

REMEMBER

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unclaimed veterans will soon receive the dignified military service and final resting place they earned through their service to the United States.

According to the organization's mission statement, its purpose is to locate, identify, and inter unclaimed cremated remains of American Veterans through the joint efforts of private, state and federal organizations. To provide honor and respect to those who have served this country by securing a final resting place for these forgotten heroes.

For nearly two decades, volunteers with the organization have worked across the country to ensure veterans are not forgotten. In its 19-year history, the Missing in America Project has visited more than 2,954 funeral homes and located 39,411 unclaimed cremated remains. Of those, 8,127 were veterans and eligible dependents. A total of 7,977 have been interred with 150 still waiting for internment.

The six veterans being honored through J.C. Kirby and Son Funeral Chapel are: Jerry Lyn Puckett, U.S. Army, passed away at 69 years old and was unclaimed for 9 years. John Wayne Henning, U.S. Marine Corps, passed away at 67 years old and was unclaimed for 4 years. Lester Wayne Brewer, U.S. Air Force, passed away at 61 years old and was unclaimed for 7 years. Jimmy R. Shelton, U.S. Air Force, passed away at 68 years old and was unclaimed for 16 years. Franklin Delano Thurman, U.S. Air Force, passed away at 84 years old and was unclaimed for 6 years. John A. Mack, U.S. Air Force, passed away at 33 years old and was unclaimed for 10 years.

All six men were considered family to J.C. Kirby and Son at some point in their lives. The veteran's families or authorized representatives originally brought them to the funeral home, but for reasons that remain unknown, no one ultimately returned to claim their cremated remains.

There are no assumptions about what happened to their families or why they never came forward. Those are stories that may never be known. What is known is that extensive next-of-kin searches have been conducted, including through the Veterans Administration, and no family members have come forward. Some of the remains have gone unclaimed for as long as 16 years. And while the circumstances surrounding their final years may remain unanswered, the people caring for them never stopped treating them with dignity.

On March 26, 2019, Governor Matt Bevin signed House Bill

110, which became 2019 Kentucky Acts Chapter 98. It specifically added the provision dealing with unclaimed cremated remains. If remains have been unclaimed for at least two years, a funeral director may inter, bury, entomb, or place them in a columbarium. The funeral director may also turn them over to a bona fide religious society, veterans' organization or civic group, but only for the purpose of final interment, burial, entombment or columbarium placement.

Fred Behnke, a Missing in America Veterans Recovery Program Kentucky volunteer, emphasized an important part of the process that is sometimes overlooked, when a person dies without anyone coming forward to claim them, the funeral home caring for their remains becomes, in many ways, their first family after death.

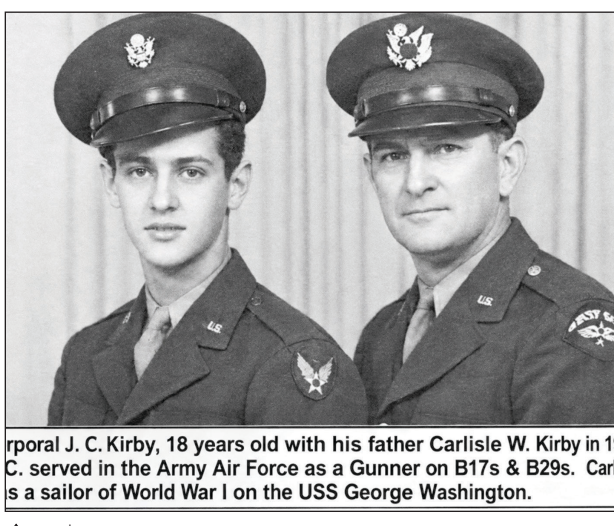
Funeral homes continue to care for those in their possession whether a family member comes forward or not, "they care for them like family," Behnke explained. That compassion is what makes the work of the Missing in America Project possible. The veterans who served their country did not ask for recognition when they signed up. They answered the call to serve and they were willing to put their lives on the line for their country. The one thing they deserve in return is the dignity of an honorable military funeral. "That's what we're here to do," Behnke said.

That respect for the individuality of each veteran is reflected in one of the most personal details of the upcoming ceremony. Each veteran will have an individually handcrafted urn, made specifically for them by Fred and Claudia Behnke. Each urn is made from different types of wood, making everyone unique.

