



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Senator Young Presents Overdue Military Awards to Local Veteran

CATHARINE YOUNG June 10, 2011

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OLEAN – Decades after serving aboard the USS Oriskany in the Vietnam War, U.S. Navy veteran Gary Clark of West Almond finally was awarded two service medals honoring the former Petty Officer 3rd Class for his years of wartime service.

Over 45 years later, Petty Officer Clark received the thanks he deserved when Senator Catharine Young (R,I,C –Olean) personally pinned the Vietnam Service Medal with one bronze campaign star and the Navy Unit Commendation onto his chest as part of a special ceremony Friday at the Crossroads Conference Center in Belmont.

“America’s brave veterans have made unparalleled sacrifices for our country and it was my great honor to present these long overdue awards to Petty Officer Clark. He earned these medals and should have gotten them long ago. I am just glad that his family were finally able to see him get the recognition he deserved,” said Senator Young.

Senator Young said the delay resulted from an omission on Petty Officer Clark’s discharge papers and separation documents where the Navy mistakenly omitted some of his sea service time, making it appear as if Petty Officer Clark never served in Vietnam.

In September 2009, Petty Officer Clark came to Senator Young's office seeking help to correct his service record in order for him to become eligible for tax credits that are available to veterans. Her office was able to get the records fixed and, in the process, was able to secure the long overdue service awards.

"Errors on discharge papers and other military records can often result in the delay or denial of service medals. It is more common than one might think, especially for our Vietnam Veterans," said Senator Young.

"All of our veterans needs to be thanked for their service, and it is gratifying to get this done for Petty Officer Clark after all these years," she added.

Petty Officer Clark said, "I would like to thank Senator Young and everyone of her staff who made my past service a priority. I am truly happy to be able to share this day with my family, my wife, Carroll, and mother-in law, Joan Youngdale, my brother and sister-in-law, Glenn and Cindy Moore, and my sister and brother-in-law, Joanne and Terry Carpenter. For a long time after my return from Vietnam I became bitter about my service, especially given the fact that it was an unpopular war. Since that time however, I am glad to see that people realize how important it is to support our troops. I am glad that in our area of New York State we have a State Senator who truly works hard for all of her constituents."

Petty Officer Clark enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1962 at the age 18 and received his basic training at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center in Illinois. He achieved the rank of E-4 while serving as an aviation electrician with Attack Squadron 163 the "Saints."

During the Vietnam War, he was deployed to the Tonkin Gulf from April to September 1966 and served on the aircraft carrier USS Oriskany. His responsibilities included assisting with the maintenance of fighter planes during combat operations. Petty Officer Clark was one of the crewman that personally maintained Senator John McCain's A-4 Skyhawk.

Before the Vietnam War had started, Petty Officer Clark served on the USS Lexington that was deployed to the Gulf of Mexico during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Petty Officer Clark was discharged honorably in September of 1966 after serving his full time in the Navy.

Curt Crandall, Chairman of the Allegany County Board of Legislators, who took part in the ceremony said, "Awards and recognition for one's service to their country is one way to show our grateful appreciation. I want to thank the Senator for her involvement in seeing that Mr. Clark got this deserving award. Most of all, I want to be sure Gary Clark knows that Allegany county is grateful of his years of dedication and service."

Mike Hennessy, Director of the Allegany County Veterans Service Agency, said, "It is gratifying to know that even after 40 years, the United States military understands the importance of recognizing all deserving veterans with their awards and commendations."

The Vietnam Service Medal was created in 1965 by order of **President Lyndon B. Johnson**. The medal is issued to recognize military service during the **Vietnam War** and is authorized to service members in every branch of the U.S. Armed Forces provided they meet certain qualification criteria.

The Navy Unit Commendation is awarded by the Secretary of the Navy to any ship, aircraft, detachment, or other unit of the U.S. Navy or Marine Corps which since December, 6 1941 has distinguished itself in action against the enemy with outstanding heroism. It is also awarded for non-combat service, in support of military operations, which was outstanding when compared to other units or organizations performing similar service.

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