



AVAG News

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Veterans Day Luncheon at Cottonwood Church

November 6, 2020

The American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) has partnered with Cottonwood Church through their Veterans Outreach four times a year to put on special events for our veterans. This year was different — due to the pandemic all outreach events were canceled. I had many veterans ask when we were going to put on another event. Pastor Ray Huda brought it to the board at church and they agreed to allow us to put on a Veterans Day luncheon.

There was a lot of preplanning due to social distancing. We normally would have our event in building B, but this year we were going to have to figure out how to do it outside. The weather in California can sometimes be unpredictable with one day really hot and the next day cold. We were having winds and fires so of course our concern was how were we going to do it outside. Cottonwood Church put up large tents, tables, chairs, and a stage for our guest speaker Phil Downer. The backdrop of a large American flag was put up by volunteers a few days before our event (see photo on page 2). The VVA brought in their helicopter, our friend Robert Crebbs brought his military classic car, and Reverend Richard Bergquist brought his military motorcycle. What an amazing backdrop.

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or learn more about us at AVAGUSA.com

Veterans Day Luncheon at Cottonwood Church continued

Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto

Words from our guest speaker, Phil Downer



The most exciting, fantastic, and effective event in recent memory! They came with their badges, medals, patchy uniforms, canes, and most of all they came with their scars, wounds, a few victories, but a lot of defeat.

We celebrate our veterans with words and monuments, but it is acts of kindness that they remember. The sky jockeys in that solo helicopter in the middle of a battle zone that kicked out the door melted ice cream and squashed cake on the Marine Corps birthday will live in my mind and heart forever because they did something for us.

The folks of the American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) and Veterans Outreach at Cottonwood Church did something for veterans with each table host decorating their extensively fashionable tables with balloons, treats, flags, sparklers, and colorful joyful decorations making the festivities a gigantic hit from 100 yards away. And then as the men who fought our wars and yes, some women too, and their spouses, walked toward the beautiful tables, smiling faces, and lovely music, they caught a glimpse of that helicopter that took so many of us to death, yet brought so many of us home to caring medical units. Probably every one of us, as I did, halted for a moment catching the glimpse of that green chopper with the runner rails we stood on before jumping to the ground into fierce combat missions.

Yes, AVAG and Cottonwood Church's Veterans Outreach spared no expense, embraced every

creative idea, even wrapping veterans in beautiful handmade quilts honoring those of particular service backgrounds.

No leftovers or cans of food! Lunch was totally first class, the conversation fun and interesting, but somewhat superficial until the speaker began to share.

I could have talked about my success as a senior partner lawyer with a big house and a big family twenty years after returning from being a Marine Corporal machine gunner in Vietnam (though no one would have cared about those things), but instead, I chose to talk about my broken heart.

I admitted to my pain, my disorientation, my hyper-vigilance, nightmares, raging anger, adultery, and thoughts of suicide as my wife was ready to walk out the door wondering "Who is this man I married?" One of the times we got into a big fight and she just couldn't understand why, I sped off in my brand-new green Pontiac GTO leaving rubber all the way down the street thinking to myself "Well, maybe now she'll care about me." That's the lie of anger. We think that anger solves problems but it creates bigger ones. We think that anger brings people to understanding and sympathy, when it really brings them to indifference, fear, and a deep desire to escape.

Years later, when I found the answer to fear, anger, guilt, and pain, I asked my wife what she was thinking that day as a young bride whose Prince Charming had turned into an angry toad. A godly woman, now totally committed to our marriage that had seemed over on that earlier day, she looked down and admitted what she was really thinking those years ago, "If he hits a tree, my problems will be over."

I came home from war with a broken heart, married the girl of my dreams and broke hers, because I had no understanding that God loved me, you, all veterans, and all creation.

I was a stubborn man and unwilling to accept help, but finally I accepted His grace, found peace, forgiveness, joy, significance, and began



Volunteers Jerry, Isaac, Steve N., Mike, Steve B., Wade installed a large American flag as a backdrop for the event.



