

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR VETERANS CLAIMS

CEREMONIAL MISC. No. 02-21

IN RE: THE MATTER OF THE RETIREMENT OF RONALD L. SMITH

Before BARTLEY, *Chief Judge*, and PIETSCH, GREENBERG, ALLEN, MEREDITH, TOTH, FALVEY, LAURER, and JAQUITH, *Judges*, and NEBEKER, KRAMER, HOLDAWAY, GREENE, KASOLD, HAGEL, MOORMAN, LANCE, DAVIS, and SCHOELEN, *Senior Judges*.

ORDER

Before the Court is the matter of the retirement of Ronald "Ron" L. Smith, whose career of providing legal services to veterans and the veterans law community merits special recognition. A veteran himself, Mr. Smith traces his life's work and achievements to the values and discipline instilled in him by the U.S. Army, the VA, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and his years of private practice.

Mr. Smith was drafted into the Army in 1966 and served 20 months in Vietnam with the 4th Infantry Division. After service, he worked in the Prince George's County Police Department while completing his undergraduate degree at the University of Maryland and receiving his juris doctor at the University of Baltimore Law School. Mr. Smith then joined the VA Office of Inspector General, investigating fraud against veterans.

Following the 1988 passage of the Veterans' Judicial Review Act (VJRA), Mr. Smith joined DAV. Before the VJRA, DAV relied on non-attorney practitioners to assist veterans with their claims before the Agency. Practice before the new Court led DAV to hire in-house lawyers and Ron Smith was one of the first. He quickly made his mark, arguing *Gilbert v. Derwinski*, 1 Vet.App. 49 (1990), one of two cases on the docket on July 25, 1990, the day the Court heard oral argument for the very first time. Finding in Mr. Gilbert's favor, the Court interpreted several fundamental statutory issues that would form the framework for many future appeals, to include the "reasons or bases" the Board must give in support of its decisions, the "benefit of the doubt" to which veterans are entitled, and the "clearly erroneous" standard.

After representing hundreds of veterans and working on cases resulting in almost 100 published opinions, Mr. Smith led DAV's 2008 initiative to out-source legal work before the Court to a partner law firm, Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett, & Dunner, LLP. Mr. Smith spearheaded this nationwide pro bono program that continues to this day, screening DAV-represented cases, training Finnegan lawyers to represent veterans before the Court, and providing mentor assistance. The program has recovered over \$4 million under the Equal Access to Justice Act, donating these fees to charities providing services to veterans.

Mr. Smith has done much more than represent veterans directly and lead a nationwide pro bono program. He was appointed to the Court's first Rules Advisory Committee, was a founding member of the Court's Bar Association and Judicial Advisory Committee, is past president of the Federal Circuit Bar Association, and is a recipient of the Hart T. Mankin Award for distinguished service to the Court. His contributions to individual veterans, the Court, and the development of veterans law are invaluable, and his career of service is inspiring and worthy of the highest recognition. Upon consideration of the foregoing, it is

ORDERED that Ron Smith take with him our gratitude for the many years of outstanding service he has rendered to this Court and to the veterans of this nation, our admiration for his many accomplishments, the warmth of our continued friendship, and our very best wishes.

DATED: September 1, 2021

PER CURIAM.