



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Olean Native Dana Whittaker Posthumously Honored in Medal Ceremony

CATHARINE YOUNG December 7, 2013

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Family of Dana F. Whittaker Receives Awards for Military Service

HINSDALE - In recognition of his honorable record of military service, U.S. Army veteran Dana Floyd Whittaker has finally received the decorations he deserves.

During a ceremony at the Norton-Chambers American Legion Post in Hinsdale this afternoon, Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I-Olean) presented to the family of Specialist 5 Dana F. Whittaker the military medals he earned by serving overseas. After being contacted by the Whittaker family, Senator Young

worked to ensure the honorable service of this local veteran was duly recognized and he received the long overdue awards his service to our country warrants.

“As with most veterans who have served, he did not talk much about what his service job entailed,” said SPC Whittaker’s wife Audrey, referring to the humility that her late husband shared with so many other veterans who do not speak too much about their experiences in the military.

While looking deeper into the details of her husband’s service after he passed away, due primarily to questions about his possible exposure to Agent Orange, Mrs. Whittaker contacted Senator Young’s office. After careful research by the Senator’s office, she learned that her husband was entitled to medals related to his service that were never received.

Senator Young then assisted in making sure he was honored with the awards he deserves, even if he is no longer with us to receive them himself.

“Those who have put themselves on the line in defense of our country deserve our utmost respect and deepest gratitude. The least we can do is make sure their sacrifices are not forgotten or diminished. The trials that SPC Whittaker and his family have had to endure as a result of his service are more than we can adequately thank them for, but with these medals I hope we can begin to express our appreciation,” said Senator Young.

Born in Olean on May 3, 1945, SPC Whittaker’s military service of over six years began when he decided to answer his country’s call by enlisting in the U.S. Army on September 3, 1965, just as the Vietnam War was heating up.

After 14 weeks of advanced individual training at Fort Gordon, Georgia, as a fixed station radio receiver repairman, SPC Whittaker was assigned to the Joint Support Command of the U.S. Army Strategic Communications Command at Fort Ritchie, Maryland.

Because much of SPC Whittaker’s work with fixed station radio receivers was classified, many of the details of his work have not been fully or widely revealed. As is often the case with those who work under such conditions, their important contributions and sacrifices can unfortunately go unheralded and unknown to the larger public.

From Fort Ritchie, however, we know that SPC Whittaker was deployed overseas on multiple occasions, spending a total of one year and 10 months on various assignments in Korea and Panama.

One 90-day tour began on February 1, 1968, seven days after the USS Pueblo was seized by North Korea and the crew onboard taken prisoner. SPC Whittaker joined 14 other USSTRATCOM personnel deployed on a special classified temporary duty order to Korea. There, he would play an important role in supporting forces near the Demilitarized Zone amid the escalating tensions.

Having served three years and attaining the rank of Specialist 5, Whittaker was honorably discharged on August 30, 1968.

He was then assigned to the U.S. Army Reserve Control Group in St. Louis, Missouri, where he served for another three years.

Always eager to give back to his country, SPC Whittaker would soon sign up for an additional stint with the Army Reserve before being discharged for the final time on February 1, 1973, at the age of 27.

After completing his years of honorable service defending our country, SPC Whittaker returned home, where he would later marry his wife Audrey and raise a family of five children: Michael, Tracy, Bradley, Kristie, and Terry.

The Whittakers lived in Ohio and Michigan for a time before eventually returning home to Western New York. During their years out-of-state, SPC Whittaker worked in welding and security, and was even able to work with his son Michael at Michael's security company in Michigan, RSIG Security, for a period.

He also remained heavily involved in volunteering with veterans service organizations. While living in Ohio, SPC Whittaker was active in a number of capacities with veterans groups there. As an American Legion, AMVETS, and VFW member, he was a well known and highly regarded leader in his community. With the Tony Stein American Legion Post No. 619 in Dayton, Ohio, he served in a number of roles, including Post Commander and District Finance Officer among others.

After a lifetime of devotion to his family, his friends, and his country, SPC Whittaker passed away in Buffalo on November 24, 2011, from soft tissue sarcoma.

In his honor, Mrs. Audrey Whittaker was presented with the medals he earned with the United States Army. Senator Young presented to her the U.S. Army's Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Korean Defense Service Medal, Expert Marksman Badge with Carbine Bar, and Marksman Badge with Rifle Bar. In addition, from the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs, SPC Whittaker was honored with the New York State Medal for Merit.

"We are very grateful to Senator Young and her wonderful staff for all the information and help they have provided for us. We would also like to express our thanks to the Hinsdale Norton-Chambers American Legion Post for allowing us as non-members of this post to have this ceremony here," said Mrs. Whittaker.

"Although SPC Whittaker is no longer with us and passed away before he could be honored in the way he deserved, we remember him today for the life he lived and the sacrifices he made on behalf of all of us. His commitment, like that of so many other brave veterans like him, is something we can all be continually inspired and motivated by in committing ourselves to the service of our community and country," said Senator Young.

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