J.C. Kirby and Son Funeral Director Jim Gildersleeve explained that the individual urns are symbolic of something important, these men were not simply names on a list of unclaimed remains, they were individuals. Each had a life, a story, a family and a reason for raising their hand to serve their country. Gildersleeve said his understanding is that each veteran receives an indivual urn because each veteran was an individual.

Gildersleeve first learned about the Missing in America Project during a training he took and reached out to the organization to begin the process of bringing these six veterans' home to a final resting place.

From start to the finish on September 23rd there will be a total of 231 days of research and coordination to reach the point where



poral J. C. Kirby, 18 years old with his father Carlisle W. Kirby in 1 C. served in the Army Air Force as a Gunner on B17s & B29s. Carlisle W. Kirby served as a sailor of World War I on the USS George Washington.

▲ PHOTO | BEVERLY BONILLA
J.C. Kirby, left, is pictured with his father, Carlisle W. Kirby, in 1944. J.C. served in the Army Air Force during World War II, while his father served in World War I.

these men could finally receive the recognition they deserve.

In recognition of that effort, Fred Behnke, representing the Missing in American Veterans Recovery Program, presented J.C. Kirby and Son Funeral Director, Jim Gildersleeve and Owner of J.C Kirby Funeral Home, Kevin Kirby with certificates of recognition. The certificate recognized Gildersleeve and Kirby for their "invaluable assistance in locating and honoring unclaimed veterans."

The recognition served as a reminder that bringing these veterans home is a team effort, one made possible by funeral home professionals, Missing in American volunteers, government agencies and members of the community who believe that those who served should never be forgotten.

Because no family members have come forward, the six veterans will not have relatives standing beside them at the cemetery, but they will not be alone. Behnke explained that everyone who attends the ceremony becomes part of their family. At the conclusion of the service, he tells those gathered: "Folks, all of you here today, all of us, are now their family." Those words may be among the most important words associated with the ceremony, because while these men may have been forgotten by circumstances beyond anyone's understanding, their country has not forgotten them.

Claudia Behnke, also a Kentucky volunteer with the Missing in American Project, stressed that the ceremony is not a private event. "There is nothing closed about this," she said. "The more, the merrier." The purpose is to honor these veterans and show gratitude for their service. Veteran organizations, motorcycle groups, civic organizations, and members of the general public are all encouraged to attend.

The procession will begin at 8:30 a.m. on September 23 at J. C. Kirby and Son Funeral Chapel on Lovers Lane in Bowling Green. The procession will travel to Kentucky Veterans Cemetery West under a law enforcement escort. The escort will help provide safety for those participating in

the procession as well as for the communities along the route that may not otherwise know what is taking place. The route that they will take will be 68/80 all the way to Hopkinsville. The cremated remains of the six J.C. Kirby and Son veterans will be formally remembered and interred at 11 a.m. CDT. They will be joined by the cremated remains of another veteran being cared for by Haley McGinnis Funeral Home in Owensboro.

J.C. Kirby and Son Funeral Chapels have a long history of serving veterans and their families. The funeral home was founded in 1962 by World War II veteran J.C. Kirby.



▲ PHOTO | BEVERLY BONILLA
J.C. Kirby & Son Funeral Chapel received a Certificate of Recognition from the Missing in America Project for its assistance in locating and honoring unclaimed veterans.

For more than six decades, the funeral home has continued to serve veterans and their families with honor, dignity and respect. That tradition continues with these six men.

The Missing in America Project has also assisted volunteers in helping pass laws in 32 states, designed in part to protect funeral homes working with the organization to locate and properly inter unclaimed veteran remains. The work can take countless hours. It requires research, records, phone calls, coordination and patience, but behind every case is a person, behind every urn is a veteran and behind

every veteran is a life that mattered.

On September 23, the community will have the opportunity to come together and recognize that. There may be no relatives waiting at the cemetery, there may be unanswered questions about these men's lives and about why no one came forward to claim them, but there will be people there. People who believed their service mattered, their sacrifice mattered and that no veteran should make his final journey alone. For these six men, the funeral home became their first family, on September 23, the community

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MASTER COMMISSIONER SALE

BY VIRTUE OF A DECREE AND ORDER OF SALE OF THE BUTLER CIRCUIT COURT, the Master Commissioner will sell at public auction the real property in the following action on **Friday, September 18, 2026** about the hour of **10:00 a.m.** at the Courthouse Door of the Butler County Courthouse located on Main Street in Morgantown, Butler County, Kentucky. Said property shall be sold to collect the amounts hereinafter set forth, together with interest and the costs of the action, and upon the following terms and conditions (unless otherwise stated).

