

With Veterans Day approaching, I am asking the public to help us return the Purple Hearts we are still protecting.

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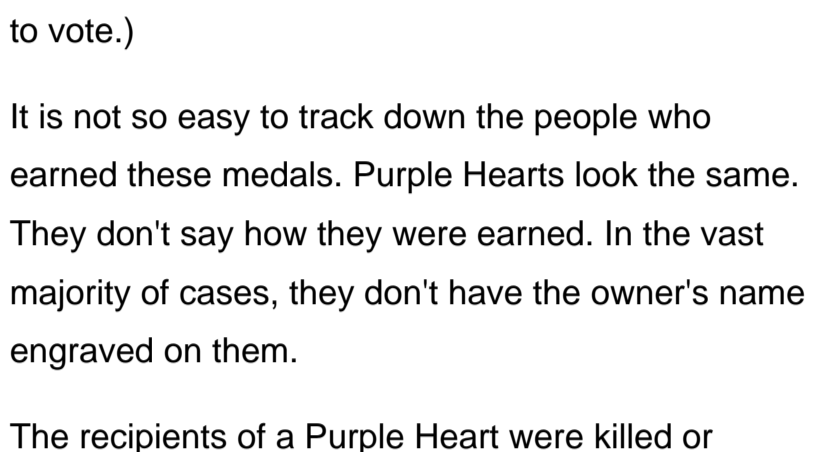
## Treasurer's Note

November 5, 2024

### Sharing Stories of Heroes

Soon after I was sworn in as Illinois Treasurer, I took a tour of our vault where we store the contents of safe deposit boxes that banks turn over to my office after they determine they've been abandoned.

Near the top of a display case full of interesting items was a Purple Heart medal. It was the first one I had seen in person. (My Uncle Doug [had earned one](#) posthumously, but my aunt had given it to his mother after remarrying.)



***This video tells you a little bit about my Uncle Doug. I never knew him because he was killed in action the same day my parents were married.***

I asked who the medal belonged to, and employees told me that we didn't know, and that was why it was in the vault. Surely, we knew the name of the person who had rented the safe deposit box it was found in. I encouraged my staff to become detectives and track down the owner.

Since that time, I have had the honor of returning 11 Purple Hearts. We want to return more of them, and with Veterans Day approaching, we are asking for your help.

(I know Election Day is today, and you're doing your civic duty by voting. But after that, consider what you can do for the heroes who have protected our right to vote.)

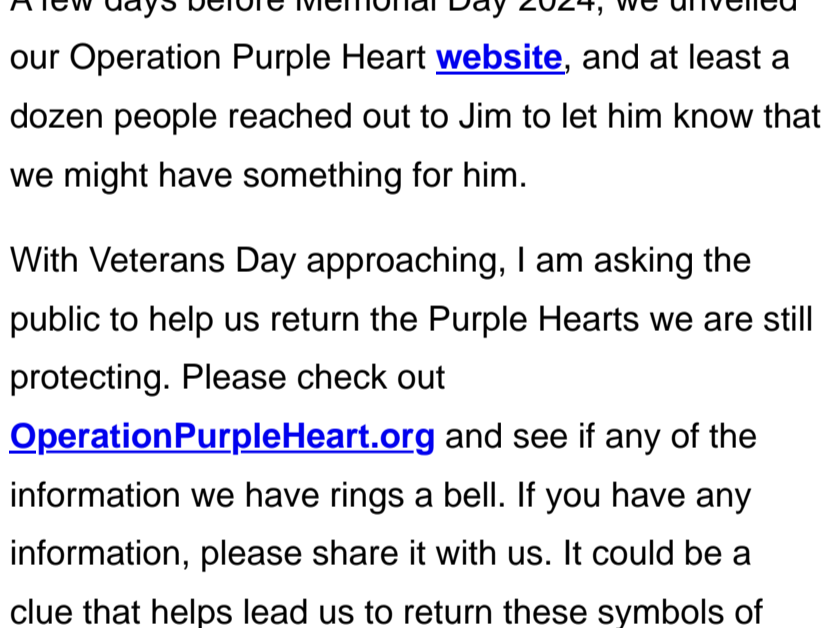
It is not so easy to track down the people who earned these medals. Purple Hearts look the same. They don't say how they were earned. In the vast majority of cases, they don't have the owner's name engraved on them.

The recipients of a Purple Heart were killed or wounded in combat. Many of those who returned home might have moved around before settling down. A good many of them carry trauma.

Today, I want to share with you the stories of a few of the Purple Hearts we have returned.

On May 22, 2017, I met Constance Barr and [returned her father's Purple Heart](#) from World War II. When we called Connie, she told us her father had never earned a Purple Heart. We were confident we had found the right person because we had several documents along with the medal to confirm this.

