



## Chicago family fights to get WW2 hero's remains brought home

Posted: Nov 13, 2013 3:44 PM CST  
Updated: Nov 20, 2013 6:52 PM CST

By Jeff Herndon, FOX 32 News at Nine Co-Anchor - [bio](#) | [email](#)

CHICAGO (FOX 32 News) - Born and raised in northwest Chicago, Buddy Kelder died in the Philippines in 1942 as a prisoner of war.

He lost his life fighting for this country and decades later, his family is fighting to bring him home.

"The Army says we bring our people home, we don't leave them there," Kelder says in an interview with FOX 32. "I don't think Buddy would want to be where he is right now."

And where Buddy is right now has Ron Kelder confused.

"I don't understand," Kelder says. "I'm very bewildered is what I am."

He's bewildered that his uncle isn't resting alongside his parents at Union Ridge Cemetery in Chicago. Instead, Buddy is thousands of miles away, at the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines. He's one of ten World War 2 unknowns, buried in a mass grave.

"It's the constant reminder of the hell he had to live through," he says.

The search for Buddy began four years ago. Ron's cousin John, who lives in Texas, decided to dig deeper into the headline that has haunted his family for decades.

He would need a court order to get his hands on evidence that he says puts a face on unidentified remains of X-816 buried in the Manila American Cemetery.

"We know without a shadow of a doubt the remains marked X-816 are Bud Kelder's remains," John Eakin explains. "We knew from family history records, that Bud had gold dental inlays. When we got the records, only one dental chart show gold inlays. The gold inlays made it a slam dunk."

And John wasn't the only one who connected X-816 to Buddy Kelder.

Rick Stone served as deputy chief of the World War 2 research and investigation team at JPAC, the government agency tasked with identifying unknown remains. While at JPAC, Stone personally reviewed the Kelder case.

"You have 10 missing. 10 unknowns all buried in the same spot.," says Stone. "You have a 1-on-1 match 10-to-10. I don't know how much easier it gets."

With all of the new evidence, the Kelder family believed it was just a matter of time before the remains would be tested, identified, and returned. But JPAC did nothing.

So, John filed a civil suit in federal court against JPAC. The case was continued, but in the final order, Chief U.S. District Judge Fred Biery agrees with the Kelder family, but sides with the government. Writing, "Private Kelder's government declines, on technical legal reasons to give him a decent burial in a marked grave."

Stone says Buddy's case isn't the only one JPAC has ignored.

"It's a case, in my opinion, of poor management, lack of leadership, and inability to stay up with modern forensic techniques," Stone believes.

His opinion is echoed in the now public Cole Report, an internal review of JPAC by economist Paul Cole. The report paints a picture of a mismanaged, wasteful operation.

In the meantime, Stone has this advice for the Kelder family: "you must get congressional involvement in your case to get action at JPAC."

So, we reached out to Illinois Senator Mark Kirk, who at the time of our meeting, was attending a Veterans Day ceremony in Buffalo Grove. Kirk says it's hard to hear stories like Private Kelder's.

"We are talking about the service members no longer alive, but the family is alive, and they deserve all the answers," Kirk tells FOX 32.

When asked if he believes the government can do a better job of identifying and returning soldiers, Kirk responded, "Absolutely, it could, yes. As long as the government puts a high priority on it, which it should do, it's a simple way of saying thank you to the family who has given up everything."

FOX 32's Jeff Herndon contacted JPAC, asking specifically about Buddy Kelder.

They would not go on camera, but did issue a statement that says, in part, "JPAC is committed to providing the fullest possible accounting of America's fallen heroes; however, they do not discuss matters of ongoing litigation."

At Union Ridge Cemetery, Ron Kelder says he's not mad, just disappointed that Buddy is still lost.

"How can you sing the lord's praise in a strange land? That's Bud," he says. "Trying to sing the lord's praise in a very strange land."

Senator Kirk's office contacted the Kelder family telling them it is exploring all available routes to have this situation remedied. So, perhaps Buddy will finally return to Chicago.

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Still another example of the Defense Department's JPAC (Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command) agency's intransigence and insensitivity to the families of our MIAs. And Judge Fred Biery should hang his head in shame for his erroneous, immoral decision against the Kelder family. Thanks go to Fox 32 News and news anchor Jeff Herndon for exposing JPAC's abusive conduct and this travesty of justice.

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 **Kimberly Johnson**

John Eakin. I am so proud of how far you have gotten with this. You and I met a while back when we spoke on the telephone and you had records on Gordon Larson of Seattle, WA. He was the brother to my Mother's HS Sweetheart. I did locate Gordon's last surviving sibling. She is in her mid 80's now. She was overwhelmed to know that her brother has been found. I just wanted to pass along another thank you. And thank you for sending me your updated posts regarding all of our fallen Soldiers. Come On Government! Bring our Soldiers home! It's shameful that you are not doing more to do so. It's an embarrassment to Our Country and to Our Men and Women that have served or even are currently serving. Please do the right thing. Bring them home.

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 **Kimberly Johnson**

I know you don't have your beloved family member home. But you are shedding so much light on this subject. If everyone out there reading this would share and ask others to share this story maybe we can be a tiny part of a solution to an issue that is long over due for resolution. Shed some light on this won't you please?

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