 7, 2013, a Route 131 MBTA bus struck McLain on Franklin Street, between Sargent and Pratt streets, near the Faith Evangelical Church. The then 88-year-old was taken to Melrose-Wakefield Hospital, where he later died.

"The city of Melrose chose this day to honor Minor because it was this day of remembrance, and the cause it represents, that was so important to him," said Ryan McLane, director of veteran services for Melrose, Wakefield and Saugus. "And this monument will stand forever as an example to the generations that follow Minor as the right way to serve both in the military and in the community."

Now, a sign, memorializing McLain, stands prominently in the area, so all who pass by will be reminded of the veteran's service and sacrifice to his country.

REMEMBERING MCLAIN

Family and members of the public shared stories and memories of McLain, speaking of his character and dedication to his family, community and country.

The World War II veteran's wife, Carolyn McLain, his son, Andrew McLain, and daughter, Susan Saunders, attended the ceremony.

Saunders, who spoke at the dedication, remembered McLain as a loving husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. She described McLain as a gentleman, always holding doors open for others and helping her mother with her coat.

He was also remembered as a regular visitor to zoos and museums and a fan of Turner's Seafood Grill & Market.

Saunders said McLain was a man who loved to play pranks. In college, he released sulfur into a building and was never caught.

"When I was a child, we had this toy called Creepy Crawlers," Saunders said, referring to a toy used to make "creepy" bug-like creatures. "Perhaps some of you remember it. Anyway, my dad was always after us to put one on mom's side of the bed. Since I have a similar sense of humor, I was the one that did it."

During World War II, when McLain was a German POW, he was able to communicate with the soldiers in German.

He even tried to lighten the mood during his capture, sharing his list of candy bars he was going to buy when he returned to the United States and convincing another American prisoner to add Sky Bars to his list.

"Thanks again, as this is a great honor for the McLain family for the placement of this monument and the naming of Minor McLain Square," Saunders said.

"We are very proud of this, and of him, and he would be honored if he could be here."

Robert Van Kirk, past Veterans of Foreign Wars state commander, also spoke highly of McLain. For his service in World War II, McLain was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in combat, a Purple Heart, POW Medal and additional citations and decorations.

"As we complete the installation of this notable memorial, we recognize Minor's achievements, of which his accomplishments are listed in the pages of our history," Van Kirk said. "A member of 'the Greatest Generation,' we will not, and cannot, forget their sacrifices."

McLane remembered speaking to McLain during their trip to Washington in 2012 to visit the veteran monuments.

He assumed this was not McLain's first visit to the memorials, given his stature and position as a retired Salem State University history professor.

As the two looked at the central fountain of the World War II monument, McLane asked the honorary veteran what he thought of the memorial.

"I am glad I got to see this. Wasn't sure I would make it down here," McLane recalled McLain saying. "I was glad he got to see it too because I cant imagine many people, of the millions who have visited the beautiful monument, who deserved to see it more."



Melrosians dedicated the corner of Franklin and Albion Streets to World War II veteran Minor McLain, who died tragically last year, during National Prisoner of War/ Missing in Action Recognition Day last week. McLain's daughter, Susan Saunders spoke during the ceremony, sharing memories of her father. Wicked Local Staff Photo / Nicole Goodhue Boyd

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