

News and stories

Supreme Court Decision on Medal of Honor Burial Pleases Family

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Linda Harris | [The State Journal](#)

Very soon, Medal of Honor recipient Hershel “Woody” Williams hopes to give a World War I hero the recognition he earned, but didn’t receive, when he died 82 years ago.

Williams has fought for more than three years to have the remains of Chester Howard West moved to the Donel C. Kinnard Memorial State Veterans Cemetery in Institute. Williams says West can be buried there with full military honors in a grave marked with a special headstone denoting his special status as a WWI Medal of Honor recipient.

It’s a far cry from the VanSickle Cemetery, the small family burial ground where he was buried on May 20, 1935. Located deep in what is now the 12,000-acre Chief Cornstalk Wildlife Preserve, the state acquired the property in the 1970s. At some point, the state closed the road leading to the cemetery and put up a gate. Eventually, the road and burial grounds were overtaken by trees and brush and became impassable. The cemetery fell into disrepair, with the graves — including West’s — overgrown.

Williams, now 93, hiked to the remote site two years ago, working

his way through briars and around fallen trees to see for himself the condition of the cemetery where the WWI Medal of Honor recipient had been laid to rest.