

MACDILL MATTERS

The recovery of a missing dog tag brings soldier back to Normandy

World War II veterans greeted with a hero's welcome 74 years after D-Day invasion.

BY HOWARD ALTMAN
Times Staff Writer

Nearly 75 years after first coming ashore in France as a young Army soldier, Boris Stern returned this summer to offer thanks to those who helped return his long-lost dog tag.

He arrived to a hero's welcome. "I've been all over the world," said Stern, of Carrollwood. "This was the trip of a lifetime."

The last time I wrote about Stern, who landed at Normandy after the invasion and went on to fight during the Battle of the Bulge, some folks in France had found and returned the iconic rectangular piece of metal he wore around his neck with information about his name, rank, blood type and religion.

He lost his dog tags sometime in December 1944, after an accidental explosion near an abandoned Nazi bunker killed several of his platoon mates who apparently set off some unexploded shells by starting a camp fire.

In November 2017, a French army veteran named Jean-Paul Mandier came across the missing relic. With the help of an internet friend from Cincinnati named Kit Timmons, they tracked down Stern and sent him the missing dog tag. To thank Mandier, Stern traveled to France with a group of other veterans, timing their visit for the 74th anniversary of D-Day.

"I was the youngest," Stern, 92, said with a laugh.

They arrived in Paris on May 31 and returned to the United States on June 8. In between, Stern and the others visited French schools and museums and wound up participating in parades and signing autographs as if they were rock stars.

"The people in Normandy were unbelievable," he said. "I ended up



Courtesy of Jean-Paul Mandier
Jean-Paul Mandier, left, helped return the dog tags lost during the Normandy invasion by Carrollwood veteran Boris Stern, right. The two men got together in France when Stern visited during the summer.

getting three different medals from three different cities."

During the parades, Stern and the other veterans rode slowly in Jeeps.

"Some girls came up and grabbed us and kissed us," Stern said. "It was overwhelming. I had never been treated like that in my life."

During the tour, Stern managed to meet up with Mandier.

"He doesn't live in the area. He drove to meet me."

Ever since connecting in November, the two have remained in close contact.

"I still get emails from him almost every day."

But meeting in the flesh was something special.

"We had a very nice time."

Mandier, who encouraged Stern to take the trip, said he, too, was thrilled to meet with his new friend. They spent about two hours together.

"After having exchanged so many letters and tried to bring him to Normandy, what a joy," Mandier wrote in an email to the *Tampa Bay Times*. "I was waiting for this moment for five months."

Stern, he said, "was received in Normandy with the honors that he deserves."

Next year will mark the 75th anniversary of the D-Day landings and already Mandier is working to include Stern.

"He wants me to come back."

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Vietnam War era veterans and surviving spouses are invited to participate in a Vietnam War 50th Commemoration Ceremony hosted by U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor, D-Tampa. The event will be held 10 a.m. Sept. 11 at the Davis Conference Center on MacDill Air Force Base. Those interested in attending must sign up at castor.house.gov or call (813) 871-2817 no later than Sept. 10.

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While I was away on vacation, the Pentagon announced the death of a soldier who was supporting Operation Inherent Resolve.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 **Taylor J. Galvin**, 34, from Spokane, Washington, died Aug. 20 in Baghdad, Iraq, as a result of injuries sustained when his helicopter crashed in Sinjar, Ninevah Province, Iraq. The incident is under investigation.

Galvin was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

There have been 2,347 U.S. troop deaths in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan; 53 U.S. troop deaths and one civilian Department of Defense employee death in support of the follow-up, Operation Freedom's Sentinel; 56 troop deaths and two civilian deaths in support of Operation Inherent Resolve; one troop death in support of Operation Odyssey Lightning, the fight against Islamic State in Libya; one troop death in support of Operation Joint Guardian, one death classified as other contingency operations in the global war on terrorism; one death in Operation Octave Shield and six deaths in ongoing operations in Africa where, if they have a title, officials will not divulge it.

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