

The Daily Record

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To Retire,
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ANGIER BENSON BUIES CREEK BUNNLEVEL COATS DUNN ERWIN FALCON GODWIN LILLINGTON LINDEN NEWTON GROVE

A LONG OVERDUE HONOR



Daily Record Photo/Tyler Douglas

Above, former Army Staff Sergeant Howard Benton Barefoot, 79, stands while his daughter, Cynthia Barefoot Barbour, pins the Vietnam Service Medal with bronze and silver stars on his uniform and his wife of 53 years, Theraldine, left, looks on. Mr. Barefoot, below, served two tours each in Vietnam and Korea. His entire military career spanned two decades and five months. Last month, he finally received the seven medals absent from his hard-earned collection.

Veteran Receives Medals 39 Years After Service

By TYLER DOUGLAS
Of The Record Staff

Meadow's Howard Benton Barefoot is a walking history book. Speaking with him for five minutes is like stepping into a newsreel from the late 1950s. Mr. Barefoot served two tours each in Korea and Vietnam while in the Army as a heavy equipment engineer. It was his job to fix bulldozers and various machines, all the while operating a crane to construct bridges and other structures. He's been stationed at bases all around the United States and the globe, including Germany and France. His wife, Theraldine, visited him once in Paris, he said, and the couple ate hot dogs atop the Eiffel Tower.

They've been married for 53 years. Mr. Barefoot is full of stories like that. After 20 years and five months, he left the military as an E-6 staff sergeant and returned to the Meadow area, where he worked for 21 years at Harnett Correctional. He also developed an affinity for antique tractors and owns a fully-restored International that's his pride and joy. Longevity plays a large part in Mr. Barefoot's life. Whether it's his storied achievements in the Army, his marriage or his civilian job, the 79-year-old has an unquestionable ability to see things through. It's no surprise then, when he turned his attention to the seven absent military medals from his hard-earned collection, it was only a matter of time before they were in the mail.



Thirty-nine years is a long time to wait for something, but that's exactly how long it took for the United States government to send Mr. Barefoot proof of his achievements. The process began, explained his daughter Cynthia Barefoot Barbour, around two years ago. After a few phone calls, he was directed to the area Veterans Legacy Foundation, from there a correspondence began with U.S. Rep. Mike McIntyre.

"He told me he couldn't promise me anything, but he would send a recommendation," explained Mr. Barefoot.

Mrs. Barbour began scanning several old documents in her father's collection — yellowed lists with all his medals printed, a small check beside the missing commendations. After nearly four decades, Mr. Barefoot received his medals a week and a half ago, shipped from an Army clothing supplier in Philadelphia, Pa.

"It feels wonderful," he said, looking over the medals lined up along the kitchen table. "I didn't think it would happen," added his wife, tears welling in her eyes. To commemorate the event, Mr. Barefoot had gone through his closet to find his old uniform, issued in the early 1970s. It still fits him to this day, even his black dress shoes.

Mr. Barefoot's recently received awards are: United States Army Good Conduct Medal, Vietnam Service Medal with bronze and silver star, Korea Defense Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal with bronze star, Sharpshooter badge with auto rifle bar, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Ribbon and the Army Commendation Medal with bronze oak leaf cluster.