

Due to the Memorial Day holiday, this brief edition of the newsletter is going out early, and we hope you will join us in honoring our veterans Monday. We will resume sending the newsletter next month.



Treasurer's Note

May 23, 2024

Reuniting Purple Heart Medals with Their Rightful Owners

I was recently in Washington, D.C. for a couple of visits to the White House on [fighting junk fees](#) and discussing labor principles in private equity, as well as speaking to North America's Building Trades Unions (NABTU). Between meetings, I walked with a friend to the [Vietnam Veterans Memorial](#), a powerful monument that lists every one of the 58,318 Americans who gave their lives in service to their country in that war.

I wanted to see [my Uncle Doug's name](#).

In April 1968, he was killed by an enemy mortar in Vietnam on my parents' wedding day, though they didn't find out for a couple of weeks.

At the memorial, I saw a man making a rubbing of a name, and asked where he found the paper and pencil. He told me his name was George, and he gave me a sheet and let me borrow a pencil. I found Doug's name, made a rubbing, reflected silently for a bit, and went to return the pencil.



The photo above is of my uncle Doug, who died in the Vietnam War. His full name was Amel Douglas Royalty.

George said he did the rubbings for people who couldn't make it to D.C. but wanted a memento of their friends or family members who didn't make it back alive. As we talked, a group of veterans approached visiting the memorial as part of an Honor Flight. The veterans wore identical yellow T-shirts, and I saw that they were from the Quad Cities.

I wasn't going to bother them during a somber time, but I noticed a woman stretching to make a rubbing for a veteran. When I overheard her say, "If only we had someone tall!" I took that as an invitation to help.

It wasn't long before there was another request to help with a name that was just out of reach. I was happy to do this small thing for the families and friends of people who made the ultimate sacrifice. It wasn't difficult, but it made me feel good to help them out.

On Monday, we will observe Memorial Day, and if you are looking for some small way that you might be able to do something for those who served our country, I have a suggestion.

People store valuables in bank safe deposit boxes because they don't want them stolen or destroyed in a fire. Sometimes, those boxes are abandoned as the owner dies or moves and forgets about them. I am in charge of [unclaimed property](#) in our state, and banks send us the items from those boxes, including military medals earned in service to our country.



I was glad to help people make rubbings and take photos of the names of their loved ones on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.



A couple years ago, I started Operation Purple Heart to try to track down the rightful owners of these medals. We [have returned 10 medals](#) so far, and there are more to return.

We have compiled the information we have about these medals and could use your help. Please take a look at our [Purple Hearts web page](#) and see if you know any of the people listed and have information that might help us track them down.

Purple Hearts can be difficult to return. These medals often were earned posthumously. Neither names nor the war they were earned in are engraved on the medals. In many cases, the owner of the safe deposit box wasn't the medal's recipient. In addition, many soldiers returned home with PTSD. We tracked down one recipient, but he is now believed to be living off the grid and has not responded to our attempts to return his medal.

These last Purple Hearts are challenging to return, but a little time from you could result in a small clue that would make a big difference to someone who has lost something valuable to them.

Memorial Day is a national holiday dedicated to those who died in service to our country. They answered the call and made the ultimate sacrifice. Can you please give just a few minutes to help them?

Sincerely,

Michael W. Frerichs

Illinois State Treasurer

P.S. You can see some of the people I met at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in this video below.



Can You Help Us Return 4 More Purple Hearts?

In honor of Memorial Day, Illinois Treasurer Michael Frerichs is urging people to assist with Operation Purple Heart, an unprecedented mission to return 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.

Frerichs is highlighting four additional Purple Heart medals the Treasurer's Office received recently:

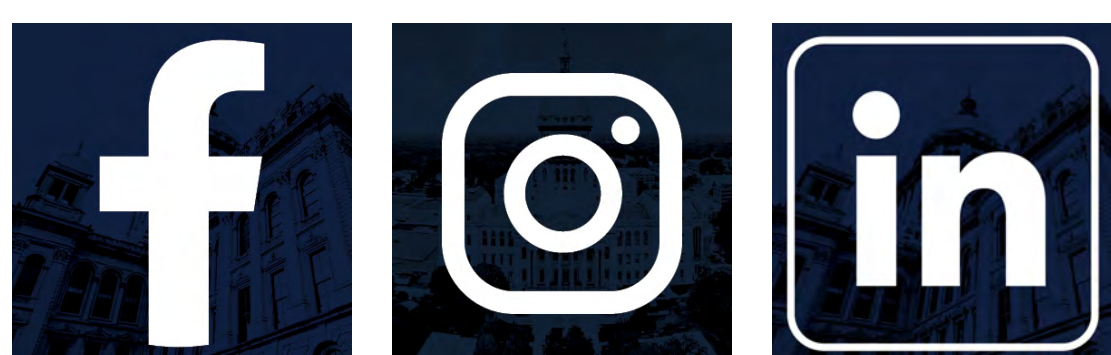
- **Jerome A. Even.** The Park Ridge man earned a Purple Heart, possibly during the attack on Pearl Harbor while serving in the U.S. Army Air Corps. He was discharged from service as a Master Sergeant on June 13, 1945. We believe he passed away in 2014 and was married to Germaine, who preceded him in death. His medal came from a safe deposit box at First Midwest Bank.
- **John Ustasewski.** In addition to the Purple Heart, there also is a Bronze Star and a World War II campaign ribbon. John lived in Chicago and banked at TCF National Bank in Chicago.
- **Nancy Johnston.** There also was a Good Conduct medal and an Air Force Medal. Nancy apparently lived in Frankfort, and her medal came from a safe deposit box at Old Plank Trail Community Bank in Frankfort.
- **James R. Bennett.** It was in a safe deposit box in the name of Ann Bennett, who lived in Oak Lawn and banked with Fifth Third Bank. Also included in the safe deposit box are references to a Susan Bennett.



"Our ask is simple. If you recognize a name, and if you have any clues about how to contact the families of these Purple Heart recipients, please reach out to them and also to the Treasurer's Office. We are focused on the mission of returning these heroes' medals to them or their heirs," Frerichs said.

You can find out more about all of the Purple Hearts we are trying to return and a link to send us information at <http://operationpurpleheart.org>.

Follow us on Social Media!



Illinois State Treasurer Michael W. Frerichs
1 East Old State Capitol Plaza
Springfield, IL 62701

WWW.ILLINOISTREASURER.GOV

[CONTACT PAGE](#)

Links to any third-party website do not constitute or imply an endorsement or referral. The Treasurer's Office is not responsible for the content or privacy practices of third-party websites.

To modify your e-mail options or opt out of receiving the Office of the Illinois State Treasurer's electronic communications, please [click here](#).