

Local Vietnam war veteran receives metals, 35 years later



Dennis Thompson and other war veterans stand in formation, each sharing memories of their military action with the audience. It was part of a ceremony to present Thompson with medals 35 years after serving in Vietnam.

By Shannon Keaveny

Vietnam veteran Dennis Thompson waited 35 years for his medals—but he finally got them.

Delayed paperwork and other factors led to the long wait.

Heroic actions, like pulling a dead man from a burning tank, earned Thompson an Army Commendation Medal, ranked sixth highest, for his bravery.

Recently community members and war veterans gathered at the Agency Longhouse to present Thompson with his long overdue medals. More than 30 veterans stood in formation throughout the event.

"I feel very honored to have received the medals and eagle feather, saying that I am a warrior."

Dennis Thompson, Vietnam veteran

Many of Thompson's close family members attended, including his mother, Gladys Thompson.

Chief Nelson Wallulatum spoke on his behalf and sang a

warrior song.

Thompson received an additional four medals from the U.S. military. The tribes presented him with an eagle feather. Both honors acknowledged Thomp-

son as a warrior.

The other medals were a Combat Medic Badge for being an active combat medic; a Good Conduct Medal for meritorious service; a National Defense Medal for basic army combat training; and a Representative of Vietnam Campaign Medal for service in Vietnam.

A lieutenant from Bend presented the medals.

"I feel very honored to have received the medals and eagle feather, saying that I am a warrior," said Thompson.

The U.S. military drafted Thompson in February of 1967 when he was 19 years old.

Thompson says he knew very little about the conflict at the time.

"I was just a kid," he said.

He was immediately sent to Texas to partake in an intense medical course for traumatic wounds.

Thompson spent the first two months in a helicopter squatter doing medical evacuations.

The next six months were spent in a tank, working as both a medic and machine gunner.

After eight months, without injuries, he returned to the States.

Thompson shared his opinion on the present crisis in Iraq.

"I believe we ought to do it with discretion. I have been in oppressed nations and people need to be liberated. The U.S. can help make a democracy," said Thompson of the pending war with Iraq.

War veterans that attended the event to honor Thompson received Pendleton blankets and other gifts.

Other attendees received gifts for their support of Thompson.

Thompson has been the logging contractor supervisor at the Warm Springs mill for the last seven years.

Community opinion

Are you for or against the pending war in Iraq?



"I don't think we need it. Look how many of our tribal members are over there."

Joannie Selam



"For it, yes, but I think they should have taken him out the first time. He's gassed his own people and killed his own soldiers."

Tom Kalama



"I want to support our kids over there but I don't want a war."

Cassie Katchia



"Yes, I support it, but I think they should have vaporized him the first time."

Mark Stevens



"I'm against it. I don't think the U.S. has any business over there."

Kenny Sahme

Ceremonial fishing begins Sunday

Although half the count of 2002, this year's spring chinook salmon run is the fifth largest recorded since 1938.

Tribal ceremonial fishermen will start filling the tribes' spring chinook quota on Sunday.

The quota this spring is 1,350 salmon, amounting to about 338 fish per fisherman.

The fish will be caught with gillnets to speed up the process. Mike Gavin, Warm Springs fish biologist, estimates ceremonial fishermen will meet their quota in about three weeks.

The amount of spring chinook expected to cross the Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River, where all ceremonial fishing takes place, is 145,500. Gavin says the decrease in returns is nothing to be alarmed about.

Last year the returns were nearly double.

"The numbers reflect the normal fluctuations in the cycles of fish," he said.

Ceremonial fishermen chosen by the Warm Springs Fish and Wildlife Committee are Bruce Jim, Virgil Culps, Douglas Palmer, and Eric Queahpama.

Teamwork needed to keep kids in school

Sixty percent of Native Americans in federal correctional facilities are high school dropouts, says John Ritter, Department of Education

By Shannon Keaveny
Spilyay Tymoo

An Oregon Department of Education official visited Warm Springs last week and spoke about effective relationships between school staff and students to prevent high school dropouts. The Warm Springs Community Action Team arranged for his presentation.

John Ritter focused on high dropout rates for Native American students.

Keeping kids in school is crucial to where they end up, he said.

Many people who don't finish high school live in poverty. People living in poverty have high rates of incarceration.

"Sixty percent of Native American high school dropouts end up in a federal correctional facility," he said.

Ritter spoke of ways public schools can help kids from dropping out.

Attitudes in schools and communities need to change too, in order to get behavioral changes from Native American students, he said.

Discrimination based on race, creed, color and affiliation is commonplace in the school system, he said.

"I work to fight it a lot," said

Ritter.

Native American kids, he said, often don't want to be in off-reservation schools and feel alienated.

Native American kids enter the school system with a fear of government institutions due to the negative history between tribes and the federal government, he said.

Often they are more sensitive and feel they are going to be "worked by the system," he added.

For many reasons, students react in adverse ways that often get them kicked out of school. A public school that does not recognize these disparities, could set an Indian student up for failure, he explained.

Behavioral and disciplinary issues in school are the number one reasons for student expulsions and suspensions.

"Grade school is a crucial time to nab a child's attention," said Ritter.

One way public schools can help is to create student engagement and accountability in schools. Minority groups should have one contact in school on an administrator level, he said.

Josh Adams, assistant principal at Jefferson County Middle School (JCMS), called having student-faculty contacts "credits in the bank." Credits are an

"We create relationships with students so when there is trouble with a student, we have something to work from. I call them credits in the bank."

Josh Adams
Asst. Principal JCMS

other way to help minority kids feel less alienated. Faculty has a student's trust before he or she get in trouble.

"We create relationships with students so when there is trouble with a student, we have something to work from," said Adams.

An action team to focus on how to keep students in school also helps, he said.

JCMS and Madras High also have tribal liaisons that Ritter said could be as effective as an action team.

JCMS has dramatically reduced student suspensions in one year due to concentrated efforts.

Last year JCMS issued about 450 suspensions. This year, Adams estimates maximum suspensions for the school year will be 140.

A suspension is defined as a