Phil Downer, left, shoots a photo during the Veterans Day ceremony.

to be an exporter of those great gifts sharing the love of Jesus Christ in voluntary settings where people come understanding they will hear a spiritual message.

That's the message — God loves you! And just as John Atkinson died in my place, indirectly giving me a second chance at life to go home, Jesus Christ voluntarily died in my place and your place, in order that we might have a second chance at life, even eternal life, because He paid the penalty for all the things that we've done wrong.

They always said to me, "Welcome home!" And I say that to my friends, too. But the best "welcome home" is the one that's ahead with the Lord welcoming us into His paradise because we've decided to go His way and receive the gift of His son, Jesus Christ.

Thank you, AVAG and Cottonwood Church's Veterans Outreach, sponsoring a real gift to veterans including the gift of eternity. 🦋

82nd Airborne Presentation of the Flag

NCOIC Robert Crebbs, currently the NCOIC (non-commissioned officer in charge) of the Honor Guard Team for the Lew Millet MOH Chapter of the 82nd Airborne Association, not only performed the presentation of the flag but also brought a military classic car.

The car, a 1940 Packard model 1800 series 110 Touring Sedan, was purchased from Lola Alvitre, wife of Pete Alvitre, a long time member of the Honor Guard Team.

“A friend of mine in the 82nd Airborne Association had several old, non-running cars and trucks he collected in his own small junk yard. We talked about restoring this car for years but nothing was done. He passed away in 2014 and his wife asked me if I wanted to buy the Packard. It was badly rusted but mostly intact. I had it towed to a Packard repair shop and asked if they could get it running and drivable. From there to what I have today took several years to complete. The actual history of the Packard and where it was before the junk yard is unknown.” 🦋



Robert Crebb's restored 1940 Packard Model 1800 Series 110 Touring Sedan.



Robert Crebbs, NCOIC of the Lew Millet MOH Chapter of the 82nd Airborne Association of the, center.



The Honor Guard Team for the Lew Millet MOH Chapter of the 82nd Airborne Association.

Reverend Richard Bergquist's Harley Davidson

My motorcycle is a 2016 Harley-Davidson Softail. The military style paint job is actually factory, an obvious tribute to the Harley-Davidson WLA built for US Army during WWII. I bought it new November 12, 2016. I have ridden it across the country twice; to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in DC and to my military reunions. I have added brass shell casings and other military brass accessories. Most importantly for me is my tribute box over the rear tire. It's a miniature foot locker on which I have attached 37 memorial dog tags honoring friends from my unit that lost their lives in combat. They ride with me in spirit! I served as a paratrooper with the legendary 101st Airborne "Screaming Eagles" Infantryman 1968-69 and extended tour 1969-70 as a Huey door gunner where I participated in the assault on Dong Ap Bia Mountain aka Hamburger Hill. I attended SoCal School of Ministry (AG) and received my Certificate of Ministry seven years ago. I have a Certificate of Completion in Care and Counsel for Combat Trauma. I'm a minister with Pointman International Ministries and make myself available to combat veterans through involvement veter-



ans' organizations, events and social media through my ministry Search and Restore. I'm a member of SoCal Patriot Guard Riders and Honor Bound Motorcycle Ministry. I'm a long-time chaplain for VFW Post 9148 and just completed my second year as a volunteer chaplain with the Whittier Police Department. 🦋

Veterans Day Luncheon at Cottonwood Church continued

Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto

Quilts of Valor Presentation

The mission of the Quilts of Valor Foundation is to cover service members and veterans touched by war with comforting and healing Quilts of Valor. Army Veteran David Breunig has been an AVAG volunteer and he was surprised with his custom quilt. Pictured below left is David with his daughter, Amanda, and his wife Mellissa. At right, the recipients and their beautiful quilts.



