

‘I Know I’m Helping People ...’

Regardless of their service background or what they are experiencing, Navy veteran Russ Meredith is grateful for every opportunity to serve his fellow veterans

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Russell “Russ” Meredith, 58, was just seven years old when his father, a World War II veteran, passed away. As he grew older, Russ knew he wanted to follow in his father’s footsteps and serve his country.

He joined the Navy out of high school in November 1982 and spent four years as a Cryptologic Technician (manual morse intercept operator). Russ served in the Philippines and aboard several combatant ships while on patrol in both the Indian Ocean and South China Sea.

In 2003, Russ volunteered again, this time in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. As a member of the Navy Reserves, he served in Kuwait and Iraq.

After a six-month deployment, Russ returned home for good. He and his wife Lynn live in Forest Park, Illinois, where he joined VFW Post 7181. In 2012, he transferred to Post 5979. Over the years, Russ held various leadership roles at both the local and district levels. In the 2009-2010 VFW year, he was honored to serve as District Commander.

Continuing a lifelong commitment to serve, Russ began working as a VFW-Accredited Service Officer in August 2015. In that role, he helps veterans and their families receive the services and benefits they earned.

“Having a passion for helping my fellow veterans, when my current position became available, I jumped at the opportunity,” he said. “It brings me contentment to be able to provide assistance by getting these veterans the help they so desperately need.”

Russ spends most days corresponding with veterans and filing claims and appeals. Occasionally, he represents veterans at hearings. Russ finds it especially challenging to work

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with victims of Military Sexual Trauma.

“I hear about the many stories where our young members endured sexual harassment in the most severe ways. They were hesitant to report it due to peer pressure, or they feared retribution from the assailant or their supervisor,” he explained. “They left the military broken in so many ways.”

Whether it is helping to file a claim or simply provide a listening ear, Russ is pleased when he can offer support.

He finds it rewarding to help Vietnam veterans as well, recalling one individual, who suffered from Agent Orange exposure. While working on the veteran’s claim, he became good friends with both him and his wife. When the wife informed Russ of the veteran’s passing, he was devastated.

Speaking about the veteran during his report as District Service Officer, Russ became too emotional to continue. His District Commander stepped in, explaining to members, “the job of a service officer is not an easy one.”

Although the role is not easy, Russ believes it is worth it.

“Our Vietnam veterans served their nation in the most inhospitable conditions and came home to an ungrateful nation,” he said. “Seeing them, and in many cases, their surviving spouses, get the benefits they earned has been so rewarding.”

Regardless of their service background or what they are experiencing, Russ is grateful for every opportunity to serve his fellow veterans.

“You never know how their day is going. So, when I can bring some sort of relief, often with humor or maybe just a friendly smile, I know I’ve done my part in making their day better. I know I’m helping people with problems,” he said. “In a word, I feel gratification.”

Learn more about the VFW's [National Veterans Service \(NVS\) program](#).