

[By Anders Ax](#)



Charles Bailey is a man of few words. When Rep. Peter Welch placed in Bailey's hands the medals the Fair Haven veteran earned during the Vietnam War, Bailey said little — not because there was nothing to say. He was speechless.

"All I want to say is that I'm proud to be an American," the 70-year-old Bailey said, then thanking his family who was in attendance at a ceremony at South Station in Rutland on Monday.

"I'm very proud, it was well-deserved," said Debi Bailey, Charles' wife. "He's a very private person and he doesn't talk about it, but it was very appropriate. His grandson started this, and then he got to have his family here to share it."

Christopher Bailey said his son Brandon "put the idea in my head" to get his father the replacement medals that had been lost to a house fire in 1988.

"They were talking about the Vietnam War (in school) and that's how it all started," Christopher Bailey said. "So from there I started making the phone calls, which led me to (Congressman Welch)."

Brandon's mother, Kim, said her son had become inquisitive after bringing newspaper clippings of his grandfather's actions into school for a project about a year ago. It was only five or six months ago they contacted Welch about the replacement medals.

The new medals were provided to Brandon, which he presented to his grandfather on Christmas.

When asked about how he felt receiving the medals, Bailey responded, "Good, you know." Finding words slowly, he continued, "It was something I did ... I served my time and did what I was supposed to do, a little bit above what I was supposed to do — that's why I have these."

Bailey had served in Vietnam as an infantry sergeant in the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment from 1965 to 1967 and received the medals with valor. They include: the Bronze Star Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Combat Infantryman Badge 1st Award and Republic of Vietnam Campaign Ribbon.

According to newspaper clippings saved by Bailey's wife, the following information describes Bailey's distinguished acts of heroism.

On Jan. 23, 1967, while escorting a howitzer of Troop "C," 1st Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Division to a firing position, the vehicle detonated upon a land mine, careened off the road and burst into flames. Bailey fought the outside fire as small arms fire began exploding, and then lowered himself into the burning vehicle before the primary ammunition would explode. He continued to fight the fire until it was no longer a danger. For that, Bailey received the Bronze

Star Medal with Valor.

On March 9 of the same year, while manning security of an outpost with two other soldiers they detected enemy movement and shifted their position, soon opening fire when two Viet Cong emerged from the foliage, wounding them. As the enemies retreated into the jungle, the outpost received heavy enemy fire and without regard for personal safety, Bailey maneuvered toward the enemy position while returning fire. The three soldiers captured two enemy weapons before darkness forced them to halt the search. For defending the security of the command post, Bailey received the Army Commendation Medal with Valor.

To have his grandson have the idea and follow through with the process, Bailey said it was "unreal. I mean ... it's way above my expectations."

Out of appreciation for what his grandson had done, Bailey brought his dress uniform and handed it down to his grandson. "That's for you," Bailey said holding out the olive green uniform jacket.

Bailey's son Christopher said his father wasn't one to talk about his experiences, and said he'd been trying for 42 years to get anything from his father.

"The most I ever get out of him is in his dreams," Bailey said. "He speaks out in his dreams, like (he) starts a story that he doesn't finish. He has powerful dreams about things that happened but he never finishes 'em, so I don't know how it ends."

Bailey's family agrees that due to the soldier's shyness and "natural quiet," he never pursued the recovery of the medals following the fire. But now Bailey's family can be a part of finally regaining something precious that was once lost.

"This is one soldier, one Vermonter," Welch said, standing beside Bailey before a Rotary Club address. "Today is the day we're returning to this great Vermont soldier all the medals that he earned and then lost in a fire."