



**Clarence William Jackson, Jr.**, currently of Newark, was born and raised in Montclair. He graduated from Montclair High School and then enlisted in the U. S. Air Force in 1968, where he was trained to be a personnel specialist. During his Air Force enlistment, he was stationed at numerous air force bases both at home and abroad, and received his Honorable Discharge in 1974. He began a long career with the U. S. Postal Service in 1978 from which he retired in November 2009.



**Freeholder President Blonnie R. Watson presented the Board’s plaque to her honoree, Clarence W. Jackson, Jr., of Newark. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON**

Mr. Jackson has been a veterans advocate for decades, ever since joining Crawford Crews American Legion Post #251 in Montclair, where he was elected Post Commander in 1990. He currently serves as Commander for Disabled American Veterans Chapter 3 in Newark, is Chairman of the Legislative Committee for the Disabled American Veterans Department of New Jersey, and was also an inaugural member of the Newark Commission on Veterans Affairs. He is also an active member with the Essex County A. Phillip Randolph Institute, the Montclair NAACP, the Montclair Neighborhood Development Corp., the AFL/CIO Retirees’ Committee and VOCAL. He has also received several awards, including: 2011 Men of Vision Award for his lifetime of service to veterans; the 2003 U.S. Postal Service Special Achievement Award; and the 1998 American Postal Workers Union AFL/CIO Human Relations Award.

Introducing her honoree, Freeholder President Blonnie Watson said, “This year I chose to honor Mr. Clarence Jackson, Jr., who has continued to give back to his country, even after completing his military service, by working to take care of returning veterans, helping them to re-integrate into society.” Mr. Jackson thanked the Board “...for recognizing me as I continue my efforts on

behalf of those individuals who have served, and continue to serve, in the U. S. Armed Services”, adding “and a special thanks to Freeholder President Blonnie Watson for always providing an attentive ear whenever I have asked to speak with her.”

**James E. Gibbs, Jr.**, of Irvington, grew up in Newark and was inducted into the U. S. Army in 1969. He received his basic training at Fort Dix, and was stationed at Fort Gordon, Georgia, as a cook. In 1970, he was transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in Aschaffenburg, Germany, as the company’s automatic rifleman, and was discharged from active duty in 1971.



**James E. Gibbs, Jr., of Irvington (left) received his plaque and commendation from Freeholder D. Bilal Beasley. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON**

After completing his active duty service, Mr. Gibbs enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves in 1972 with the 1018<sup>th</sup> Basic Training Company, received his Honorable Discharge in 1975, and then re-enlisted with the 322<sup>nd</sup> General Hospital Unit, then the 469<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer Company and then transferred to the 343<sup>rd</sup> Combat Support Hospital Company in Fort Hamilton, N.Y., in 1992. Later, he joined the Critical Events Debriefing Team and was appointed the Asst. Field Hospital Operations Coordinator, retired from the 343<sup>rd</sup> in 1999, volunteered as an active in the Ready Army Reserve in 2000, and then enlisted with the 411<sup>th</sup> Combat Chemical Company, from which he retired in 2003.

Mr. Gibbs worked as a Nursing Asst. at UMDNJ, a Psychiatric Asst. at the Essex County Hospital Center, and then as a Training Asst. for Human Services and a Behavior Modification Program Technician at the Woodbridge Developmental Center. Thereafter, he worked for the NJ

Department of Corrections where he served as a Quality Assurance Specialist for Health Services and a Medical Quality Assurance Specialist/Contract Administrator until his retirement in 2010.

In 2002, James E. Gibbs, Jr., volunteered with the Quality of Life Access Network, Inc., in New York, to help veterans and their families obtain compensation, pensions and other entitlements due them, and then, in 2012, he formed the Volunteer Network for Veterans, Inc., with William Elmore and Brenda Jenkins, which is located in Irvington.

“I have known James Gibbs since we were kids growing up in the Central Ward of Newark”, said Freeholder D. Bilal Beasley. “So, now that we both live in Irvington, I am especially pleased to honor him for his active duty and reserve military service that spans so many years, and for his tireless advocacy on behalf of his fellow veterans.”

**Ronald T. Riddick** of East Orange was born in Newark and graduated from Essex County Vocational and Technical High School in Irvington as a Tool and Die Machinist in 1961. He was drafted into the U. S. Army in December of 1962 and fulfilled his two-year military service obligation. Years later, in 1974, he joined the N. J. National Guard and over the succeeding 19 years was promoted from E4 to E6 (Staff Sergeant), before retiring from the Guard in 1993. He has remained active in veterans affairs ever since, and currently serves as Commander of P.F.C. Lewis L. Lackland VFW Post 7923 in East Orange.



