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War long over, vet receives his medals

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HERKIMER — It has been 31 years since Dave Davis fought in Vietnam, and he finally received his medals, 12 in all. He doesn't seem to be as disgruntled about the delay that didn't end until this spring as one might think, and humbly makes every effort to downplay the magnitude of his conduct during the Vietnam war.

He obviously didn't want to submit to this interview, and declares as much with a laugh. "I felt like I was blowing my own horn. ...It wasn't me doing this damn interview," said Mr. Davis with a smile, after being brought to the meeting by his friend Jim Dinehart.

"I've been trying to get them since I got out of Nam," said Mr. Davis as he begins the story of finally getting the commendations due him for his service.

"For 28 years, I fought my ass off to get my claim. I fought for 14 years straight," said Mr. Davis.

About two years ago Mr. Davis contacted Mary Blair of the Veterans Service Agency in Utica. Ms. Blair took Mr. Davis' claim and submitted a government form to the Department of the Army of the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri. Ms. Blair states such a request takes time. The current two-year backlog is around 98,000 cases and 4,300 congressional requests for Army medals.

"In defense of the military in general," said Mr. Davis, "they try."

Mr. Davis points out there were roughly 3 million soldiers in Vietnam at one time or another. "I don't think they can keep track of that many people. It's tough. I guess it's understandable."

Mr. Davis' friends Mr. Dinehart and Chuck Wilson, a Gulf War veteran, thought other-



Telegram photo/Adam Atkinson

RECEIVES MEDALS — Dave Davis with some of his medals and commendations, finally sent to him after a 31-year wait.

Assistance available locally for veterans

Veterans who have not received medals, commendations or pensions to which they believe they are entitled to can contact Mary Blair of the Veterans Service Office

at the County Office Building in Herkimer on Thursdays from 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. at 867-1127, or at her Utica office at 798-5828.

wise. They saw a formal record of Mr. Davis' commendation listings and were taken with the document. They began to encourage Mr. Davis to continue to seek his medals. "It should be known," said Mr. Dinehart. "I've heard of red tape before, but wow."

"I guess they both felt it should be noted... There comes a time in everybody's life, when some friends go to extremes and show their friendship more than other times," said Mr. Davis. The veteran points out he has known both men for many years and the three were always good friends. "Until now, I didn't know how good."

"He was stubborn," said Mr.

Dinehart of trying to motivate Mr. Davis to pursue the granting of his medals further.

Mr. Davis served two tours in the Army as a sergeant in Vietnam from 1968 to 1970. He began his career as an infantryman. He then served as a sniper, forest reconnaissance and a forward observer.

He served under the 589th Engineers with the 18th Engineering Brigade, the 11th Armored Cavalry, the 1st 17th Air Cavalry, 9th Infantry, and the Navy Riverine forces. With the 589th he was stationed in Quang Tri, the Rubber Plantation, and the Iron Triangle. With the 9th he was stationed in Cambodia and Laos and the

Mekong River Delta.

Mr. Davis doesn't brag about his role in the war. He re- small details but doesn't tell stories.

"A lot of what I did, I did of fear," says Mr. Davis. "I affects different people different ways."

A Bronze Star Medal, a valor device, tops the complete list of medals Mr. Davis finally has received.

Other medals that finally rived were a Purple Heart, a Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster, a Bronze Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal with two Bronze Stars, A Service Ribbon, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Ribbon with device, Expert Badge, Auto Rifle, and Rifle Bars.

"It was something I had to do... Don't think for one minute that I wasn't scared, because I was scared to death," said Davis.

Ms. Blair states requests Mr. Davis' are fairly common. "It's a very popular request," said Ms. Blair.

Many former warriors either didn't receive their commendations or have misplaced them over time and are seeking placements. Ms. Blair states some cases, discharged soldiers cared little for anything had to do with the war at the time and left medals and commendations behind. Many of these soldiers who served in wars go back as far as World War II seeking replacement commendations either for themselves or perhaps for their families, Ms. Blair.

Mr. Davis highlights the importance of Ms. Blair's role in the receipt of his medals. The veteran points out how important having an advocate or tact when dealing with veterans' issues is. "The VA is a system and you got to have someone in the system."

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