



Illinois Treasurer Dan Rutherford returns a Bronze Star to Mt. Vernon resident Tommy Fenton, who earned it in a classified operation in South America. Fenton's Bronze Star was in a safety deposit box in a Mt. Vernon bank, where it was sent to Springfield as unclaimed

property. It was returned to Fenton through Operation Reunite, which seeks to locate veterans whose medals or dog tags have been misplaced. RORYE O'CONNOR/REGISTER-NEWS

Local man reunited with lost Bronze Star

By RORYE O'CONNOR

rorye.oconnor@register-news.com

MT. VERNON — A misplaced Bronze Star found its way back to its rightful owner in Mt. Vernon through a state program called Operation Reunite.

The program, part of Illinois Treasurer Dan Rutherford's unclaimed property division, seeks to locate Illinois veterans whose military medals, dog tags or other personal military items of value have gone unclaimed.

"I am the recipient of property that for multiple reasons has become disconnected from its owner," Rutherford explained Monday at the Mt. Vernon Airport Hall of

Honor Museum. "Many times, it's the contents of a lock box. Unfortunately, that happens — when the family didn't know about the box and moved. After five years, if a financial institution couldn't find the owner, they are obligated to turn it over to me."

The Bronze Star, the award that Rutherford turned back over to Fenton, is awarded for military acts of heroism, merit or meritorious service in a combat zone, Rutherford said.

Fenton was a U.S. Army Staff Sgt. in the 2nd Ranger Battalion, 75th Infantry. He originally received his Bronze Star in 1984, he said.

"It gives me a real connection to my fa-

ther," Fenton said. "He was at Pointe du Hoc in Normandy, where he earned a Silver Star. He's the reason I went into the service."

Fenton said he believes the real military heroes are those who didn't return from combat. Nonetheless, he urged the public to honor veterans by shaking their hands and thanking them for their service.

"I ask my daughter, every time you see a veteran, shake his hand," he said. "It doesn't take much time out of your day and it means a whole lot to them."

Being able to have his family with him

see BRONZE/Page 3A 11-13-12

BRONZE

continued from 1A

while the medal was returned to him was special, he said.

He was first contacted by the Illinois Treasurer's Office about two months ago concerning his Bronze Star.

"I was really shocked," he said. "I called them

back to let them know, yes, she had the right person."

Fenton said he plans to construct a shadow box for the medal and put it "back up on the wall where it belongs."

Rutherford said among the items in Operation Reunite waiting to be returned to their rightful owners or their families are 16 Purple Hearts, awarded to those injured or killed while serving in

the military. There are more than 200 items on the list; the owners can be seen at the Illinois State Treasurer's ICash website.

He said Fenton's Bronze Star is the second medal to be returned through Operation Reunite, which was launched a year ago. He urged the public to help the unclaimed property division find the owners of those items.

Prior to the establishment of Operation Reunite, the names of those missing their military items would be among the more than 11 million names on the unclaimed property database, he said.

Rutherford thanked Mt. Vernon Airport Manager Chris Collins and the museum team for their efforts in recognizing veterans through the museum and Hall of Honor.