**Freeholder Carol Y. Clark presented the Board’s plaque and commendation to her honoree, Ronald T. Riddick of East Orange. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON**

Following his military service, Mr. Riddick worked for the Ford Motor Company and then in 1968 began a long career of outstanding service with the City of East Orange as a Housing

Inspector. Over the years, he rose through the ranks to the positions of Field Representative, Senior Field Representative, Supervisor and then Director of Code Enforcement before retiring in 1999, for the first time, after 31 years of service. Two years later he was called out of retirement to serve the City as Director of Property Maintenance until he retired for good in 2005.

Introducing her honoree, Freeholder Carol Y. Clark of East Orange said, “You’ve all probably seen Ron Riddick here in the audience on previous occasions to cheer-on others as they’ve received their accolades. But this is your night, Mr. Riddick, and tonight I am honored to bring some accolades to you.” Mr. Riddick expressed his appreciation to veterans’ family members who support their loved ones, and thanked the Board for honoring him.

**James Daniels** of Newark, was born in the segregated South in 1917 in Flat Rock, North Carolina, and moved with his family to Newark in 1923. He graduated from Newark’s South Side High School and then worked with explosives and munitions for the U.S. Army at Picatinny Arsenal until the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, when he was drafted into the U. S. Army Air Force and reported to the Aberdeen Arsenal Base in Maryland for basic training and munitions school. He was shipped to England to prepare bombs and pyrotechnic equipment for the Normandy Invasion, and then served in Maramas and Nance, France, and in Germany until the end of WWII.



**Freeholder Carol Y. Clark presented the Board’s plaque and commendation to WWII Veteran James Daniels of Newark. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON**

After the war, Mr. Daniels was sworn-in as one of Newark’s first African-American police officers. He served in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Precinct and then undercover with the federal Bureau of Narcotics, before returning to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Precinct where he was one of the first African-Americans to integrate

previously all-white radio cars. Following a stroke in 1959 that resulted in his partial paralysis, he worked behind the desk performing administrative duties and finished-out his 32-year career with the NPD in the radio room, retiring in 1980. Mr. Daniels is an active Mason and holds the rank of The Royal High Priest of the Alpha Chapter 32<sup>nd</sup> Degree.

In Freeholder Donald M. Payne, Jr.'s absence, Freeholder Clark made the presentation to his 95-year old honoree, James Daniels, saying, "He may be Freeholder Payne's honoree, but he's *my* Uncle Jimmy! So if I have a grin on my face from ear-to-ear, please forgive me." During his remarks, Mr. Daniels reminisced about his years on the Newark Police Department and thanked the Board for recognizing veterans, saying "This is the first time I've been recognized since I was discharged in 1945."

**Earl W. Mills** of Caldwell served in the U. S. Army Air Force with the 366<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group as a ball turret gunner on B-17 "Flying Fortress" bombers in the European Theater of Action. He flew on 27 successful bombing runs until his 28<sup>th</sup> mission to Poznan, Poland, on May 13, 1944, when his plane lost two engines, was hit by flak, and was forced to land in officially neutral Sweden; he was an internee/POW at a camp in Loka Brunn, Sweden, for six months before being returned to the United States. He was discharged from the service on June 19, 1945, with the rank of Staff Sergeant. In recognition of his patriotic military service, Mr. Mills was awarded an Air Medal for actions over Berlin, Germany, on March 4, 1944, and a Distinguished Flying Cross for his fateful mission to Poznan.



**Freeholder Leonard M. Luciano of West Caldwell (right) presented the Board's plaque and commendation to his honoree, Earl W. Mills of Caldwell. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON**

Following his military service, Mr. Mills held many jobs, including that of a NASCAR race car driver for six years. He has also been very active in veterans affairs and served as a Commander of VFW Post 10185 in Berkeley Township, New Jersey, from 1995-96.

In introducing his 93-year old honoree, Freeholder Luciano explained that he'd first met Mr. Mills about two years ago, and since then has run into him around town on many occasions, commenting, "Although I'm a young guy at 31, Mr. Mills often acts younger, and gets around a lot more than I do!" During his remarks, the diminutive Mr. Mills (under 5-feet tall) described the ball gun turret that hung under the belly of the B-17 as being "smaller than a peanut", and explained that to fit in there, "you had to be small... *extra* small!" He went on to regale the audience with side-splittingly stories of his time in the internee camp, and of the fascinating life he's led since his military service.