Grand Prize Winner of Recliner

Recently retired with forty years of proud military service Command Sergeant Major Ron Cabrera was overjoyed to have won a recliner chair at the November 6th Cottonwood Church Veteran's luncheon. Ron began his military service by joining the Marines after his 1980 high school graduation then transitioned to the Army Reserve and California Army National Guard. He has

served in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan. Ron is a familiar face around the Joint Forces Training Base Los Alamitos and recently joined the California State Guard (CSG) volunteer force. Ron volunteers his time visiting hospice Veterans and speaking to Army National Guard recruit sustainment program applicants. He is the Chaplain for the California Sergeants Major Association and Vice President of Enlisted Affairs of the Army Aviation Association of America Southern California Chapter.



Flagman Frank and Melanie Boies set up their "store" of clothes, shoes, and more for the veterans. All items were given away free to these deserving veterans.



AVAG Chairman of the Board
Mike Keele and his wife Cora



Honor Guard Team for the Lew Millet MOH
Chapter of the 82nd Airborne Association



Phil Downer



There were many very nice items to be won in the events raffle.



Event attendees were blessed with a
gorgeous Southern California Day.



Coast Guard veteran John Counts
with his active-duty Coast Guard guest



Ariana Warde sang *God Bless
America* and *America the Beautiful*



David Breunig's beautiful
Quilt of Valor



A few of the lovely Quilts of Honor and the Veterans to whom they were presented.

Sequoia Mobile Home Park Toy Drive

On December 19, 2020 The Richard Breunig Foundation and Sway to the 99 sponsored a Toy Drive in San Bernardino at Sequoia Mobile Home Park. YouTuber Josue Franco (YouTube.com/Swaytothe99) generously donated to support these efforts and writes about his experiences at the park and why he chose to support this worthy cause.

Mr. Franco states, “While the world seemed to be shutting down, people losing hope, I did not want to end the year without doing something to give kids the Christmas magic...hope that Santa would come, hope that things would get better and there would be some what of a “normal” holiday season. When the opportunity presented

itself, I knew this was the right choice, a large community with many deserving families needing a Christmas. I wanted 2020 to end on a sweeter note. Seeing all the smiling faces, some tears of joy, and for a few hours gathering forgetting our troubles and being in the moment, I knew we had made the right decision. Maybe in six months the kids will have forgotten the toys they received for Christmas, but they will not forget the feeling from that day. They will remember that they matter, and that someone out there remembered them, someone remembered they too need a Christmas. For me it was an experience I'll never forget. My life is so abundant I can in return help others; that in itself is a blessing! RBF and Sway to the 99 thank AVAG for allowing us to sponsor and support such a worthy cause. 🦋



Hundreds of toys donated by the Richard Breunig Foundation and Sway to the 99 made for many smiling faces.



Event volunteers gather for a group photo. Volunteers at the event included Lisa Nicholson, Merin Pedraza, Megan Reyes (Money Saving Megan on YouTube), Ethan Reyes, Noah Reyes, Josua Franco (Sway to the 99 on YouTube), Mellissa Breunig (Couponing For A Cause on YouTube), David Breunig (Richard Breunig Foundation), Roberta Gardner, Patricia Torres, Alice Guest, AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, Roy and Elijah Gonzalez



Josue Franco of the YouTube channel Sway to the 99 (YouTube.com/Swaytothe99)



Community members at the event



The joy of toy selection



Bikes and scooters were among the donated toys.



There were toys and gift for all ages and interests thanks to the generous donations of the Richard Breunig Foundation and Sway to the 99. Lots and lots of happy faces were hidden behind face masks that day.

Hemet RV Park 2nd Annual Toy Drive

By Mellissa Breunig

Sponsored by The Richard Breunig Foundation (RBF) and Highway Riders MC

On December 5, 2020 RBF and Highway Riders MC (HRMC) sponsored the Hemet RV Park for the 2nd Annual Toy Drive. Due to the impact the Corona Virus has had on the community for 2020 the Highway Riders MC really wanted to make a difference for Christmas for the residents at Hemet Valley RV Park. With the assistance of The Millers who generously donated 72 pairs of Vans shoes to the residents' children and other various donors, RBF and HRMC were able to provide 56 beauty gifts for the mothers and a toiletries table that included necessities as well as cereal for the par-

ents, 40 blankets for the parents, 34 children's jackets, and 75 craft bags. A Taco Station provided by OMG Face Painting by Natasha Rodriguez and company served 150 people with a choice of carne asada tacos or cheese quesadilla, rice and beans, a sweet snack and a choice of juice or water. Over 175 toys were brought in for children to pick and choose from. Major raffle prizes were provided which included two bikes for each age category ranging from toddler to teen.