A. The successful purchaser may pay the purchase price in full on the date of sale OR the successful purchaser will be required to pay 10% down on the date of sale with the balance of the purchase price plus interest on said balance at the rate the judgment bears (KRS 426.705) from the date of sale with balance to be paid within 30 days of the date of sale. If the successful purchaser does not pay the purchase price in full on the day of sale, the purchaser shall execute a bond with an approved surety bearing interest at the rate the judgment bears (KRS 426.705) from the date of sale until paid which bond shall have the force and effect of a judgment. The Commissioner shall retain a lien upon the property sold as additional security. All bidders must be prepared to comply promptly with these terms.

B. The property is sold subject to the following:

- a. State, County, City and School taxes payable for the entire year of 2026 and all taxes due thereafter. The Master Commissioner will make a good faith effort to obtain and pay all taxes or assessments upon the property for prior years; however, this cannot be guaranteed.
- b. Easement, restrictions, and covenants of record.
- c. Any facts which an inspection or accurate survey of the property may disclose.
- d. Any assessments for public improvements levied against the property.
- e. Any applicable zoning regulations.

C. The property shall otherwise be sold free and clear of any and all right, title and interest of all parties to the action and their liens and encumbrances thereon.

D. For a more particular description of these properties, reference is made to the file on record at the Butler Circuit Clerk's Office on the second floor of the Butler County Courthouse.

E. You assume risk of loss of the property the day of the sale. Therefore, you should secure property and casualty insurance to protect your interest.

F. The Master Commissioner does not have access to the properties listed below and therefore makes no representation or warranty of any kind as to the conditions of these properties.

SALE #1
KENTUCKY HOUSING CORP vs. CHRISTOPHER OAKS, et al., pending in Butler Circuit Court, 26-CI-00096, to collect \$157,777.84 as of December 1, 2025, plus interest until paid, advances for taxes and insurance, reasonable attorney fees, the court costs herein expended, and the expenses of the sale.
1574 Russellville Road, Butler County, KY PVA Map #047-00-00-005.01
BEING THE SAME property conveyed to Christopher Oaks, single, by Deed dated September 27, 2023, and recorded in Deed Book 254, page 587, in the Office of the Butler County Court Clerk's Office.
HON. SEPTIMOUS TAYLOR, ATTORNEY FOR THE PLAINTIFF

SALE #2
MOVEMENT MORTGAGE, LLC vs. EDDIE NEIGHBORS, et al., pending in Butler Circuit Court, 26-CI-00086, to collect \$222,978.32 as of June 30, 2026, plus interest until paid, advances for taxes and insurance, reasonable attorney fees, the court costs herein expended, and the expenses of the sale.
3334 Oak Ridge Road, Morgantown, Butler County, KY PVA Map#081-00-00-010.01
BEING THE SAME property conveyed from James D. Embry and Deanna Embry, husband and wife, to Stacia Neighbors and Eddie Neighbors, wife and husband, by Deed dated May 28, 2021 and recorded in Deed Book 245, Page 53, records of the Butler County Court Clerk's Office.
HON. VERONICA L. STEWART, ATTORNEY FOR THE PLAINTIFF

SALE #3
MORTGAGE RESEARCH CENTER, LLC vs. ROGER L. LESTER, et al., pending in Butler Circuit Court, 25-CI-00200, to collect \$79,470.58 as of January 30, 2026, plus interest until paid, advances for taxes and insurance, reasonable attorney fees, the court costs herein expended, and the expenses of the sale.
948 Arnold Ridge Road, Morgantown, Butler County, KY PVA Map #011-00-00-019.04
Being the same property conveyed from Kenny McPherson, unmarried, by and through his power of attorney, Bobby McPherson, to Roger L. Lester, unmarried, in fee simple by virtue of a Deed dated February 26, 2021 and recorded February 26, 2021 at Deed Book 243, Page 638 of the Butler County, Kentucky real estate records.
HON. VERONICA L. STEWART, ATTORNEY FOR THE PLAINTIFF

This the 27th day of May, 2026 Samantha Short Miller, Butler County Master Commissioner