

# After 30 years, stolen jacket makes its way home

**T**he last time I saw the jacket it was hanging in a closet at my grandparents' house," Dan Potter said. "That was 1980, maybe '81."

Not long after that, the World War II Army jacket, known as an "Eisenhower Jacket" or "Ike Jacket" because it was introduced under Gen. Dwight D. "Ike" Eisenhower, was stolen in a break-in at the grandparents' home.

"I was deployed for a time with the Marines as a civilian and when I returned in 1985, the entire uniform was gone. So I didn't think I'd ever see that jacket again," said Potter, who lives in Lancaster and works in aerospace.

That year, 1985, was the same year his father — George L. Potter, Jr. — died. So it was even more meaningful to have lost this symbol of a war that played such a major role in his dad's life and the lives of tens of millions of Americans.

There was no reason to expect that the jacket or anything else that was taken from his grandparents' home in Dinuba would ever be found.

But then again, he didn't have the Internet in 1985.

George L. Potter Jr. served in the famous Easy Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne, which was featured in Stephen Ambrose's 1992 book "Band of Brothers" and the subsequent HBO mini-series of the same name.

While Potter was not featured in the book, he is the subject of a chapter in "A Company of Heroes" by Marcus Brotherton. The book tells the stories of the men who served in Easy Company, and the chapter is based on the author's interview with Dan Potter.

George Potter was a military man from day one. Born at Fort Benning, Ga., in 1923, he was the son of a World War I officer.

Growing up, his family lived in California, Arizona, Washington state and finally Oregon, where he lived when he enlisted in 1942 at age 18. He joined the Army while still a senior at Hood River High School, and received his diploma as part of his enlistment. An athlete, he held the state record for the quarter-mile.

On March 5, 1943, the Hood River newspaper

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*Dan Potter never thought he'd see his late father's 'Band of Brothers' jacket again.*

printed an account of George Potter's first parachute jump. It quoted extensively from his letter home, very much the gung-ho young paratrooper.

He would go on to see and experience things that a kid just out of high school — or anyone, for that matter — should never see or experience. He joined E Company "late" — on Feb. 22, 1943, and felt a bit slighted by others for not being one of the originals. He made the jump with E Company in Normandy and also in Holland, where he was wounded in the fighting and earned a Bronze Star. He fought at Bastogne in the Battle of the Bulge, suffering frostbitten feet that would bother

him the rest of his life.

George Potter survived the war physically, his son said, but it haunted him psychologically for the remainder of his days. "He never talked about his experiences," Dan Potter said.

And, like many of his generation, he tried his best to self-medicate with alcohol, and it took over his life. "He never got over it," his son said.

In "A Company of Heroes," Dan Potter recounts the time his dad, under the influence, barricaded the door of a winter cabin they were staying in and insisted the Germans were just outside.

He married four times, and divorced three. He made a career in television news in San Diego, working as a cameraman, who in those days did a fair amount of reporting which would then be read by the anchor, narrating the film footage.

It was only after his dad's death that Dan Potter learned so much about the war experiences. The "Band of Brothers" book came out and Dan began researching on his own, ultimately talking with author Ambrose and attending company reunions. He met his dad's friends — the ones who survived.

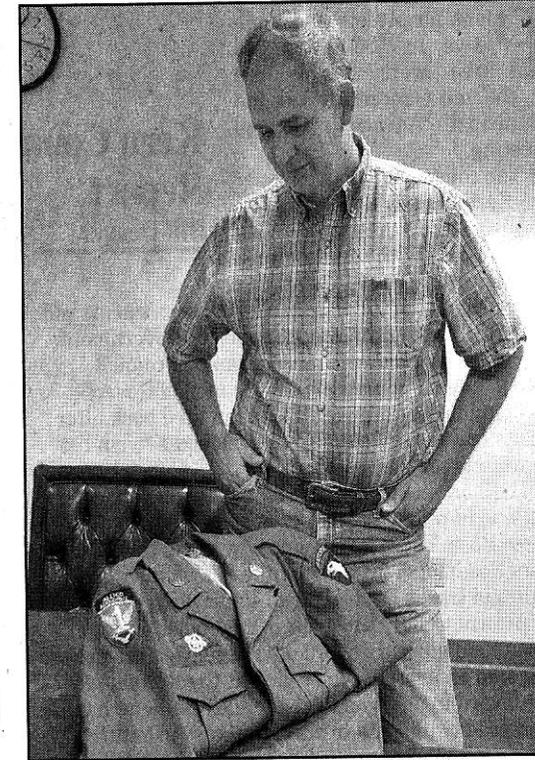
So now we fast-forward to 2010. And, out of the blue, a couple of weeks ago, Dan Potter and his brother Tom started getting calls from a military collector in the Netherlands about a jacket he was considering buying on eBay.

"He wanted to know if it was genuine," Dan Potter said.

Potter had no idea what the man was talking about. E Company equipment goes for a good price, and there's a temptation for fakery. He thought



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CHRISTINA RAMOS/Valley Press

**PIECE OF HISTORY** — George Potter, above left, in his World War II Army uniform. Potter served in the "Band of Brothers" made famous by historian Stephen Ambrose: Company E of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division. Above right, Dan Potter looks down at his dad's World War II Ike Jacket. The jacket was stolen years ago, but was found and returned to Dan Potter.

maybe someone had a trench coat up for sale and was claiming it had belonged to his dad. "It never occurred to me that it would be the Ike Jacket."

But it was.

The auction had just closed, but Potter contacted the seller, who lives in Los Angeles, and explained that the jacket was indeed his father's — but it had been stolen. At the first the fellow was reluctant, thinking that Potter might be a phony, but ultimately he agreed to send it back. Potter sent him a finder's fee.

It turns out that the seller is a collector who goes to "rag shops," which amass bundles of unsold clothing from thrift stores and separate the materials out to produce filling for mattresses. "It was there, in a big pile, that he found it, about to be chopped up. It was this close to being gone forever," Potter

said.

The collector mailed the jacket to Dan Potter, and he will keep it until the next Easy Company reunion later this year and then pass it along to his brother Tom.

It was hard to describe the emotion of opening that package. "It was kind of an unbelievable experience," Potter said. "It was so long ago and we never imagined we would see that jacket again. Through 'Band of Brothers' we learned a lot, but there were pieces missing."

Now, 30 years later, they have one more piece of the history of the life of their dad, George Potter.

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