

‘I Will Continue to Help Veterans’

A North Carolina VFW member recently was recognized for his service to veterans, and now wants to be reinstated as a veterans service officer

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Growing up as a “voracious” reader, Wayne “Larry” Dandridge recognizes how powerful writing can be. Honest journalists, as he puts it, “...are one of the best and perhaps the most important checks on those most powerful in society.” Dandridge, a member of VFW Post 7383 in Cary, North Carolina, has written more than 260 articles on how to apply for veterans benefits and services to articulate the complexities of filing a VA claim for veterans all over the country.

Because of Dandridge’s dedication to veterans, VA recognized him with its Commendation of Meritorious Service Award on March 5 at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center in Charleston, South Carolina. Along with his writing, Dandridge’s service to veterans include 21 years serving as a volunteer VA patient advisor, being a founding member of the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center’s employment assistance program and being a founding member and major fundraiser for Fisher House Charleston.

Scott Isaacks, CEO of the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center and Healthcare System, presented the award to Dandridge.

“Dandridge has tirelessly advocated for our nation’s heroes,” Isaacks said.

AN ACCOMPLISHED AIRMAN

Dandridge’s military service began in Fort Polk, Louisiana. After completing basic training, he moved onto flight school, which was split between Fort Worth, Texas, and Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia. Overseas in Vietnam, he served as a troop transport helicopter pilot and UH-1B Model Huey Gunship pilot with the 121st Assault Helicopter Company in Soc Trang and as a pilot of an AH-1G Model Cobra Attack Helicopter with the 235th Ariel Weapons Company in Can Tho.

Inspired by his experience piloting helicopters in Vietnam, Dandridge would go on to write

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the acclaimed novel “Blades of Thunder (Book One),” with proceeds going toward a fundraiser to buy the land on which the Fisher House in Charleston was built.

Dandridge’s “most dangerous and demanding assignment” occurred while serving as a logistics, flight standardization and safety advisor to the Iranian Army Aviation Headquarters from 1974 to 1976. Dandridge, along with his wife and daughter, were living in Iran at the time.

“I saw more carnage on the road riding to work and riding home every day than I saw in Vietnam,” Dandridge said.

EXPERIENCE WITH THE VFW

Having been a member of Post 445 in Charleston, South Carolina, for the past five years, Dandridge and his wife recently moved to Cary, North Carolina, to be closer to their daughter and three grandsons. As of January, he is now a member of Post 7383.

Dandridge has given more than 150 speeches and has done more than 140 book signings at VFW and American Legion Posts, as well as at Knights of Columbus chapters and Disabled American Veteran (DAV) chapters.

Today, Dandridge is working closely with the commander and adjutant of Post 7378, along with the VFW Department of North Carolina Service Officer, to become reinstated as a VA-accredited veterans service officer (VSO). He also wants to continue creating accessible resources for veterans through his writing.

“I will continue to help veterans who read my weekly Island News newspaper articles, articles in veteran service organizations and other magazines and newspapers every day from all over the world,” Dandridge said. “By email, phone and text.”

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