



Operation Purple Heart Reunites Military Honors for Vietnam, Desert Storm Veteran

by Greg Rivara
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SPRINGFIELD - The Purple Heart awarded to Army Specialist Kenneth R. Wiest was returned to his family as part of Operation Purple Heart, an unprecedented mission to return 11 Purple Heart medals to their rightful owners, Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs announced today.



Wiest earned the medal while serving in Vietnam. He also served in Desert Storm, sometimes called the Gulf War. Mr. Wiest died in O'Fallon, Illinois, on Sept. 4, 1998, at age 48. Like many combat veterans, Mr. Wiest rarely spoke about his service and the injuries he suffered taking fire while inside a helicopter.

“Army Specialist Wiest served his country, and it is our duty to honor this soldier no matter how many years have passed,” Frerichs said during a somber ceremony in Springfield with Mr. Wiest’s children.

“Dad was a good soldier, a loyal friend and dedicated father,” said Andrea Wiest Schone, the youngest of four siblings who initiated the process that led to the return of the Purple Heart and two Gulf War service medals. “My brother and sisters are grateful to have these medals that honor his legacy.”



Mr. Wiest was born on July 28, 1950, in Kelly Township, Pa. He moved to O’Fallon with his family when he was young. He was an Eagle Scout and a graduate of Mascoutah High School class of 1968. He entered the Army and went to Vietnam. When not deployed, he was employed as a logistics/computer program analyst for the United States Department of Defense. Mr. Wiest attended St. Clare of Assisi Catholic Church in O’Fallon, was a member of the Army Aviation Association of America and

ran the Idle Hour Pool League for eight years. He was an avid animal lover who requested memorials to be made to the Humane Society.

The Purple Heart and Gulf War medals were among items in a forgotten safe deposit box submitted to the state treasurer's office in 2019.

Safeguarding unclaimed property until it can be returned to its owners or heirs – no matter how long it takes - is a core function of the treasurer's office. Other examples of unclaimed property include forgotten bank accounts, unpaid life insurance benefits and uncashed rebate checks.

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

Nevertheless, Frerichs' office has an unparalleled record of returning military medals. With today's announcement, Frerichs' office has reunited eight Purple Heart and other military medals to soldiers or their survivors, more than any other administration in Illinois' history.

"These medals personify honor, sacrifice, and duty," Frerichs said. "I am grateful we returned this Purple Heart to the Wiest family, and we continue to seek the assistance of Illinois residents to help us return these medals to the loving care of their families."

Frerichs launched operation Purple Heart in November 2021. It sought the public's help to return 11 Purple Heart medals that had been especially difficult to return, including that of Mr. Wiest.

Each of the 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 of these 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 Purple Heart awardee. The dates below correspond to when the contents of the bank safe deposit box containing the Purple Heart was turned over to the treasurer's office, not when the Purple Heart was earned or awarded:

Robert Cawthon, submitted to the Illinois State Treasurer's Office Nov. 1, 1992, from 5 /3rd Bank in Oak Park. There is conflicting information 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.

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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 WWII 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 the Mariana Islands battle campaign.

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.

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

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.

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.

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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 when his plane was shot down over France on August 14, 1944. He was 23 years old.

March 5, 2022 – (Springfield) –Returned Purple Heart to children of Army Specialist Kenneth R. Wiest. Specialist Wiest earned the Purple Heart while serving in Vietnam. He died in O'Fallon, Illinois, in 1998 at age 48.

About the Illinois Treasurer

As Illinois State Treasurer, Michael Frerichs (FRAIR'-ikz) is the state's Chief Investment and Banking Officer and actively manages approximately \$52 billion. The portfolio includes \$26 billion in state funds, \$17 billion in retirement and college savings plans and \$9 billion on behalf of local and state governments. Frerichs' office protects consumers by safeguarding more than \$3.5 billion in unclaimed property,

encouraging savings plans for college or trade school, increasing financial education among all ages, assisting people with disabilities to save without losing government benefits, and removing barriers to a secure retirement. The Treasurer's Office predates Illinois incorporation in 1818. Voters in 1848 chose to make it an elected office.