Two 24-inch flat screen TV's, two 32-inch sound bars, an electric scooter, Madera Skateboard with T-shirt and a laptop computer were the raffle prizes. The event was a huge success and we were excited to be able to partner with AVAG to provide an amazing Christmas for the residents of Hemet RV Park. RBF's motto is "*Giving is not always about making a donation, it's about making a difference*" and together we made that difference. 🦋



Thanks to the generosity of the Millers, RBF and the HRMC hundreds of gift items including Vans shoes, a wide variety of toys, bikes, a skateboard and more were donated for Hemet RV Parks 2nd Annual Toy Drive.



Above, 150 community members enjoyed the carne asada tacos and cheese quesadilla's served by the taco station provided by OMG Face Painting.



Children with toys and the lucky winners of bicycles which were included in the raffle held at the event.

AVAG and Cottonwood Church Deliver Christmas Joy

American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) Partnering with Cottonwood Church to bring Christmas joy to eight communities. Passing out over 500 Love to Others bags filled with all the necessities for Christmas dinner including ham, Hawaiian sweet dinner rolls, apple pie, and all the fixings. We arrived at 8 AM in the morning to unload the trucks, prepare the bags, and head out into the communities. All of our veterans, seniors, and families in need were blessed.

We had volunteers from Cottonwood Church, AVAG, the Richard Breunig Foundation and managers from Santiago Corporation. The Love to Others bags went to Creekside Estates in Orange, Creek Orange Senior Community, Desert View Estates in Barstow, Parkside in Rialto, Rancho Meridian in San Bernardino, Glen Aire in San Bernardino, and Diamond Bar Estates in Diamond Bar. After passing out all the bags to the communities, Cottonwood Church called to ask if we knew anyone else that could use dinners for Christmas. Immediately we made calls to Flagman Frank and to Kevin and Nery Mitchell. They came to pick up bags to pass out in their communities. Chaplain Doreen also took bags to the American Legion Post 295 in Cypress for any veterans in need. 🦋



Volunteers Ibeth, Ruthie, Tyren, Kamesha were on hand to set up and hand out bags.





Setting a Culture in Our Communities

By Doreen Matsumoto

People are always watching trying to find a place to start. That was in a hymnal at the Lutheran Church I grew up in. I have always used that as an example to show people their opportunities to help others. Most people see others doing good work but don't know how to get started. I have been with AVAG almost five years now and have seen AVAG grow from one meeting a month to servicing over thirty different communities.

The most exciting part is to watch the residents and the management get involved. **David Winterhalter** and **Nancy Gordon** from Creek Orange are a great example of serving alongside our organization.



Nancy Gordon and David Winterhalter of Santiago Creek Orange

We receive food every week since the pandemic started but trying to serve multiple communities is difficult with a small staff. David and Nancy saw that we needed help and started to help us by picking up food and passing it out in their community. They help by making calls and prepare for us to deliver. They have been so active in checking on residents to make sure they are okay and we have reached so many new people. David and Nancy also participate in our weekly Bible study and are always inviting people to join us.

Phil and Myrna Simpson have always been a blessing in their community of Diamond Bar Estates by helping the elderly veterans not only with physical needs but spiritual needs. They have such a giv-



Phil and Myrna Simpson of Diamond Bar Estates



David Winterhalter



David "Santa" and Doreen Matsumoto



Phil Simpson on the job.

ing heart and are ready to help at the drop of a hat. Phil also volunteers for the sheriff's department; he definitely has a servant's heart.

This Christmas he wanted to help out another veteran by giving them \$100 gift card to help with groceries. Our motto is "veterans helping veterans" and he surely did that by giving a \$100 gift card to Navy veteran Chris Tomczak and his family. They were so surprised; they called Phil on the phone and all the kids kept saying thank you! What a blessing to have amazing people that want to help our organization and the people we help.

