



AVAG News

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Members of AVAG at Rancho La Paz Mobile Home Park pose together for a photo as Representative Lou Correa presented federal funding to the group to further its work providing housing options for low income veterans.

AVAG Secures \$1 Million in Federal Funding for Veterans Housing

On August 21, 2023, in Anaheim, California, Representative Lou Correa presented \$1 million in federal funding to the Veterans Affordable Housing Program (VAHP) and American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) to support veterans' housing assistance.

VAHP provides low-income veterans throughout Southern California, with mobile home options and financial support. AVAG provides support services to the communities served by VAHP.

The ceremony for the official presentation of the funds was held at the Rancho La Paz Mobile Home Park home of Jack Gutman, a US Navy World War II veteran. Gutman's home was the first to be rehabilitated using some of the federal funding. Workers were on site that day delivering supplies necessary to replace the flooring and roof of his mobile home.

AVAG is excited to begin the work of rehabilitating veterans' homes with the support of this federal grant. We have already coordinated and completed other repairs for veterans' homes. Repairs have been made for several other homes at Rancho La Paz, as well as in the Cherokee Mobile Home Park, also located in Anaheim.

AVAG is grateful for the opportunity to serve the veteran community and provide them with the support they need. We are committed to providing our veterans with dignified and comfortable housing, and we believe that everyone deserves a safe and affordable place to call home. ✨

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AVAG Host POW/MIA Remembrance Day Event at Cherokee MHP

AVAG-hosted event at it's new connection with Cherokee MHP in Anaheim with speakers and more.

Serve Day

Volunteers from AVAG and partners served the communities of Sequoia Plaza MHP and Santiago Creek Orange Estates.

AVAG Forms a New Partnership with Westmount of Cypress Senior Living

Happy 100th birthday to WWII veteran Harold Gomer!

Santiago Creek Orange Estates celebrates the birthday of a much-loved resident.

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or learn more about us at AVAGUSA.com

AVAG Secures Federal Funding and Forms New Community Connections at Rancho La Paz and Cherokee Mobile Home Parks

Meet Rancho La Paz Mobile Home Park Veterans



Jack Gutman was presented a Quilt of Valor by So Cal Quilts of Valor at an event held at Rancho La Paz in August.

Jack Gutman

Jack Gutman served as a U.S. Navy Corpsman in WWII. At age 18, Corpsman 1st Class Gutman provided aid to the wounded and dying on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day and Okinawa in some of the bloodiest battles throughout the European and Pacific theaters. Jack had no gun but carried a medical pack and stretchers.

Jack, at age 93, vividly remembers when his unit landed on Utah Beach on June 6, 1944, 79 years ago. With bullets flying, bombs exploding, and men dying all around him, Corpsman Gutman helped those he could, bandaged and tourniqueted the wounded, gave morphine shots, and provided words of comfort to soldiers who died in his arms.

What he thought was going to be “a piece of cake” turned into what Jack describes as an “absolute nightmare,” one that has caused him to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder for 66 years after D-Day. He spent those six-plus decades repressing his memories of the war before seeking treatment.



Jack Gutman, center, in front of the Gavidia RRP truck which had delivered the flooring material for his home repair. Also pictured, left to right, AVAG Board Chairman Ramon Rodriguez, Representative Lou Correa, AVAG founder Richard Simonian, and AVAG member and owner of Gavidia RRP, Alex Gavidia.

Jack wrote a book about his experience titled *One Veteran's Journey to Heal the Wounds of War*. His story has also been documented by the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, Louisiana.

A quote from his book best describes the impact the war had on his life:

“My experiences had changed my outlook on my life and the world. I went into the war with a fervor to fight for my country and protect our freedom, but the experience had been nothing like what I thought when I signed up to join the Navy. Back at home, I thought constantly of the men that had died overseas. I wondered how and why I survived. There I was, a young teenager thrown into a crazy war with thousands of young men like myself dying in front of me. I never dreamed it would be that awful, and that those horrifying images would stick with me now that I was safely at home, and for years to come.”

Jack now uses his own experiences to help veterans overcome PTSD and motivate others to get help so they may have fulfilling lives.

In addition to being a much-in-demand public speaker, Jack has contributed significantly to the 46th Congressional District of California through his work with young leaders in Congress, conducting the flag salute for the Service Academy, and other events.

Recently, Jack was in Washington, D.C., as part of a Veterans Honor Flight to visit the various war memorials and honor the service and sacrifices of all military veterans.

On the auspicious occasion of the 75th anniversary of D-Day, Jack returned to France for the first time to take part in a documentary film about the pivotal invasion, which paved the way for an Allied victory one year later.