**Captain Crystal R. Lane** of Newark was born and raised in the West Ward. She graduated from Marylawn of the Oranges Academy in South Orange in 2001 before going on to graduate from Rutgers University in New Brunswick, where she earned both a B. S. degree in Environmental Policy and a B. A. degree in Sociology in 2006. At Rutgers, she was enrolled in Army ROTC and after graduating was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army on September 29, 2006. Thereafter, she completed numerous Army leadership courses, served as the Battalion Training Officer for the 50<sup>th</sup> Personnel Services Battalion, and was deployed for Operation Iraqi Freedom from the Summer of 2008 to the Summer of 2009. She was promoted to the rank of First Lieutenant and served as the Human Resources Officer in Baghdad, Iraq, where she supervised joint teams of airmen, sailors and soldiers and controlled an office that assisted the Department of State in the International Zone.



**Captain Crystal R. Lane** of Newark was honored by Freeholder Rufus I. Johnson, who presented her with the Board's plaque. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

Upon her return from Iraq, she received numerous awards, including: the Distinguished Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal with Campaign Star, Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon, and the Armed Forces Reserve Medal with M Device. She was promoted to Captain on January 27, 2011, and currently serves as the Officer in Charge of the Mobilization Unit Inprocessing Center – HRM and the Officer in Charge of the Joint Readiness Center at Fort Dix. She has also organized Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Programs for soldiers and their families, and has been involved with the Girl Scouts of America as a troop leader, receiving the organization’s Volunteer Services Medal in 2011.

“I am truly honored to recognize Captain Crystal Lane today, because I have been chasing her down for the last three years trying to get her here!”, said Freeholder Rufus Johnson, kiddingly adding, “And I have a feeling she just wanted to make Captain before she agreed to attend.” In her remarks, Captain Lane thanked her family and friends for their support, and all those who served before her “who have made it possible for me, as an African-American female, to be an officer in the U. S. Armed Forces.”



**Freeholder Rolando Bobadilla presented Cheryl “Kit” Turner with a commendation from the Board on behalf of her sponsor, Freeholder Brendan W. Gill. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON**

**Cheryl “Kit” Turner**, a Montclair native and current resident of Irvington, received 3 separate Honorable Discharges: Active Duty Air Force, Army National Guard, and Air Force Reserves with whom she served from 1978-80 and then again from 1983-2003, when she retired as a Master Sergeant. She has been very active in veterans affairs as the current Department Vice Commander of the NJ American Legion, and as the immediate past, and first *female* Commander

of Crawford Crews American Legion Post #251 in Montclair, a position she held for 2 years. She has also served as the Chairperson, Trustee and Counselor of Essex County Boys State, and is currently the Veterans Affairs Officer for the Montclair Chapter of the NAACP.

As Post #251 Commander, she partnered with the community on projects such as the Coat & Toy Drive, feeding the needy, and a back-to-school drive she initiated that now helps more than 250 families. She has also been actively involved in a project to raise funds for the rebuilding of the Post, the oldest standing building in Montclair, and another to register veterans to vote. She was also a vocal advocate for veterans housing as a member of the Montclair Housing Commission, and is currently involved in fundraising efforts to construct three buildings to house homeless veterans.

Standing-in for Freeholder Brendan Gill to make the Board's presentation to his honoree, Cheryl Turner, Freeholder Rolando Bobadilla of Newark introduced her by first telling of his personal experience with a 63-year old veteran when he was only 6 years of age, recently arrived from Honduras and unable to speak English. "The school paired me with a veteran who volunteered not only to teach me English two hours every day so I could catch up with the other students, but also, off the record, how to defend myself against school bullies who picked on me because I was so small and couldn't speak the language." "He touched my life, and I will never forget him", said Bobadilla, "and in that same spirit, of a veteran who continues to give back to the community long after active service is completed, I am proud to honor Kit Turner." "Everyone usually joins the military once, but I joined three times out of the sheer love of my country and my fellow veterans", said Turner. "The military will always be in my blood." She also explained that while the American Legion has built homes for single homeless veterans, she is working now to provide housing for homeless veterans *and* their families.

The 2012 Veterans Observance was a heart-rending and poignant event that also included remarks from Essex County Deputy Administrator/Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver, opening and closing prayers by Essex County Health Officer Dr. Michael Festa, and a musical performance by Ms. Kathy Brown of Montclair, Research Analyst for the Board of Chosen Freeholders.

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