Janice Castillo has been a resident in Palm Vista Hemet for fifteen years. She is a proud daughter and sister. Her father, Navy Veteran Vernon House served in WWII and Korea. Her brother, Louis House served in the Marine Corps and her other brother, Dale House, served in the Marine Corps and Navy both during the Vietnam

War. She started participating in our AVAG meetings, Bible studies, and veteran's luncheons a few years ago. Since the pandemic, she noticed that people in her community were going hungry and having to go to the food banks. We have partnered with her to bring her food to pass out to the community. She has been an encouragement to so many and is taking a leadership role as one of our volunteers and will be hosting a bible study on Sundays at her home in her patio area at noon.

We want to say a special thank you to two other residents, **Dawn and Hinda** of Palm Vista Hemet. They are donating tables and chairs, food, and other necessities to launch this bible study. It helps us to have boots on the ground in this community. 🦋



The Tomczak family display the gift card they received.



Janice Castillo in her patio at Palm Vista Hemet.



Janice wearing an inspirational face mask.



The Palm Vista Hemet Bible study group



David Manchester and his team from Howmet Aerospace Partners presented a \$20,000 check to AVAG Program Director Scott McReynolds and AVAG Founder Richard Simonian.



Howmet Aerospace Partners team member and AVAG members in a group photo during the meeting.



Howmet Aerospace Partners with AVAG to Help Veterans

Special thanks to thank David Manchester and his team for their assistance in obtaining the grant of \$20,000 from the Howmet Foundation.

Their team came out to do the presentation at the AVAG office with a large \$20,000 check. The Howmet team was able to meet our board members and AVAG veterans.

Mike Keele, Chairman of the Board, US Army combat veteran

Jim Duffy, US Army Special Forces combat veteran

Richard Simonian, founder of American Veterans Assistance Group, Army Veteran, a member of the original Green Beret unit.

Scott McReynolds, Program Director

Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto

We also asked our AVAG Veterans to join us which included Vietnam Army Veteran Charles Cruz and his wife Mary Cruz, WWII Navy Veteran Harold Gomer and his daughter, Pam Crawley, Mike Keele's wife Cora, and Navy Veteran Paul Gomez.

We presented challenge coins to all of the staff that came to present the check from Howmet Aerospace.

Our intention regarding use of the funds so far is as follows:

- Down-Payment Assistance \$5,000 – We plan to help two families with down-payment assistance of \$2,500 each to purchase their own manufactured home.
- Rent Assistance \$5,000 – We plan to help four needy veteran families with one years rent assistance of approximately \$1,200 each (\$100/mo).
- Home Repairs \$10,000 – We plan to help with home repairs of approximately \$3,300 each. Our goal is to prepare roofs, paint homes, fix stairs and skirting on the homes. 🦋

Meet AVAG Veterans



Glenn Williamson

Glenn Williamson served in the Marine Corps during 1965 to 1968 and the highest rank he achieved was Corporal E4. His job was a 03 51



rifleman. He was stationed in MCRD San Diego and also Camp Pendleton. He also was deployed to Vietnam, Okinawa Japan, and China.

When Glenn was in Vietnam, he liked the camaraderie and he loved being a Marine but he never got close to a lot of people because they were there to do a job. The only thing he really disliked was Boot Camp but any Marine will say the same.

“AVAG has been a huge help to us and everyone that has been involved has been so delightful and wonderful. I have nothing but positive things to say about Doreen and Amanda; they have helped us so much with rent assistance, food deliveries, and I really miss the veteran meetings. Also, we greatly appreciated

being able to go to the Angel game in our own suites where we had a waitress there to serve us with whatever we wanted. It was definitely the best seats I’ve ever had and it was a great game too. I truly enjoyed the Veterans Day event at Cottonwood Church. It was very nice and I was able to meet a few other Vietnam veterans at the table. I hope to attend more.” 🦋

John Gibbs

John Gibbs was in the Air Force from 1956 to 1958 and the highest rank he achieved was Airmen 3rd Class (AC3). He was stationed at Barksdale Air Force Base in Bossier Parish, Louisiana. He worked in the hanger on the base and his job was to build bombs, called it special



mechanical engineering. He loved doing his job but he disliked the higher up guys because they were snooty and it was like they forgot where they came from but that’s just how it was in the military.

