



Right: (Courtesy of Christian Wirtz/Sharp Wilkenson); Left: (Courtesy of Carl Hughes)

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Farmer in Vietnam Finds Marine's Dog Tag Lost 57 Years Ago—Now Finally Returned to Family in US

BY [Louise Chambers](#) | TIME - March 17, 2023

The family of a Vietnam War veteran has been reunited with a piece of their loved one's history that was lost in a rice field 57 years ago.

The late U.S. Marine Cpl. Larry Hughes lost his dog tag while serving in Da Nang in 1966. Decades later, on a Vietnam field trip with 20 University of Notre Dame students in October 2022, professor Michael Desch and Jim Webb, a former Virginia senator and ex-Marine, ran into a local farmer who approached them with the lost tag.


“[The farmer] said he had found this dog tag when he was working his fields,” Desch told The Epoch Times. “We decided if we could get him to part with it, it would be neat to bring it home and see if we could find the Marine who lost it, or his family.”



A rice farmer approaches the field trip group and hands Hughes' lost dog tag to Jim Webb. (Courtesy of Christian Wirtz/Sharp Wilkenson)



Former Virginia senator and ex-Marine¹ Jim Webb receives a dog tag from a local farmer in Da Nang during a field trip in October 2022. (Courtesy of Christian Wirtz/Sharp Wilkenson)

¹ Comment – No such thing as an “ex-Marine” so long as the Marine served Honorably. Semper Fidelis  Former Senator Jim Webb (VA – 2007-2013) was an Officer of U.S. Marines who served with distinction during the Vietnam War. He subsequently served as the 1st Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, and the 66th Secretary of the Navy. - <https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/jim-webb-49954.php>



Former Virginia senator and ex-Marine Jim Webb examines the dog tag.
(Courtesy of Christian Wirtz/Sharp Wilkenson)

Hughes likely dropped the tag while serving, said Desch, but since the veteran never told his story—not even to family—we “don’t know for sure.”

“The first thing that came to my mind was my father, who had served as a Navy doctor with the Marines,” Desch said. “He kept his dog tags on his keychain. ... The second thing that occurred to me was, it might be a way for us to close the loop on somebody’s service in Vietnam.”

The task of returning the tag was both an experience for the students and a chance to help those military family members. “It was the right thing to do,” Desch said.

Returning to Indiana, he tried to access military personnel records kept by the National Archives at St. Louis but was told they could only be released to next of kin. Webb, who served as a first lieutenant and captain in Vietnam in 1969 and 1970, and taught a fall course on the war at Notre Dame, happened to have contacts at the Senate. He stepped in.



The dog tag lost by Hughes in 1966 is returned 57 years later.
(Main: Courtesy of Christian Wirtz/Sharp Wilkenson; INSET: Courtesy of Carl Hughes)



Photos of Hughes as a young man. (Courtesy of Carl Hughes)



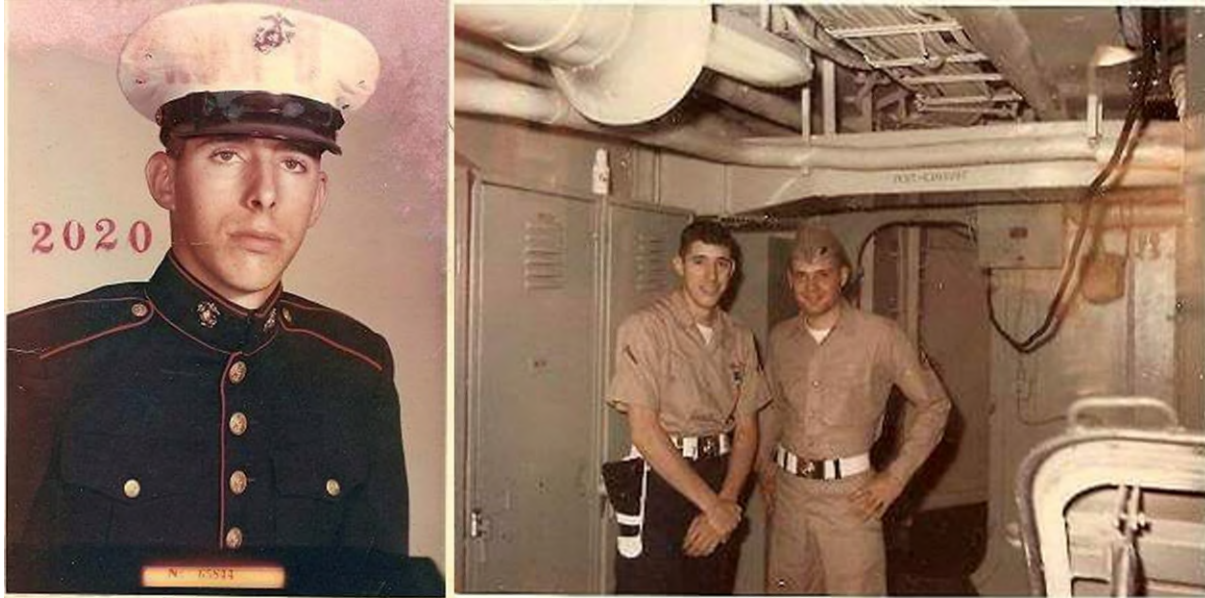
Detail of Hughes' now-returned dog tag. (Courtesy of Christian Wirtz/Sharp Wilkenson)

The “key” to locating Hughes’ surviving family was a Marine colonel and Notre Dame alum whom Desch had known years ago.

“The Notre Dame connection came back,” Desch said. “They found that the last address within the system was in Inglis, Florida. ... One of the [non-commissioned officers] in public affairs came up with the idea of calling the mayor; ... he was the connection with Carl Hughes, Larry’s son, also a former Marine. And through him, we connected with his other son and his sister, Patricia.”

Webb had the idea of framing the dog tag in a shadow box alongside Hughes’ campaign ribbons and a picture of the university group on their field trip, presenting a full commemorative package. In February 2023, Webb and Desch traveled to Florida to reunite the long-lost tag with Carl, Patricia, and Larry Hughes Jr., its rightful owners.

“They were first just shocked that this whole thing came together the way it did,” Desch said. “Secondly, I think they felt that Corporal Hughes was a very quiet, unassuming man. He was proud of his service, but he also didn’t talk, so it was, in a way, an opportunity to connect directly with an important part of their father and brother’s life.”



Photos of Hughes while serving as a U.S. Marine. (Courtesy of Carl Hughes)



(Left) (L-R) Professor Michael Desch, Patricia Pickett, Carl Hughes, Larry Hughes, Jr., and former U.S. Senator Jim Webb; (Right) A shadow box containing Vietnam veteran Larry Hughes' returned dog tag. (Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Pedro A. Rodriguez)



The field trip group poses for a photo in Da Nang, Vietnam, in October 2022.
(Courtesy of Christian Wirtz/Sharp Wilkenson)

Hughes, who died in 2019 after a heart attack, had enlisted in the Marines as a teenager. When he returned from the war, he reintegrated by working as a boiler maker in a nuclear power plant.

Desch recounted a story from Carl about visiting a mobile Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Wall with his father, that came to their hometown when Carl was a child.

“His father was looking at all the names, and apparently found somebody who served,” Desch said. “It was obvious that his father [felt] deeply about his time in Vietnam, but it was also not something he talked a lot about.”

During the presentation, family members expressed how proud they were of Larry and how glad they were that he finally received recognition. It was also symbolic of something else.

“The two sides hated each other, and look how they come together now, how quickly you can build that friendship, that bond,” Carl said. “And that’s what the world needs, is everybody can get along and love each other.”

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