



Honoring more than six decades of service



MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, N.C. — With more than 63 years of service, Freddie Dawkins disassembles an SH-60 starter Sept. 6, 2016 at the workstation he's used since beginning employment at Fleet Readiness Center East at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C. in 1995.

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, N.C. — Freddie Dawkins only planned to be a civil service employee two additional years after relocating from Alameda Naval Air Station, California to Fleet Readiness Center East in 1995.

And now 21 years later he is being honored for more than 60 years of federal service, and he has no plan of hanging it up just yet.

"I'm 81 years old. I might stay until I'm 100," said Dawkins, who has worked as a pneumatics systems mechanic — disassembling, assembling, repairing and overhauling various turbine compressor assemblies daily — with Naval Air Systems Command since January 1981. "I feel good that FRC East is still allowing me to serve."

According to Dawkins, his lengthy federal service career began in 1953 when he enlisted in the United States Air Force in the aircraft and engine mechanic career field.

"I had to do something," he said, as he talked of growing up in Washington, D.C. in the time leading up to the Civil Rights Movement. He said the job market was scarce for



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African-American males at that time in the nation, and he had to find a means of earning money.

He said, having attended a military preparatory school, “I always knew, some way or another I was going into the military.” So when his hope of attending West Point and becoming a pilot did not materialize he sought another route into the military.

“I went to the recruiter, and it was a lucky day for me, because only the Air Force and Army recruiters were there,” he said, holding in his mind that his hope of flying might still be realized. “It was an opportune time for me because the Air Force was accepting more African-Americans.”

“I had to really, really talk to my mom about signing me up,” said Dawkins, who was then 17 years old, the older of two children and sensing his mother’s apprehension of the matter, as the U.S. was engaged in the Korean War.

And while the situation in the military was not ideal for people of color, as segregation and prejudice were prominent then, Dawkins’s said he did not let that deter him. “I just wanted to serve,” he said.

“I overcame the prejudice and discrimination. I was well-aware of it, but at some point you have to progress,” he said, acknowledging a resilient attitude and self-motivation as his internal propellers through a 26-year active-duty military career (and now more than 35 years in civil service). “I believe I can do anything I want to do when I’m ready to do it. I thought, ‘despite what’s going on, I’m going to make me better.’ ... I’m kind of stubborn a little bit too, you know.”

Dawkins credits a strong work ethic, “good support systems” and “the man upstairs” for enduring in service. “I didn’t get here by myself,” he said, giving an instinctive nod to family, church, friends, doctors and various social organizations.

He also attributes some of his success to admonishment from an “old sergeant.”

“He said, ‘You’re not going to make it because of what you’re doing,’” Dawkins recalled, telling of how his off-duty activeness, which equaled his work intensity, drew unfavorable attention of his superiors. “I worked hard, but I also partied hard.

“He walked me up to the line. He said, ‘you are very skilled and can do anything, but here is the line that you do not cross.’ I kept myself out of trouble by that resonating in my head.”

Dawkins served in the earlier part of his career in the distinguished Strategic Air Command, noting that while assigned to the 31st Fighter Wing at Turner Field, Ga. he worked some with the historic Tuskegee Airmen. He became a flight engineer after about five years of service. He served a couple of tours in the Vietnam War between 1966 and



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1969 where he earned the Air Medal — with five oak leaf clusters, representing 125 combat missions flown — and the Distinguished Flying Cross, which was awarded to him for performing the mission in the Republic of Vietnam.

Dawkins retired from the Air Force in 1979, but he quickly realized he would have to get another job when he saw that he would not be able to partake of benefits the way he did while he was enlisted.

“I rolled up to the clinic and the guy said, ‘Sarge it’s a little different now that you’re not on active duty,’” he said.

He used his Montgomery GI Bill to take some classes at a community college, where he studied aircraft and engine maintenance — what he already knew.

He worked with a military contractor, working on C-5 aircraft, for a short while before landing a federal service position at Alameda. The naval air station was on the 1993 Base Realignment and Closure Commission list to close, subsequently displacing much of its workforce around the country. Dawkins received orders to relocate to the Navy Depot at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point and started in January 1995.

Through the years his focus has remained resolute on serving his nation.

“Every day I think of the importance of getting the details right for the troops who use these products in the field,” said Dawkins, commenting on his role in generating combat air power for America’s Marines and Naval forces.

According to the man affectionately known around FRC East as Mr. Fred, the reason he has stayed so long is because he has “met such beautiful people here.”

“It wasn’t a perfect journey. It was a rough and rugged road,” he said. “But I liked what I was doing. It’s a collection of good days and bad days; I’ve had more good (ones) than I’ve had bad.”

And for those asking, “When will Mr. Fred retire,” he said, the people and mood around the depot are still pleasant. “When we start bothering each other, I’ll be the first to go,” he said.

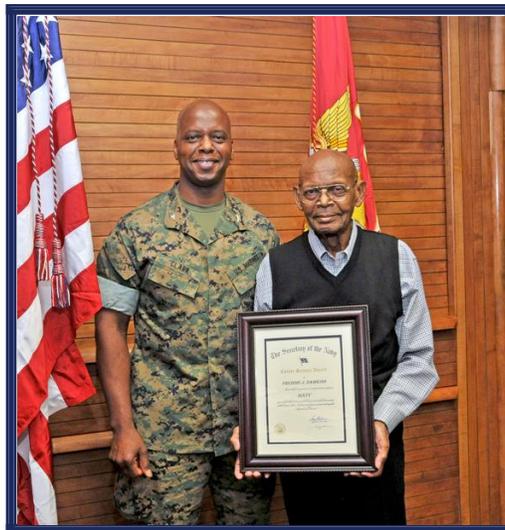
The FRC East Commanding Officer Col. Vincent Clark presented Dawkins the Secretary of the Navy Certificate of Service and pin for 60 years of federal service Sept. 7 during a special ceremony in the command Conference Room, honoring his comprehensive military and civilian service, calling him “a national treasure.”



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MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, N.C. — Freddie Dawkins stands with Col. Vincent Clark, Fleet Readiness Center East commanding officer, after being presented with the Secretary of the Navy Certificate of Appreciation, honoring him for more than 60 years of federal service in the FRC East Conference Room Sept. Sept. 7, 2016 at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C.