Being part of AVAG has helped John and his wife Charlene of 61 years meet new people and have long lasting friendships with other veterans and their families.

The first AVAG event he came to was an ice cream



social and we gave him and his wife a banana split. That’s all it took; they were hooked!

They have been great supporters at our AVAG monthly meetings at Sequoia mobile home park. We have celebrated their birthdays, anniversaries, spent Thanksgiving and Christmas with them but due to the pandemic the clubhouse has been closed. He misses the meetings where he got to get out and talk to people and tell his silly jokes to all of us. He has also had other AVAG Veteran’s help him and his wife with projects around their house and yard. 🦋



Jerry Rushing

Jerry Rushing served four years in the United States Air Force achieving the rank of E-4 Senior Airman (Buck Sgt). He served in the Philippines and Vietnam. He was also in the reserves for two years. He liked the excitement of being in the military but didn't like C-130 aircraft land drops and pick-ups in North Vietnam. He learned to fully appreciate the "American" way of life. He had additional training in Japan. Because of the serving in the military, he was able to go to Okinawa, Wake Island, and Alaska.

"This pretty much talks about my job as a crew chief on a C-130 on supply missions to North Vietnam. We had different code names for each type of delivery system we made, depending on the situation. This particular air drop was known as a LAPS or Low Assisted Parachute System, or Drop System, where we would set up the 'rollers' on the floor of the aircraft, (already built in the floor) and at the precise moment flying low over our mark, let the freight 'roll off' on pallets, between 30-50 feet above the ground, slowed down by parachute. If the freight was fragile, such as a replacement 'engine' for an aircraft grounded for repair, we would land our aircraft, and unload it manually (forklift).

The missions that I didn't like were the landings in North Vietnam with weapons supply and food (K-Rations) for our troops, and to 'pick-up' certain items, sometimes 'body-bags'. The pilots would keep the aircraft engines running and the props 'feathered' in order to make the mission go rapidly, to get the hell out of there! There were the

times when 'Charlie' (VC), would come out of the jungle to try and 'Down' our aircraft, and we would be firing M-16s from the open 'ramp' of the aircraft as we took off. We had on board M-16s and we carried 45 autos on our person. We 'had' to protect our aircraft!

The C-130 was a remarkable aircraft, and could take-off and land in a football field, but as a teenager, you didn't think about that, you just wanted to hurry and get the job done and fly back to our base! (Saigon). We carried on board about 16 JATO (Jet Assisted Take Off) bottles, to attach to the side of the aircraft, for a quick 'take-off' in situations like this, if we had the 'time' to install! JATO, four mounted on each side of the aircraft. On arriving back at Base (Saigon). We would prep the aircraft (after all inspections were made and repairs were made). Load our aircraft for the Philippines, Mactan Island Base, carrying aboard sometime North Vietnam Prisoners, American soldiers' body-bags, which by the way, it was a 'long' trip back to the P.I. having to fly at low altitude, with the 'hatches' open because of the 'stench'. One trip I will never forget was when we carried back a wooden coffin of the first 'General' killed in Vietnam. Out of respect, only his wooden coffin was strapped down in the center of the aircraft."

After his service, Jerry did some acting and was a race car driver and motorcycle enthusiast. Pictured below, he is with his veteran buddies celebrating Loren Applebaum's birthday. Jerry Rushing – Air Force, Loren Applebaum – Army, Ernie Cedderstaff – Navy, Pat Cedderstaff – Army & Air Force Reserves, Vince Cisneros – Army, Lou Schumow - Navy." 🦋



Alex Gavidia

Alex was in the Marine Corps from 2004 to 2008 and the highest rank he achieved was E3. He did Boot Camp in Paris Island South Carolina and was stationed at Camp Pendleton and did three deployments to Iraq. The part he liked least about his service was time away from his family, but he was never alone because the camaraderie of the guys in his unit. He missed the birth of his first son and met him for the first time when he was five months old. One guy that helped him was Lieutenant David Bradt, during an IUD they lost two guys but Lieutenant Bradt kept everyone positive and helped them through the loss and kept them focused on the task they had to do.

