

# Lost Bronze Star finds its owner

## Rutherford presents honor as part of Operation Reunite

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THE SOUTHERN



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MOUNT VERNON — Tommy Fenton viewed his Bronze Star as a direct link to his father; every time he looked at it, he thought about the man who taught him about military service — the man who earned a Silver Star for his service at Normandy on D-Day.

But when Fenton placed his Bronze Star in a

bank deposit box for safe keeping, he had no idea it would be more than a decade before he saw it again.

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'I really, really thought it was gone forever. Every time I look at this, I'm reminded of my father.'

TOMMY FENTON, RECEIVED HIS LOST BRONZE STAR THROUGH OPERATION REUNITE.



JOEL HAWKSLEY / THE SOUTHERN

Illinois State Treasurer Dan Rutherford returns a Bronze Star to Tommy Fenton of Mount Vernon on Monday at a ceremony at the Mount Vernon Airport Military Museum. The medal was returned through Operation Reunite, which returns military memorabilia from the Unclaimed Property Division of the treasurer's office.

11-13-12

## FENTON: Receives Bronze Star

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Like his father, Fenton was an Army Ranger and earned the Bronze Star for his service in South America during the 1980s. Specific details for which he earned the honor are classified, but Bronze Stars are awarded for acts of heroism, merit or meritorious service in a combat zone.

Sometime in 1999 or 2000, Fenton placed the medal in the safe box. After a couple a moves, Fenton said he had forgotten where he had placed it and considered it gone forever.

As part of Operation Reunite, a program that attempts to return military honors to the veterans they have been disconnected from, Illinois State Treasurer Dan Rutherford presented Fenton with his lost military honor Monday in Mount Vernon.

"I really, really thought it was gone forever," Fenton said. "Every time I look at this, I'm reminded of my father."

"He's the reason I went into the service," he added. "This gives me a real connection to him."

Rutherford said his office came in possession of the Bronze Star after the financial institution

holding the safe box was unable to locate Fenton. He said an institution will hold property for five years before they turn it over to the treasurer's office.

There are about 11 million records of people with unclaimed property in the state, Rutherford said, and 66 veterans — or their heirs — listed in the Operation Reunite program.

Purple Hearts, Silver Star's and Iron Crosses are among the nearly 200 military artifacts dating back to the Spanish American War that occupy a vault beneath the state capitol in Springfield.

Operation Reunite was launched last year on Veterans Day, and in that year Rutherford said his office has been able to return one Purple Heart and Fenton's Bronze Star.

He hopes Fenton's reunification will encourage more people to look through the list of names of those with unclaimed military property.

"I ask you please help us, because there is another Tommy Fenton out there somewhere that deserves his recognition back," said Rutherford.

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