

Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs Seeks Additional Help With Operation Purple Heart

by Greg Rivara

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SPRINGFIELD – As Veterans Day approaches and we honor all who have served in the Armed Forces, Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs urges people to assist with Operation Purple Heart, an unprecedented mission to return 11 Purple Heart medals to their rightful owners.

The military honors were submitted to the Illinois State Treasurer's Office for safekeeping and return as part of the Unclaimed Property program, also known as I-Cash or missing money.

“These medals personify honor, sacrifice, duty. We call today on the citizens of Illinois to help us return these medals into the loving care of their families,” Frerichs said.

The treasurer’s office hopes attention to the upcoming Veterans Day observances will spark a memory or provide a clue so that these medals can be returned. Frerichs’ office has an unparalleled record in returning military honors, especially the Purple Heart. (A full list is below.

Military medals are among the most difficult items to return because neither the Armed Forces nor the federal government maintains a comprehensive list of awardees.

In an effort to find the rightful owners, the Illinois State Treasurer’s Office is releasing additional information that the owners or their relatives might recognize. A thorough vetting of inquiries will occur once an electronic claim is made at www.illinoistreasurer.gov/icash.

Misrepresenting oneself in an effort to recover unclaimed property is a crime, will not be tolerated, and the state treasurer’s office will seek prosecution to the fullest extent of the law, especially with regard to military honors.

Each of the 11 Purple Heart medals was inside a bank safe deposit box. Each bank determined the safe deposit box as abandoned because the owner(s) of the box had not touched it in several years. As a result, the contents of each safe deposit box were turned over to the Illinois State Treasurer’s Office.

In most cases, the conflict in which the Purple Heart was awarded, such as World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam or Desert Storm, is unclear or unknown.

The names below are the names associated with the bank safe deposit box and might not be the name of the awardee. The dates below correspond to when the contents of the bank safe deposit box containing the Purple Heart were turned over to the treasurer’s office, not when the medal was earned or awarded:

Robert Cawthon, submitted to the Illinois State Treasurer’s Office Nov. 1, 1992, from Fifth-Third Bank in Oak Park. There is conflicting information about where Robert lived. Information suggests the awardee was in the infantry.

Raymond Wilson, submitted to the Illinois State Treasurer’s Office Nov. 13, 1995. Raymond lived in Chicago and banked with Chicago Community Bank, which subsequently was sold.

Lawrence M. Burns, submitted to the Illinois State Treasurer's Office Nov. 5, 1997. Lawrence lived in Homewood and banked with Advanced Bank in Homewood. Information also suggests a financial relationship with Homewood Federal Savings and Loan. Today, there is information to suggest Mr. Burns chooses to live in a remote area in California.

Linda K. Moore, submitted to the Illinois State Treasurer's Office Oct. 17, 2001. Linda lived in Peoria and banked with National City Bank in Peoria, which subsequently was sold. Information suggests a relationship with John L. Moore.

Bernice Smith, submitted to the Illinois State Treasurer's Office Nov. 18, 2002. Bernice lived in Oak Park and banked with MB Financial Bank in Oak Park. The bank subsequently was sold.

David Gorski, submitted to the Illinois State Treasurer's Office Oct. 30, 2003. David lived in Darien and banked with Hinsbrook Bank & Trust. Contents suggesting a relationship with World War II also were present, although it is difficult to determine if that is when the Purple Heart was earned.

Vincent G. Tuttle, submitted to the Illinois State Treasurer's Office Oct. 25, 2018. Vincent lived in Decatur and banked with Busey Bank in Pekin. Information suggests Mr. Tuttle's father, Delbert Gleason Tuttle, is believed to be the Purple Heart recipient. Vincent might be experiencing unsecure housing. Years ago, he frequented House of Miracles Pentecostal Church in Decatur.

Toni Alexander, submitted to the Illinois State Treasurer's Office Oct. 26, 2018. Toni lived in Channahon and banked with First Midwest Bank in Shorewood. Channahon straddles Grundy and Will counties and is near Morris. A Bible also was in the safe deposit box. Information suggests Toni was the owner of the safe deposit box and the Purple Heart recipient was Private Charles J. Alexander, who earned the honor for wounds received against the enemy in the Central Pacific area on July 30, 1944. He might have been a Marine and might have been wounded during battle of Mariana Islands.