“One day we got blown up eight times in one convoy on my first deployment; it definitely was a wake-up call. I realized what I did mattered and was important to find these bombs which was around August 2005. We had found 9000 ordinance that could be used as bombs that day.

“The American Veterans Assistance Group has helped me get work over the last five years; it is a good resource for work. I am a veteran that is able to help veterans. I have been able to grow within my business and



spiritually with my faith. I have been attending a weekly men's Bible study with AVAG members and was baptized by Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto.

“I'm blessed to be married for four years to Genesis Gavidia who is a reserve in the National Guard since November 2016. She has achieved the rank of E-4, Specialist as a Patient Administrator. We have three boys, Brian 12, Castiel 5, and Dathan 1 and I am raising my brother's children. AVAG checks on us regularly to drop off food or necessities and for Christmas, the organizations AVAG partners with put together toys for my sons and gave gift cards to my niece, Kimberley, and nephews, Ethan and Jahir. 🦋



Machinist Mate Striker Albert S. Kellogg, U.S. Coast Guard, 1958-1962, USS Minnetonka (Courtesy photo – Daniel Kellogg)

My Father! My Hero!

By Sgt. Daniel Kellogg

In our country's history, we've had great heroes, like General George Washington of the Continental Army, who lead our young country to victory in the Revolutionary War, Lieutenant Presley O'Bannon, USMC, whose Marines crushed the Barbary Pirates of Tripoli in 1805, Teddy Roosevelt, whose Roughrider Force won the battle of San Juan Puerto Rico in the Spanish/American War of 1898, and GENERAL OF THE ARMY Douglas MacArthur, who helped not

only to save the United States, but also the gallant nation of the Philippines by the end of WWII in the Pacific War by 1945.

But my greatest hero is my father, Machinist Mate Striker Albert Kellogg, United States Coast Guard!!

My father in was born in Inglewood, CA on December 27, 1938. He joined the US Coast Guard when Dwight David Eisenhower was President in 1958. He was a crew member of the USS Minnetonka and did a lot of important work on the ship. He did a lot engine maintenance work, and that is a truly something to be proud of. A ship like that cannot accomplish its mission without skilled hands taking care of it. My father fulfilled his service time when 'Jack' Kennedy was President in 1962. The Minnetonka ended its service tours during Vietnam. After his service to our great country, he married, raised my siblings and I into future military men and good citizens. He's a father of two boys and two girls, a grandfather of twelve and a great grandfather of two young girls. My father taught us the value of honor and just all around being a good person and good servant of our Lord and savior, The Almighty God!! Right now my father is locked in combat with cancer and is almost 82 years of age. But I know he will win his battle/war with this cancer, because he's the ultimate warrior and fighter!!! Please pray for him everyone!!! Thank you and may God bless you all!!! 🦋



Henry G. Gordon

I've lived in Barstow, California for 39 years. Served in the Marine Corps for 20 years, achieving the rank of G4 Sgt, E-7. Stationed in Okinawa, Japan, Camp LeJune, Camp Pendleton, California and at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. Served in Vietnam, worked in civil service, Department of Defense for 32 years at the Marine Corps Logistics Base in Barstow, California. I was an optical instrument repairman, performed repairs on fire control systems on tanks, self-propelled artillery M109A3 and M110A2 Howitzers, M198 Towed Howitzers. Align, adjust, synchronized, fire control systems on tanks and artillery Howitzers.

