OFFICE OF ILLINOIS STATE TREASURER

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State Treasurer Mike Frerichs Returns Purple Heart To Family That Had Four Sons Serve in WWII

Operation Purple Heart Finds 13th Family Whose Military Honors Were Missing for Years

VIDEO, SOUND BITES, B ROLL:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDYXwRRsu_S8LzbiLlqFVbss2n1brWPma

Ahead of Memorial Day, Illinois Treasurer Michael Frerichs announced the return of a Purple Heart medal to the grandson of a late World War II Army veteran from Lansing, Ill.

Army Cpl. Henry Van Der Noord was one of four brothers who fought for the U.S. during World War II, with all of them making it home. He earned the Purple Heart for wounds he suffered during the fight to liberate the Philippines in May 1945.

“Mr. Van Der Noord and his brothers served their country proudly during a crucial time in our world’s history,” Frerichs said while returning the Purple Heart to Van Der Noord’s grandson, Christopher Reed, also a veteran. “I am proud to return this honor to his loving family.”

Reed, the first male grandchild, got the medal when he was 8 or 9. He also received his grandfather’s Army green dress jacket, and some other medals. The Purple Heart stood out, however.

“When I first got it, I didn’t know what the Purple Heart medal signified. I just thought it was really cool, coming in its own case,” Reed said. “Fast forward 10 years, and I’m in the Air Force. Then it was like, ‘Wow, that’s a big deal.’ They just don’t hand these things out. A lot of people’s next of kin got them. It meant more as I got older. It was quite an honor.”

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Frerichs returned the medal as part of Operation Purple Heart, an unprecedented mission to return the military honor to its rightful owners. The iconic medal is given to individuals wounded or killed during military combat.

Henry Van Der Noord, one of eight children, was nicknamed "Babe" because he was an infant when his family came to the U.S. on a boat from The Netherlands.

Mr. Van Der Noord was in combat during the mission to liberate the Philippines. General Douglas MacArthur had lost his first attempt to take the Philippines, which was controlled by Japan. MacArthur tried again in 1945, and it was a months-long, bloody campaign.

Mr. Van Der Noord was with the 38th Field artillery division on Luzon, the largest island in the Philippines. On May 3, 1945, he suffered a wound when he was hit in the back with shrapnel.

"I can remember he had a hellacious scar," Reed said.

During his time recuperating, Mr. Van Der Noord discovered that one of his brothers, Private First Class Edward Van Der Noord, was in the same hospital. Edward, who was in the Army's 11th Airborne Division, injured his ankle in a parachute jump.

"The happy brothers spent four days together the first week in June," according to a newspaper clipping from the time.

Two other brothers also served their country. Seaman First Class John Van Der Noord was on a Naval ship that was sunk in action off Okinawa. Technical Sgt. Gerriet "Harry" Van Der Noord worked on an Army railroad unit.

All four brothers made it back home. Henry Van Der Noord became a police officer and started a construction company with Eddie, the brother he met in the hospital. They built duplexes as well as a large apartment complex in Lansing during the 1970s that bore the family name, Van Der Noord Apartments.

"He was always kind of like a carpenter," Reed said of his grandfather. "If Henry wasn't building a picnic table, he was building a house."

Today, Reed lives in suburban Atlanta, Georgia. He grew up in Lansing and Batavia, where his father was police chief.

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Van Der Noord's Purple Heart was among items in a safe deposit box submitted to the state treasurer's office in 2020. This is the 13th Purple Heart medal Treasurer Frerichs has returned to the soldier or the soldier's family, an unparalleled record in Illinois and the nation. A list of unclaimed Purple Heart medals in possession of the Illinois State Treasurer's Office is available at the Operation Purple Heart web page, as is a list of the medals returned.

"If you recognize a name, please reach out to them or their family. This is an honor that deserves to be in their loving hands, not the cold, dark vault of my office," Frerichs said. "You also can contact my office through operationpurpleheart.org."

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 state 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. 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.

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

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

Of the soldiers, eight served in the Army, three in the Marines and two in the Air Force. Seven Purple Hearts were earned for service in World War II, one in Korea and five in Vietnam. Only one soldier, a Vietnam veteran, was alive to accept the honor; survivors accepted the other 12. Two soldiers were Killed in Action: A Marine in Vietnam and a pilot in World War II.

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About the Illinois Treasurer

The Illinois State Treasurer's Office is a powerful economic engine that invests in people to drive prosperity, development and growth throughout the state. As State Treasurer, Michael Frerichs (FRAIR'iks) is the state's Chief Investment and Banking Officer and actively manages approximately $60 billion. The investments help families pay for college and trade school; workers save for a dignified retirement; and local governments process bill payments more efficiently so they can pass along the savings to taxpayers. The office provides financial institutions money to loan to farmers, small business owners, and qualified individuals at below-market rates because better jobs create stronger communities. The office operates the state's largest consumer-protection initiative, the unclaimed property I-Cash program, which has returned a record-breaking $2.2 billion since Frerichs was elected.

For more news about the State Treasurer's Office, please follow Treasurer Frerichs on Instagram at ILTreasurer, LinkedIn and Facebook at Invested in You – Treasurer Michael Frerichs. You can find our weekly newsletter here.

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