



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

William Larkin

## Senator Larkin Honors Local Vietnam Veterans

WILLIAM LARKIN March 29, 2017



Senator William J. Larkin, Jr. (R-C, Cornwall-on-Hudson), today honored Corporal Richard Lay, Corporal Joan Heitzman and Sergeant Carmen Heitzman as part of the New York State Senate's Vietnam Veterans' Day.

Senator Larkin said, "Today we acknowledge the service of our Vietnam Veterans in a special way. Not all of our Vietnam Veterans were treated appropriately after the war and it is our responsibility as free Americans to let all of our service members know that we appreciate their sacrifice. I was proud to be joined by some of our local heroes and enjoyed taking time

today to speak to them about their service to our country during Vietnam”.

Today Corporal Lay, Corporal Heitzman and Sergeant Heitzman joined over 20 Vietnam Veterans from throughout the State receiving special recognition for their service during a session of the New York State Senate. They also were treated to a luncheon and participated in a tour of the State Capitol.

On March 29, 1973 combat and combat support units withdrew from South Vietnam. The Vietnam War lasted nearly two decades and involved over 500,000 US military personnel. There were 58,000 service members killed in action. This week, President Donald Trump signed into law the Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act of 2017, designating every March 29<sup>th</sup> as National Vietnam War Veterans Day. On this day, we as a nation pause to recognize the service and duty rendered by all Veterans of the Vietnam era. Around the country, events like today's recognition ceremony by the New York State Senate take place honoring the service of our Vietnam Veterans.

Biographies below.

### **Carmen and Joan Heitzman – US Marine Corps**

Carmen and Joan Heitzman are from Monroe, New York and are Vietnam veterans with individual stories of patriotism and service to our country. In 1967, Carmen enlisted in the Marine Corps and was sent to boot camp at Parris Island for advanced infantry training. After Parris Island, he was sent to Memphis, TN for aviation radar school. Carmen met his soon to be wife Joan in Memphis where she was training to become a flight simulator instructor. Joan began her service in the military after seeing so many of her friends and community members come back from the War injured or killed. She felt the desire to serve her country and so she did. After her training in Memphis, Joan served as a flight simulator instructor training pilots to be certified before they could be deployed. Carmen and Joan

were married in May of 1968 and five months after the birth of their daughter, Carmen was deployed to Da Nang, Vietnam. Carmen spent about 13 months in combat at Da Nang, which housed one of the largest air facilities in Vietnam. Carmen came back from Vietnam without significant injury and later served on active duty in Memphis, TN. On the day Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed, Carmen and his unit were tasked with keeping the community safe from rioters. Joan and Carmen have two children and five grandchildren. They look back on their service with pride, not just for their contributions in Vietnam but also for the impact it had on bringing their lives together and building their family. Sergeant Carmen Heitzman and Corporal Joan Heitzman are Vietnam veterans that we are proud to recognize today as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual New York State Senate Vietnam Veterans Day in Albany.

### **Richard Lay – US Marine Corps**

Richard Lay is a Town of Crawford resident and the current Chairman of the National Purple Heart Hall of Honor, Inc. Richard was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Division and his unit, Battalion Landing Team 3-1, arrived in Vietnam and landed at the Cua Viet River just south of the DMZ. July 22, 1968, his unit was out on patrol and was ambushed. He was blown eight feet away by a landmine blast and although briefly knocked unconscious, Richard recovered enough to call in a medevac helicopter. He was wounded in the leg, arms, hands, face, and chest. Richard was taken to an Army MASH unit in the rear of the lines before being loaded onto the USS Sanctuary, a Navy hospital ship, where he spent several weeks in recovery. The Marine Corps was going to send him back home to the States but he insisted on returning to the front lines with his fellow Marines to finish out his tour of duty, despite the shrapnel still in his body, which he carries with him to this day. On his last night in Vietnam, he went out on ambush patrol, one of eighty patrols he'd been on in Vietnam, and when he came back at dawn he was informed that his orders had come in and he was going home. Corporal Richard Lay is a patriot, a Purple Heart Recipient and someone that Senator Larkin was proud to honor as part of Vietnam Veterans Day.

