

Worth a 40-year wait for return of Mishawaka Marine's dog tag

By TOM MOOR

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MISHAWAKA — Sitting in his stepmother's Mishawaka home, Mike Morgan teared up as he stared long and hard at his brother's dog tag from the Vietnam War.

"This is the last piece of the puzzle," Morgan said.

More than 40 years after his brother, Dennis Morgan, was killed in Vietnam, his family has at long last been reunited with his identification tag that was left behind in Vietnam.

Pulling a neck chain out of his pocket with his father's two dog tags, Morgan said Dennis' tag will look nice next to them. Dennis' second tag was never found.

"It's indescribable," said Morgan, 49, the youngest of four brothers and the only one still living. "I feel as if I have a closer bond to him now."

Dennis Morgan was killed in action Aug. 23, 1968, in Quang Nam Province in South Vietnam. Marines were crossing a bridge, and he was in a defensive position when gunfire broke out. He was fatally shot in the gunbattle.

The dog tag's path back to Michiana was a long one that started about two months ago in a small market in Saigon.

*Long path home*

A man from England was in Vietnam on vacation and came across the dog tag inside a bucket at the market. There were about 15 other dog tags in the bucket, but Dennis Morgan's caught his attention because he could tell it was for a Marine because of the letters "USMC." The English man decided to pick that one because he was in the British Royal Navy and admired Marines.

The man took the dog tag back to England and called his sister, Annette Brofey, who lives in Portland, Ore. They made the decision to reunite the dog tag with Dennis' family.

But that wouldn't be easy. With only a name and an identification number to go on, Brofey contacted the military archives in Washington, D.C. She received enough information to learn that Dennis Morgan was born in Pennville, Ind., and had lived most of his life in Mishawaka.

The Jay County Historical Society was able to provide the name of an aunt, Betty Kenyon, near Pennville in Portland, Ind.

Because the St. Joseph County Historical Society did not know about that certain family in this area, the woman also called The Tribune for help. The Tribune was able to find Mike Morgan and Grace Morgan, Dennis' stepmother. However, Annette Brofey had already sent the tag to the aunt in Portland, Ind.

But on Wednesday morning, the dog tag arrived at Grace's home. The package came with a nice note and a rosary. The identification tag notes that Dennis was Catholic.

"It was very thoughtful for the family in England to do this," Morgan said last week at his stepmother's home. "I'm going to put it on the same chain as my dad. This will be a treasure."

*In the family*

Although Mike Morgan did not serve in the armed forces, his father was in the Army 82nd Airborne, and Mike's two sons, Brandon and Bryan, are both Marines. Brandon served two tours in Iraq, while Bryan is currently stationed in Okinawa, Japan.

"Marines are very respectful," Mike said. "(My sons) said the tags are something to be honored and respected."

Mike said his sons grew up seeing pictures of their uncle in uniform, which Mike says likely contributed to them becoming Marines.

"I think they both looked up to him," said Mike, who now lives in Edwardsburg.

Just as Mike looked up to his oldest brother. Mike was only 7 when his brother left for the war. He remembers little of him, other than Dennis coming home from a tour and giving him a hat.

Before the dog tag came, Mike's best memorabilia of his brother was a Marine lighter. Morgan will make a special section in his house to put the medals, pictures, lighter and now the dog tag on the chain.

Marines carry two sets of dog tags — one around the neck and the other usually in their boot. Mike is not sure what happened to the other one.