



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

## Senator Ortt Honors Town of Niagara Veteran and Inducts Him into the New York State Senate's Veterans' Hall of Fame

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ALBANY - State Senator Rob Ortt (R,C,I – North Tonawanda) today honored United States Air Force veteran Ron Bassham, 81, during a special ceremony in the state's capital. The Town of Niagara resident was inducted into the New York State Senate's Veterans' Hall of Fame. The Veterans' Hall of Fame pays tribute to past members of the U.S. Armed Forces whose service has helped to shape our nation and make our communities better places to live.

“The veterans throughout New York who have been inducted into the Hall of Fame have shown gallantry both in the military and in civilian life,” **said Senator Ortt**. “Ron Bassham is one of those exemplary men who has fought selflessly to defend our country, and has made huge strides across the country in helping other veterans after their duty ends. The Veterans’ Hall of Fame is our way of saying thank you to all the brave men and women who have served and continue to serve our great nation. It was my honor to be able to recognize him and memorialize his story in the state’s history.”

“I am so thankful and humbled to be recognized by Senator Ortt and the entire state Senate,” **said Bassham**. “This honor means so much to me, especially since Vietnam veterans never received a proper homecoming. It was a privilege for me to serve my country as an enlisted member of the Air Force, and I am grateful to God for allowing me to survive and help others dealing with PTSD. I’d like to share this award with the comrades I served with who sadly did not make it home, so that their service and sacrifice will never be forgotten.”

Bassham has honorably served in the military for 22 years. He enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1953, when he was 17 years old. Before serving his country, he made the decision to leave Emerson High School and later earned his GED.

Bassham began his military career as a technical sergeant, working throughout parts of Asia, including South Korea and Japan. He later served in Vietnam where he assisted in electronically eavesdropping on North Vietnamese soldiers and guerrilla fighters. He was deployed to Vietnam a total of three times, where the psychological and emotional effects of combat took a toll on him.

Bassham has received a number of accolades for his bravery and courage at Quang Tri, including the Bronze Star Medal, the U.S. Vietnam Service Medal, the New York State Conspicuous Service Cross and several others. He retired from the military in 1975.

Following his retirement from the Air Force, Bassham began a new career at what was then Harrison Radiator in Lockport. Many of its employees were veterans struggling with the psychological wounds of war, so in 1977, the same year he started at Harrison Radiator, Bassham helped to create the first successful veterans committee in the history of the United Auto Workers union. The UAW Veterans Committee has since expanded coast to coast from New York to California and from Montana to Texas.

During the 1990s, Bassham and several other Vietnam War veterans set up the first residential clinic for treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder at the VA Medical Center in Batavia. During this time, he also helped write the Living Wage Law for the City of Buffalo, which has impacted thousands of citizens living and working in the city. He retired from Harrison Radiator in 1995, but continued to be a community and union activist.

Appointed by the federal government in 2006, Bassham became the Veterans Administration Volunteer Services Representative for Western New York. That same year, he helped to open the Women's Residential Program at the VA in Batavia. The program provides support for female veterans suffering from PTSD.

As he manages his own PTSD, Bassham continues to dedicate his time to other veterans dealing with the physical and emotional scars of combat. He regularly volunteers as a mentor at the veterans treatment courts in both Buffalo and Lockport. He is also a member of at least 35 community groups, including the Niagara Military Affairs Council (NIMAC).

Bassham has been married to his wife, Julia, for 48 years, and has eight children and more than a dozen grandchildren.

Bassham's full biography will remain on display indefinitely in the Senate's Veterans' Hall of Fame online directory. A copy of the biography can be seen [here](#).