Jack's valiant service to both his country and fellow veterans has made him an invaluable part of his community. He is an inspiration to the community and has undoubtedly bettered the lives he touches. Jack is a true American hero who continues to serve his country and community. ✨

AVAG News



Under the aegis of VAHP
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For questions or additional information,
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Gene Thorpe

Gene Thorpe commuted to the 222nd Combat Communications Squadron in Costa Mesa, CA, for about twelve years in order to participate in monthly unit training assemblies. He was a traditional Guard member, also known as a “Weekend Warrior.” Guard members, whether Air or Army, are citizen soldiers that have full-time civilian careers, but they also have “the most important part-time job in America!”

Gene served in the California Air National Guard (CAANG), in Costa Mesa, from approximately 1978 to 1990. The CAANG is a state military reserve component of the U.S. Air Force, not to be confused with the Air Force Reserve, which is a federal component. Members in the Air Guard have two commanders-in-chief; the President of the United States AND the Governor of the State of California. Guard members, like Gene, can be activated for any federal or state emergency (flooding, earthquakes, riots, fruit fly infestations, etc.). As a member of a mobile Combat Communications unit, Gene was trained as a Radio Communications Operator and was subject to being activated at any time. Some of the radio operators in his unit were activated to provide radio communications after a major hurricane ravaged the Hawaiian island of Kauai in 1992. As a Guard member, Gene traveled to Italy and Germany to participate in a NATO exercise once.

Many Guard members learn a skill in the military that they can use in their civilian life. That’s not exactly what happened with Gene, but his Squadron Commander, LTC “Skip” Freely, an avid ham

radio operator, challenged Gene to become an amateur ham radio operator since he was learning radio communication skills in the Air National Guard. Gene accepted the challenge and enjoys it as a hobby to this day! His wife is also an amateur radio operator! They continue to communicate with other ham operators around the country/world.

Gene joined the Air National Guard later than many of his peers. While he was in junior and senior high school, he was in the Jr. ROTC, but he waited until he was 34 years old before he actually enlisted in the military! He attained the rank of Technical Sergeant (E-6) and remained in the Guard for about twelve and a half years until he felt that he needed to place a higher priority on his marriage and family rather than on the military. Even though he misses the camaraderie and friendships that he had in the Air National Guard, he knows that he made the right decision. He said he would definitely join the Air Guard again, since he loved what he did there, but that he would have joined at a much younger age!

In civilian life, Gene was employed as a forklift operator for the Kimberly-Clark Corporation for many years. One of his duties in the company was that of Safety Committee Chairman. He said he “raised Hell” when he saw safety violations. He earned the nickname, “Thumper”, as a result—a name that he was also known by among his Air National Guard comrades!

Gene has been married for 28 years. A resident of Rancho La Paz, a 55+ community in Anaheim, he was introduced to AVAG at an event they sponsored at the park. He learned about government grants for homes that needed repairs that were related to “health and safety” issues. AVAG’s Chaplain Doreen helped him complete an application to determine his eligibility for the home repair grant. Gene learned of the grant program from other residents of his community which is in the 46th Congressional District of U.S. Representative for California, Congressman Lou Correa. ✨



Olic Dunning

Army veteran Olic Dunning, Jr. served in the from 1969-1971 and attained the rank of SP4. After his initial training at Ft. Ord, CA, he served as a platoon leader, and was then sent to Vietnam. Having been trained in both supply and transportation, his duties required him to regularly travel to the front lines. Despite the danger that he was in as he performed his duties, he said that he would do it all over

because of the “adventure!” When asked if he would do anything differently, he said, “No.” He really liked meeting people while he was in the military, but was glad to be out! He did add that he thought that every young man should experience the military.

Prior to joining the Army, Olic was a truck driver. He continued to drive trucks while he served in Vietnam. It was fairly easy, for him, to transition out of the military since he merely continued driving trucks for many years in civilian life until he retired from his career with the Waste Management company.

While he was in the military, the Motor Pool Sergeant that he worked for really “watched out for the guys.” This made the hard times a little easier for Olic. He never had any R&R while he was overseas. He went to Vietnam, served his time, and returned to the States. Olic especially recalls his return to the United States. When the transport plane that was bringing home troops landed at McChord AFB, in Tacoma, Washington, many of the guys kissed the ground after they exited the plane! It WAS good to be “home!”