Isbell Servina, or Mary A. Shayer, or Vincent P. Shayer, submitted to the Illinois State Treasurer's Office Oct. 31, 2018. It is believed they lived in Chicago. Each name was on the safe deposit box. A will for Mary and a Trust for Vincent also was in the safe deposit box.

Michelle Steward or Patricia VanHasselaere, submitted to the Illinois State Treasurer's Office Oct. 31, 2018. It is believed they lived in Round Lake. A will for Patricia also was in the safe deposit box.

Kenneth Wiest, submitted to the Illinois State Treasurer's Office Oct. 23, 2019. Kenneth is believed to have lived in O'Fallon, the second-largest city in the Metro East region and Southern Illinois. It is five miles from Scott Air Force Base and 18 miles from Downtown St. Louis. Information suggests a potential connection to Desert Storm and Vietnam.

“Our ask is simple. If you recognize a name, and you know they had contact with the city, then reach out to them or their relatives because maybe we have their Purple Heart,” Frerichs said.

Since 2015, the Illinois State Treasurer's Office has successfully reunited seven Purple Hearts with their owners or heirs. It did so through an internal investigatory process, and the office is required by law to try to return unclaimed property no matter how long it takes. Private entities holding abandoned or misplaced property are not compelled to try to identify nor locate the owner.

The Illinois State Treasurer's Office safeguards \$3.5 billion in unclaimed property. Typically, a bank account, investment product, or contents of a safe deposit box are turned over to the treasurer's office if there is no activity for several years. Unclaimed property is submitted twice each year; financial institutions in the fall and non-financial institutions, such as business associations, utilities and life insurance companies, in the spring.

Returned Purple Hearts and other medals

December 13, 2016 (Springfield)– Korean War – Returned Purple Heart and Combat Infantryman Badge to Barbara Ann Reynolds, daughter of Korean War Veteran Corporal John W. Naylor of Springfield. Cpl. Naylor served in the Army.

April 5, 2017 (Chicago)- Vietnam – Returned Purple Heart, Vietnam Service Medal, and National Defense Medal to Vietnam Veteran Specialist Harold J. Walker (of Vicksburg, Mississippi, formerly of Chicago). SPC Walker served in the Army (1969-70) in the 23rd Infantry Division.

May 22, 2017 (Peoria)– World War II – Returned Purple Heart to Constance Barr, daughter of World War II Veteran Corporal Edward H. Dunn of Peoria. Cpl. Dunn served in the Army (1943-45) as part of Battery A of the 808th Field Artillery Battalion in Europe where he was a Scout (reconnaissance) and Rifle Sharpshooter.

November 6, 2017 (East St. Louis)- Vietnam – Returned Purple Heart to Tommie Turner, brother-in-law of Vietnam Veteran Specialist Willie G. Riley, formerly of East St. Louis. SPC Riley served in the Army (1967-69). The medal then was presented to his widow, Lori, and children at Calverton National Cemetery in New York on Veterans Day.

December 19, 2017 (Springfield) - Vietnam – Returned Purple Heart to Bertha Richard, niece of Vietnam Veteran Private First-Class Andrew Gust Richard of Elkhart. PFC Richard served in the Marine Corps (1968) in B Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Marines, 1st Marine Division, 3rd Marine Amphibious Force as a Rifleman. He was killed in action (KIA) 6/19/68 (age 21) in Quang Nam Province, South Vietnam at Bac Dong Ban, Go Noi Island while participating in Operation Allen Brook. His tour in Vietnam began on 2/26/68. He is buried at Camp Butler National Cemetery outside of Springfield.

June 28, 2018 (Chicago) - Vietnam – Returned Purple Heart to Phyllis Furlough, daughter, and Kenneth Furlough, grandson, of Vietnam Veteran Private First-Class Phillip Allen Morris of Harvey. PFC Morris served in the Army (1964-67) in the 101st Airborne Division, A Company, 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry (when received Purple Heart) as an Armor Crewman and Armor Intelligence Specialist and in the Army Reserves (1967-70). He was wounded in battle on January 13, 1966. PFC Morris passed away in 1997.

March 11, 2019 (Joliet) – World War II – Returned Purple Heart to Barbara Martens, niece of First Lieutenant Walter B. Ingledew, Jr. The Chicago native enlisted in the Army Air Forces in 1942 and served in the 428th Fighter Squadron, 474th Fighter Group, Ninth Army Air Force as a Fighter Pilot. He was active over Normandy on D-Day and received his Purple Heart after he was killed in action (KIA) when his plane was shot down over France on August 14, 1944. He was 23 years old.