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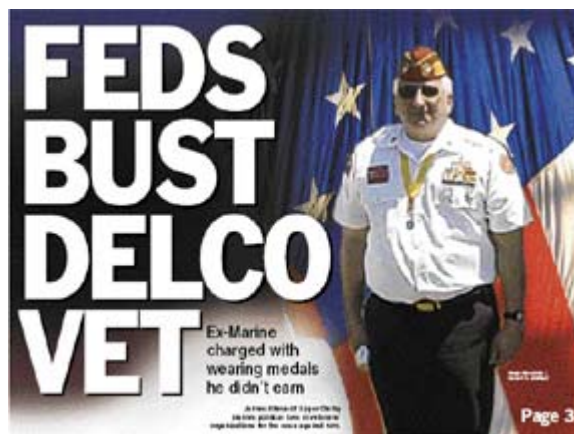
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## Questions arise about medals on vet leader

By Linda Reilly, Times Correspondent



PHILADELPHIA — A prominent leader among Delaware County veterans wore military medals he never earned — including the Silver Star, Bronze Star and Purple Heart, according to federal prosecutors.

James Anthony Alleva, 54, of the 200 block of South Lynn Boulevard, Upper Darby, commandant of the Marine Corps League General Smedley D. Butler Detachment 741 of Newtown Square, was formally charged, ordered to surrender his

passport and released on \$10,000 bail pending disposition of the case filed by U.S. Attorney Patrick L. Meehan and FBI Special Agent-in-Charge J.P. Weis.

Alleva allegedly altered his military discharge certificate, wore unauthorized military medals or decorations and falsely represented himself as an award recipient of commendations achieved in action governed under federal laws.

According to the Assistant U.S. Attorney Jose R. Arteaga, Alleva was cited Aug. 7 for allegedly altering his military discharge certificate and Feb. 5 and Aug. 7 for illegally wearing the Silver Star medal, the Bronze Star medal, two Purple Heart medals, awards only authorized by Congress, and Parachute Jump Wings and a SCUBA Badge for completing diver school.

If convicted of all charges, Alleva faces a maximum sentence of two years imprisonment, one year supervised release and an \$110,000 fine.

"I plan to vigorously defend these charges," Alleva, a member of 741 since 2002, said, claiming disgruntled members of the detachment have it out for him.

"They are envious of the way things are going and they are trying to discredit me and the detachment. It's a vicious, immature, cowardly attack against me and the detachment," Alleva said.

Alleva announced plans to turn over leadership of the detachment to the senior vice commandant for the month of October.

Reaction among local veterans was mixed. Several said they were not surprised by the accusation.

Paymaster and 741 Past Commandant Bob Spano, 58, of Drexel Hill, recalled Alleva "talking to us about the Upper Darby (884 Detachment) people doubting his medals.

"People in the military are very sensitive to others wearing medals they don't deserve," Spano said. "It is nothing we would approve of and something we would be embarrassed about. Unfortunately it happens in all branches of the military. I don't accuse anybody. That is up to the law. It's being handled by the

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proper channels. It's their jurisdiction."

According to Spano, a 1969 Vietnam veteran and recipient of the Combat Action Ribbon and member of 741 since 2000, new members to any detachment have to provide a record of honorable discharge to qualify for membership.

Since Alleva transferred from 884 in good standing to 741 that wasn't required, Spano says.

Former Commander Bob Stanton of Ridley Park, now sergeant-at-arms and commander of the Young

Marines at 741, wondered why anyone would lie about their service record.

"I questioned him a couple of times after I saw the Silver Star and Bronze Star," Stanton said. "I thought there was no way anybody could have done all this" during the time Alleva served in the Marines. "He says he has everything he says he has."

USMC Capt. J. David Fleming of Lansdowne, stationed in Quantico, Va., after three tours to Iraq, called the allegations of wearing undeserved medals "infuriating" and cited the enactment of the 2005 Stolen Valor Act.

"We have our own value system in the Marines — selflessness, honor, courage," Fleming said. "We give those things value. When a man or woman is selfless we recognize them by giving them a medal. To have an imposter lie that he demonstrated a heroic act detracts from the medal.

"The real guys who received medals don't go around promoting themselves. The real heroes prefer to be unrecognized. It's important for us to keep the value system intact. Danny Santos, who had shrapnel in his gut, there's a Silver Star recipient. Jason Dunham, who smothered a grenade with his body and lived seven days, there's a Medal of Honor recipient. These are the heroes," Fleming said.

The Crawfords, a Drexel Hill family of Marines and members of MCL Upper Darby Detachment 884, said they were saddened and angered by the charges.

Ed Crawford, 79, served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam and has five Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star. His son, David Crawford, 49, is a retired recruiter. His grandson, Matt Crawford, 27, toured Iraq twice and is a Purple Heart recipient.

"It made me feel bad," the elder Crawford said. "I knew guys who were wounded or killed and should have gotten all those medals and never got them, and he's wearing them. He dishonored people that really deserved the medals."

"He dishonored himself and anybody else who ever received a medal," Dave Crawford said.

"A lot of people went through a lot of pain for the Purple Heart," said Matt Crawford, who lost sight in his right eye from an improvised explosive device in Iraq. "It's not right for someone to pretend they have it. To earn the Bronze or Silver Star you pretty much have to put your life on the line. If he did wear it and didn't rate it, he's a scumbag."




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