Except for his time in Vietnam, Olic has made his home in California for his entire life. Married for forty-one years, he has six children and eleven grandchildren! It was a pleasure meeting him at the Veterans’ Appreciation Luncheon at Rancho La Paz’s clubhouse on August 30th, sponsored by the American Veterans’ Assistance Group (AVAG). ✨



“Pepper” Enderlin

When “Pepper” Enderlin joined the U.S. Navy in 1973, there was a female corps called “WAVES” (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service). This corps was established in 1942 and disbanded in 1978, just one year before Pepper was honorably discharged from the Navy. As challenging as some aspects of military service can be, Pepper and other female sailors had many challenges that their male counterparts did not face.

Primarily, many of the Naval career fields were not available to women, and frequently, female enlistees were placed in administrative jobs. Pepper also faced a lot of discrimination and resistance from the male sailors. She was given duties as a steward. She made the best of it, though, and used the skills she learned to become a bartender and caterer! Many of the officers’ wives used Pepper’s skills at their parties!

Not only was this life difficult for Pepper, but she got married while in the military, and she soon ended up being a single mom with the responsibility of caring for two young sons. As a result, she found it impossible to remain in the Navy.

While in the Navy, Pepper attained the rank of E-3 and served in NAB Coronado (Amphibious—San Diego, CA) and NAS Barbers Point (Air Base—Hawaii). When asked if she would join the military again, she said, “Yes!” She did comment, though, that she would take things more seriously the next time! The elements that she liked the most about the Navy were the general respect, unity, discipline, and what she was able to learn about herself! She wishes that she had had more opportunities to travel like her male counterparts. She disliked the disrespect of women that she experienced. She greatly appreciated one officer who “turned in” a senior NCO that was showing disrespect to her. It gave her hope that things would get better for women in the military.

After leaving military service, Pepper felt that her transition to civilian life was fairly easy. She continued to do bartending and catering. She eventually was hired on as a school bus driver for the Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District, a position she held for thirty-one years, until her retirement a few years ago. 🦋

AVAG Host POW/MIA Remembrance Day Event at Cherokee MHP

American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) hosted our first Veterans event at Cherokee Mobile Home Park in Anaheim on September 15, 2023.

With the help of our new commander at Cherokee Mobile Home Park, Tony Manuel Martinez, and administrative assistant Chely Kirby, who made special gifts for all the veterans, we had a successful event.

This day also had a special meaning to it, as it is POW/MIA Remembrance Day. We do not want to forget the veterans who are still missing in action. Chaplains Doug Zimmer and Doreen Matsumoto shared the reason this day is so important and the meaning behind the empty chair at the table.

We were honored to award two So Cal Quilts of Valor to female veterans Barbara Robbins (Army National Guard) and Catherine Rubino (U.S. Army).

Janet Brown helped present Vietnam veteran commemorative pins to eight Vietnam veterans. AVAG supplied In-N-Out Burger for lunch.

We had two special guest speakers from Torres Mortuary who provided information regarding Veterans Burial benefits. They also raffled off Stater Brothers gift cards.

Rebecca Kopczak, a special guest speaker from the VA Long Beach Healthcare System, discussed VA benefits.

Thank you to Congressman Rep. Lou Correa's office for your help in making this event a success. 🦋



Rebecca Kopczak from the VA Long Beach Healthcare System talked about VA benefits.



AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto with new Cherokee MHP commander Tony Manuel Martinez

Cherokee MHP Veterans Enjoying the AVAG POW/MIA Remembrance Day Event



Meet Cherokee Mobile Home Park Veterans



Manuel “Tony” Martinez

Manuel “Tony” Martinez has lived in Cherokee Senior Mobile Home Park for the past fifteen years since he retired. He is the “commander” there who helped identify the veterans who reside in his park and invited them to a Veterans’ Appreciation Luncheon at the park in mid-September. The event was a huge success, with nearly twenty veterans attending.

Tony served in the U.S. Army from 1964 to 1967. He went into the Army on the “buddy plan”. He is still in contact with this long-time (almost 60 years!) buddy who lives in Prescott, AZ. Tony’s military rank upon discharge was SP4 (“Spec 4”). He and his “buddy” went through Basic Training at Ft. Ord, CA. He was then assigned to Ft. Huachuca, AZ, for eight months with the military police. His final assignment was at StratCom Europe in Heidelberg, Germany, working as a company clerk. He is grateful to his First Sergeant and a Captain in his unit, a West Point graduate, for believing in him and for both helping to mold him into the man he is today!

Being away from home when he was in the Army was something Tony really disliked. He loves his extended family! He still gets together about once a month with his four surviving siblings (one of whom pre-deceased them) for lunch at a local restaurant. All of them are retired.

