

Coincidence or Fate?



Me at the spot where the dog tag was discovered.

American soldier's dog tag from the Second World War.



known that area well. A quick bit of research into the site revealed that we were going to be on, or very close to, the former site of RAF High Halden, which had been used as an American airbase during the Second World War.

On the morning itself, I met up with a few old friends, then after a short briefing from organiser Paul Howard, I headed out into the 180 acre permission with my Rutus Alter 71 in hand. It didn't take long before we all got separated out in the fields – I'm sure you've all experienced that!

After a few hours, all that I had to show for my efforts were a few green blobs that used to be coins and some (as to be expected) ordnance. I stopped and looked around and decided to try my luck in a different field. It feels somewhat strange to write this, but as I passed a small pond surrounded by trees, something told me I should have a hunt around the area.

No sooner had I reached the tree line when a cracking signal reverberated in my ears. From around only four inches depth, out popped what I thought was a manufacturer's plate from some item of farm machinery or similar. It was heavily coated in Kent clay, as were my gloves by this point, so I placed it into my pouch for later inspection. The rest of the day was pretty uneventful for me, with just a few more bits and pieces, so around 3pm I

decided to call it a day. This decision was also enhanced by the fact that as I'd been squelching around for the past couple of hours, one of my boots had decided to spring a leak!

Later that evening, I remembered the manufacturer's plate so took it out for a good old check. Slowly a jumble of numbers and letters began to appear as the mud was washed away. 'Sumner Vivat'? "Well that's an unusual name for a machine plate" I thought. However, I soon realised that what I was holding was in fact an American soldier's dog tag from the Second World War!

Without any real expectations I then performed an Internet search for Sumner Vivat. I soon stumbled across an obituary for a sadly now departed Allan Vivat, who most curiously shared the same birthday as my partner. It also listed the name Sumner as well as other family members – could it be? The hunt was on! I found contact details for some of the family members and sent messages via various formats to try and confirm my suspicions. I waited as 36 very long hours passed by without reply, and then 'ping'! It was a lady by the name of Andrea, one of Sumner's daughters.

She wrote, "Yes, Sumner is my father, he's 95 now and quite well." It was a real 'eureka' moment, as I realised that he was still alive!

Once my senses had been restored, my first thought was that he must have his dog tag back. Over the next week, Andrea and I were in constant communication and I remember fondly how she told me about when she had first informed her father about the find. Andrea had asked him about when he

I was born in 1975 and spent most of my infant years in a small village in Kent called Bethersden. Later on, I left school and finally moved to Langley to pursue a career. Thus I had always considered that Bethersden was well and truly a place of my past – or was it?

A few weeks ago, a good friend of mine informed me that Let's Go Digging were holding a rally on the 11th February down in Kent and, rather intrigued, I looked up the details. Amazingly for me, it was being held at Bethersden! I had not been back there for nearly 40 years, so I quickly got my name down alongside the other attendees.

A few weeks passed, and on the eve of the rally we were given the full location details. It was being held at Langley farm which made me chuckle as I had

had joined the army and whether they had given him anything? Sumner had replied "Well a gun, some uniform and a few other bits."

Then Andrea more specifically asked "Did they give you any form of identification?" Then came the definitive proof "Well, yes I had a name tag, my number was..." By now tears were rolling down Andrea's cheeks as she was looking at the image I had sent her - her father had quoted the number shown on it exactly. Sumner then told Andrea that it also had a letter H in the corner which meant Hebrew. Back in England I could only imagine the potentially awful possibilities that could have occurred had he been captured.

I have now got to know Andrea and Sumner very well since our first contact, and she has revealed some amazing insights into his life. He still goes to the

gym! He really is an amazing character and our phone conversations are a real highlight for me. I have recorded many of these conversations and they are available on the Let's Go Digging forum.

I have to say it has been both a real privilege and an honour to have been able to return his tag to him and to hear the excitement in his voice and see the joy on his face. Such things have made the whole event so fulfilling. Over the years I have made a few nice finds, however nothing will ever be more meaningful to me than this little strip of stamped metal.

So why did I give this account the title that I did? When I looked at Sumner's enlistment record I saw that the date that he had enlisted was 11th February 1943. Look at the date on which the rally was held, and you



Sumner now reunited with the dog tag he lost over seven decades ago!

decide! Out of around 100 people on that rally I was the one that got that feeling near the small pond and went on to discover the dog tag, and for me that's just so amazing. TH

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