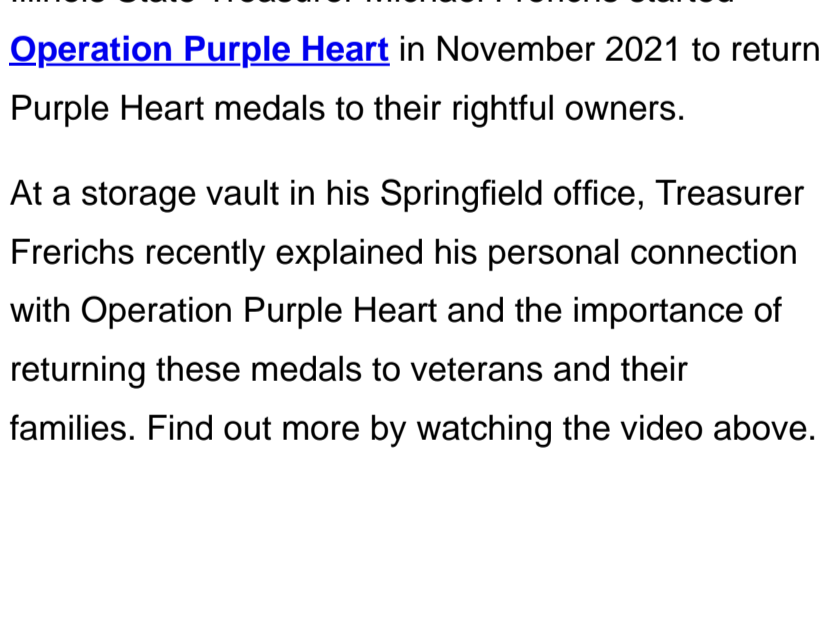
Her father, Army Corporal Edward Dunn of Peoria, had served his country, was injured in battle, and when he returned home, he put his medal in a bank safe deposit box, and apparently didn't discuss it with his family. His story is not as uncommon as you might think.



***This photo is from the day we returned Edward Dunn's Purple Heart medal to his daughter, Connie Barr, at the Peoria County Veterans Memorial in 2017.***

On April 5, 2017, I met Vietnam veteran Army Specialist Harold J. Walker and [returned](#) his Purple Heart, Vietnam Service Medal, and National Defense Medal. He was living in Mississippi, but he drove up to Chicago to collect his medals because he didn't want to risk them being lost in the mail.

I learned that upon his return from Vietnam he gave his Purple Heart to his mother for safekeeping as he was still getting established. When his mother passed away, he didn't know that she had put the medal into a bank box for safekeeping, and he didn't know where to find it. This also is not a unique story.



***In another moving ceremony, we returned a Purple Heart to Vietnam War veteran Harold Walker in 2017. He chose to drive all the way from Mississippi to retrieve it.***

Just this summer, I met Jim Even, and [returned his father's Purple Heart](#) that his son said was earned at Pearl Harbor. The family had assumed Army Air Force Master Sergeant Jerome Even's medal had been lost because they thought they had collected all of their father's military memorabilia after he died in 2014.

A few days before Memorial Day 2024, we unveiled our Operation Purple Heart [website](#), and at least a dozen people reached out to Jim to let him know that we might have something for him.

With Veterans Day approaching, I am asking the public to help us return the Purple Hearts we are still protecting. Please check out

[OperationPurpleHeart.org](#) and see if any of the information we have rings a bell. If you have any information, please share it with us. It could be a clue that helps lead us to return these symbols of sacrifice to our country. We don't want them in our cold vault. Rather, we want them in the warm embrace of family.

Sincerely,

Michael



## Why Operation Purple Heart Matters

Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs started [Operation Purple Heart](#) in November 2021 to return Purple Heart medals to their rightful owners.

At a storage vault in his Springfield office, Treasurer Frerichs recently explained his personal connection with Operation Purple Heart and the importance of returning these medals to veterans and their families. Find out more by watching the video above.



Welcome to "The Mailbag," which is your opportunity to ask me about topics like our programs, other state government functions, or anything else that interests you.

**Q.** Can't the U.S. Military help you return Purple Heart medals? —Doris S.

**A.** 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. And unfortunately, [a 1973 fire](#) at a records storage facility in St. Louis destroyed about 16 million to 18 million official military personnel files.

We do work with veterans organizations, including [VFW](#) posts, [American Legion](#) posts, and the [Military Order of the Purple Heart](#) to return the medals to their rightful owners. We also welcome help from the public. That's one of the reasons we created [Operation Purple Heart](#).

If you have a question for "The Mailbag," please [send me an email](#) with the subject line "Mailbag." I can't promise that every one of your questions will run, but we do read them all and try to respond. And let us know if we can use your name, or if you'd prefer to be anonymous.

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