Upon discharge from the Army, Tony’s transition to civilian life was relatively easy. He took college classes and graduated from Cal State Fullerton with a BA in accounting. He is very proud of the fact that he was the first of his nearly 100 relatives to go to college. Upon graduation, he applied for a “direct commission” in the Army Finance Corps. He was given the option of E-7/Sergeant First Class with a PCS move, but he turned it down because he knew that his college degree would enable him to qualify for higher-level positions in civilian life.

While in the military, Tony enjoyed his independence, becoming a man, and learning to be responsible for his own finances. It was only natural that since accounting was the “love of his life”, with his degree in accounting and having learned financial responsibility, he would move into a civilian career where he used these skills. Also, since his job in the military required a Top Secret—Special Program security clearance, he was a “good fit” as he established himself with the Defense Contract Audit Agency, where he was employed for twelve years. Then he transitioned to the Northrop/Grumman Corporation in Pico Rivera for twenty-three years as a corporate auditor, where he worked on the B-2 bomber project until he retired.

Tony first learned about AVAG (American Veterans’ Assistance Group) when Janet Brown, an aide to Congressman Lou Correa, came to

Cherokee Senior Mobile Home Park to find any military veterans. At that time, Tony was the only known veteran in the park, but with his help, they were able to locate eighteen more veterans, including three female veterans, over the next six months. He wants all veterans to know about some of the veteran benefits that they might not be aware of. One such benefit that is available to low-income veterans is housing assistance and government grants that will help remedy health and safety concerns in their homes. AVAG is assisting a number of veterans in the park to apply for these government “fix-it” grants through Congressman Lou Correa. U.S. Representative for California’s 46th Congressional District, which is in Orange County and covers the cities of Anaheim, Santa Ana, and portions of the City of Orange.

Tony and his wife of 55 years have two daughters, one son, and three grandchildren. He loves restoring classic cars. He is currently restoring a 1962 Chevrolet Corvair turbo-charged Spider. Even though Tony sees many things happening today that can be disappointing, he is glad for the veterans’ benefits that are available and says, “God bless America!” 🦋



Barbara Robbins

Barbara Robbins served our country from 2012 to 2017 in the California State Military Reserve/Judge Advocate General’s Corps (JAG) at the Joint Forces Training Base in Los Alamitos, CA. Attaining the rank of E-5, she applied for the Warrant Officer Program. When illness prevented her from being accepted, she decided to become a civilian again. She would definitely choose to join the service again, but she would really want to become a Warrant Officer.

Transitioning to civilian life was fairly easy for Barbara. Many of the skills she acquired in the JAG Corps enabled her to continue and enhance her own business as a mobile notary public, which she had established prior to joining the military. Additional skills gained as a Tech Library librarian were also helpful. As a mobile notary, Barbara has appointments all over Southern California, and she has control over the days and hours she works—a great advantage for someone of “retirement age!”

Not only is Barbara a veteran from her own service in the military, but she is also the widow of a military veteran—two times! Her first husband, Dennis, was an Army draftee. They divorced amicably after 31 years of marriage. He has since passed away. In 2010, she married again. Her new husband, Daniel, was a retired U.S. Air Force officer who had served for twenty-five years. After his retirement from the Air Force, he taught Junior ROTC. Barbara persuaded him to volun-

teer at the California State Military Reserve, where Barbara worked at the time, because she wanted him to be with her. Sadly, Barbara was widowed a second time after nine years of marriage to Daniel.

One aspect of Barbara's military career that she found especially rewarding was her participation in "Yellow Ribbon ceremonies". When service members would return from overseas service, if they did not have family members that were able to greet them, Barbara made sure that they would have someone waiting for them to welcome them home. As one can imagine, this was very much appreciated by those members! The Yellow Ribbon program was also helpful to service members that were going to be deployed. She would help them to complete durable powers of attorney, wills, and other legal paperwork prior to their departure. This gave those deployed service members more peace of mind during their absence. She did not want to leave that behind when she left the military, and she hoped that others would pick up her vision for the program when she left. She very much enjoyed the "camaraderie" she experienced in the service.

In mid-September of this year, AVAG (American Veterans' Assistance Group) held a Veterans' Appreciation Luncheon at the Cherokee Mobile Home Park's club house. Not long before that date, Congressman Lou Correa's office had located eighteen veterans in the park, three of whom were female. The luncheon in September was only the first event, with more scheduled in the near future. Many of the veterans in the park live with a limited fixed income and find that, as repairs are needed on their homes, it is difficult to get the repairs done due to a lack of funds. The Congressman's office informed these residents of available government grant funds that were available for qualified veterans. This was great news for Barbara! AVAG helped her apply for a grant to get the exterior of her home repainted and the front porch repaired. Within a few weeks, she was approved for the repair work at no cost to herself, and the work will be completed by an approved contractor in the upcoming weeks! Barbara is thrilled to have found out about the program through the AVAG-sponsored event! A number of other residents will also be helped by the program. Now that AVAG has planned some events at Cherokee Park, perhaps Barbara will once again experience some of the same camaraderie with other veterans she experienced in the service!

