

The ISLANDS of GUERNSEY

“I KNEW THAT IT NO LONGER BELONGED TO ME” HOW A GUERNSEY FATHER AND SON FOUND THEMSELVES TRAVELLING 4,000 MILES TO RETURN A VIETNAM WAR HELMET



Imagery available [here](#) (credit Tony and Hugo Booth)

London, November 2024 – A Guernsey father and son have travelled 4,000 miles to restore the helmet of a US soldier fighting in the Vietnam War to his family. Hugo Booth, aged 19, found the 55-year-old helmet in a local charity shop auction and, after spending hours researching its original owner, managed to trace it back to Private Jeffrey Rupp, who passed away in action in 1969 aged just 20.

“I’d always wanted to find a Vietnam war helmet for my personal military memorabilia collection,” says Booth, “but when I saw the graffiti on the helmet’s Kevlar insert, and managed to trace whose it was, I knew that it no longer belonged to me”.

Booth and his father Tony rifled through military records to trace the surname handwritten on the helmet’s *inset*, finally confirming a match for Private First-Class Jeffrey Rupp of the 101st Airborne Division in the US Army. Remarkably, as a result of Booth’s online appeals, Rupp’s sister Christine managed to get in touch, asking that the helmet be returned home.

Tony Booth explains that the experience has taught the pair to expect the unexpected, and to recognise the kindness of strangers. *“Lives lost over 50 years ago can still impact families today. The loved ones of the thousands who lost their lives in this conflict are still feeling the deep pain of loss, and it means so much that Hugo and I were able to bring closure to at least one family”.*

Hugo and Tony travelled to Wisconsin to meet with David, Rupp’s nephew, returning the helmet to his family after over fifty years. Tony describes the emotional intensity of the meeting, explaining how *“the significance only truly hit home when we were there. I was glad to be able to help Hugo achieve his dream to get the helmet home. I also realised the true significance this helmet has for Jeff’s family – that is, to give back something tangible of their loved one from the battlefield and give them a little peace”.* Hugo adds that the experience was an *“emotional roller-coaster”* and expresses his gratitude to have had *“the opportunity to fly 4,000 miles and help this family find some closure”.*

After 55 years, a part of Jeffrey Rupp has finally returned home. For Hugo Booth, *“I do not yet have the words to fully comprehend what I have learned from this experience, but I do know that I am not the same person who left Guernsey. Being away from my own family, I soon found a group of people who were like a family to me themselves, linked by one man’s combat helmet”.*

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For enquiries relating to this story and for interview opportunities, please contact Natalie and the team at guernsey@wearelotus.co.uk