Married to my beautiful wife, Mary, for 45 years; raised four kids and we are doing okay. Taking it easy, one day at a time. 🦋

Chaplain Gilbert Garcia

Chaplain Gilbert Garcia served in the Marine Corps July 2000 to January 2009 achieving the rank of Sergeant. His job was primarily 381 in food services and he was deployed to Iraq as an 0431 logistics. Chaplain Gilbert Garcia was stationed in Okinawa, Japan for two years during 2003 to 2005 and then went to Iraq February 2006 to February 2007. In Iraq he was the chief cook. He loved serving with all of the different men and women from all over the country and they were all ready to be called on when needed. If he had to, he would do it all over again; he loved the camaraderie between everyone. There wasn't much he didn't like but he did not like running during Boot Camp. He recently celebrated his 20th year anniversary graduating from Boot Camp.

Chaplain Gilbert was first introduced to AVAG when he met AVAG's Spanish Chaplain, Susanna Gonzalez, when they attended the Chaplaincy School at the Riverside Police Department through Living Shield Ministry. She wanted to turn in a recognition form for a Quilt of Valor, when she found out he was a Marine Corps veteran.

During his service he loved the camaraderie and being able to teach and train all of the new men and women joining the Marine Corps because they all have the same mindset.

One memorable story he shared was that he had the opportunity to go to the Pentagon to be the personal cook for General Peter Pace. This was during April 2004 in Fort Worth, Virginia where he was taking a culinary class. Unfortunately, he was unable to finish because he had to go back to Okinawa, Japan, but it was still a great experience. 🦋



Gregory Wages Sr.

In 1973 a friend and I decided to join the Navy to serve our country and defend the freedom all Americans enjoy. We talked to the Navy recruiter and agreed on entering the field of CB's (combat battalion) at the end of boot camp we were told that there was a six month waiting list so we went with being boatswain mates which in time found that I enjoyed.

My first ship was the USS Oklahoma city CG-5 flagship of the 7 fleet as a boatswain mate my main job was maintaining the ship doing everything from scraping rust and painting anything that didn't move! LOL. My training included rescue swimmer, fire fighter, and once the chief petty officers found out that I could cook well guess where I ended up? Yes, that's right, Petty officers mess and my mud (coffee) was the best, so I was told. The USS Oklahoma City CG-5 was stationed in Yokohama Japan during my time spent there we did ops off the coast of Vietnam rescuing refugees since we were a flagship. Other places we visited were Korea, Philippines, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, and Okinawa.

After 2½ years overseas I was assigned to the USS Bristol County LST 1198 located in San Diego, California, visiting several places including Alaska, Hawaii from there I was discharged in 1977, must say I never regretted serving our great country and would do it all again if needed. ✕



AVAG News

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Honoring Those Who Served

Dear Lord, We honor these veterans, worthy men who gave their best when they were called upon to serve and protect their country. We pray that you will welcome them into your arms and comfort their families till we meet again.

Come to Me

God saw you were getting tired, And a cure was not to be,
So, he put his arms around you, And whispered, "Come to Me."
With tearful eyes we watched you, And saw you pass away.
Although we loved you dearly, We could not make you stay.
A golden heart stopped beating, Hard working hands at rest.
God broke our hearts to prove to us, He only takes the best.

Kenneth Compton – US Air Force Veteran – Korean War Passed Away December 26, 2020



Chaplain Bishop Herman Hodges – Korean War Veteran Passed Away December 26, 2020



Bishop Herman Hodge served in the Vietnam and Korean wars. He was also a part of LAPD, a lifetime member of DAV Jack Fisher 23 of Orange County, a lifetime member of VFW Riverside Post 9223 and a member of the Tuskegee Airman Moreno Valley Chapter. He also served as Chaplain for the different organizations

Gilbert Ronald Mellen (Gil) - US Army Veteran Passed Away October 28, 2020



Gil Ronald Mellon served in the United States Army during the Vietnam War from 1960-1963. Gil also served in the reserves for three more years. During this time, he served under US Attorney General Nick Katzenbach.

Richard Reynosa – US Navy Veteran – Korean War Passed Away November 15, 2020



Charles Cruz – Vietnam Army Veteran Passed Away December 29, 2020

