



---

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 17, 2009

**SUMNER MAN ORDERED TO PARTICIPATE IN MORAL RECONATION THERAPY  
FOR MAKING FALSE CLAIMS OF MILITARY MEDALS**

*Man Falsely Claimed He Had Been Awarded Bronze Star and Purple Heart*

STEVE A. BENNEST, 57, of Sumner, Washington, was sentenced today in United States District Court in Seattle, Washington, following his federal conviction for Making False Claims of Military Medals and Decorations in violation of federal law.

BENNEST is a former reserve police officer for the Pacific Police Department in Pacific, Washington.

According to court documents, during 2008, BENNEST made multiple claims for military compensation, and made oral and written claims, alleging that he had received a Purple Heart and Bronze Star due to heroic military service and sustained post-traumatic stress disorder.

These claims were false.

The Bronze Star and Purple Heart are of the most highly esteemed medals awarded by the United States military. The Bronze Star is awarded to soldiers who made an "extraordinary contribution to the United States national defense." The Purple Heart is awarded to soldiers who achieved valor and were "wounded in combat by hostile fire." While BENNEST served in the U.S. Army between 1969 and 1972, he was not awarded any of these medals.

Retired Air National Guard Serviceman Steve Pennington told the Court that he recalled observing BENNEST wearing multiple false medals, including a Purple Heart, that he had not earned, and that BENNEST claimed to have served in the elite Special Forces on "classified missions." All of this was false. Pennington told the Court that BENNEST's actions were "demeaning to all servicemen, but especially those who lost their lives as soldiers."

United States Magistrate Judge Brian A. Tsuchida told BENNEST that his conduct was "shameful and hurtful to other soldiers," and sentenced the defendant to 24 months probation. As part of his probation, BENNEST was ordered to perform community service work and to participate in a structured U.S. Probation program known as "Moral Reconation Therapy," designed to help those with trouble recognizing right from wrong.

This matter came to the attention of federal prosecutors as a result of complaints from the public indicating that BENNEST was wearing unearned military medals and making false claims regarding military service.

This case was prosecuted as part of “Operation Stolen Valor”, an ongoing initiative by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, designed to identify those making false claims of military service and committing monetary fraud upon the United States.

The case was investigated by U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General in Seattle and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Ronald J. Friedman.

For additional information please contact Emily Langlie, Public Affairs Officer for the United States Attorney’s Office, at (206) 553-4110.