In her spare time, Barbara likes to complete puzzles with no less than 1000 pieces. Once, her brother gave her a puzzle, but he had removed the picture of what the completed puzzle was supposed to look like! Talk about a challenge! Barbara has faced many challenges in her life and gives advice to others: "Be kind, be loyal, be true, and love everyone!" Great advice, Barbara! 🦋

Terry Fincher

When Terry Fincher, a park resident, learned in mid-September about the first AVAG event at the Cherokee Mobile Home Park, he decided to attend.

He is a U.S. Navy veteran who served from 1971 to 1975. His first duty assignment was to Norfolk, VA, where he served on the guided missile destroyer USS Barney (DDG6). Since he missed his family in Southern California, some time later he was able to trade duty assignments with another seaman who was assigned to the West Coast

who wanted to be on the East Coast. Both ship commanders agreed to the swap, so Terry's new assignment was to San Diego (National City) on the USS Molala, an ocean-going tugboat.

Since Terry's tours on the East and West Coasts each lasted two years, he was able to see several areas of the world that he would not otherwise have seen. On the USS Barney, he traveled to the Mediterranean Sea and saw ports in Italy, Greece, and Spain. As a crew member on the USS Molala, he was able to travel to Japan, Korea, and the Philippine Islands. One thing Terry said that he would do differently if he were to start all over again is that he would not have joined the Navy immediately after his high school graduation.

He said it would have been better for him if he had waited until he was a little older! In his short four years with the Navy, he attained the rank of Seaman (E-3).

Terry really enjoyed the travel experiences and different cultures in other parts of the world, but he really was "homesick" when he was deployed.

The hobbies and past-times that Terry enjoys as a life-long bachelor are bicycle riding, swimming, and playing "penny poker".

Terry learned at the recent veterans' event at the park about government grants available to assist with health and safety issues in the homes of veterans who qualified for the program. Terry applied for grant money to fix issues in his home and soon learned that his application for repairs was approved! Soon, his dilapidated storage shed will be replaced. The replacement shed will be built on a new concrete pad that will make the shed much more durable and weather-tight. Additional repairs that will be addressed in his home are skirting around his mobile home, which will either be repaired or replaced, and cracks in the exterior of his home will be sealed, caulked, and painted to keep out the rain. The government funds have really helped veterans, like Terry, when they really needed it. He is glad to have learned about the program at the

AVAG-sponsored event and looks forward to the next veterans' luncheon that will be held later this month! 🦋





Donna Grims

Recent rains reminded Donna Grims, the widow of a veteran, that the roof in her mobile home was going to need repairs since more leaks were making themselves known with every passing storm. She was wondering how she would ever be able to afford to pay for the necessary repairs. Coincidentally, at about the same time, she learned about an upcoming veterans' event in mid-September at Cherokee

Mobile Home Park, where she is a resident. At first, Donna disregarded the invitation since she was not a veteran, but when talking to the organizers of the event, she was surprised to learn that, as a widow of a veteran, she would be welcome and was encouraged to attend the Veterans' Appreciation Luncheon at the club house in her community.



Donna's late husband, Jim, served in the U.S. Navy from 1961–1963, as a sonar man on a destroyer. He was assigned to Newport, RI. Donna, a West Virginia-born girl, had never been very far away from her family, and moving to an East Coast Navy town was an extreme culture shock! She experienced deep loneliness when Jim was out to sea. To make matters worse, they

had a small apartment that had a shared bathroom with the neighboring apartment! After Jim's two-year enlistment with the Navy was complete, he went into the U.S. Naval Reserve and was assigned to a submarine, which he really enjoyed.

Donna says he probably would have made a career of the Navy had he been assigned to submarine duty while he was in the Navy.

Considering the high divorce rate of naval personnel assigned to ships, it is amazing that Donna and her husband were married for sixty-two years! They had two children together. Donna also has four step-grandchildren.

Prior to Jim (Donna's husband) being drafted, he had graduated from West Virginia University with a degree in Sociology. After the Navy, while in the reserves, he taught psychology, criminology, and sociology at a junior college in Connecticut, the state where their two children were born. He retired from teaching after twenty years.

When their children reached adulthood, each moved to California. When the kids moved away, Donna and Jim decided that they needed to be closer to them, so they also moved to California in 1988. Donna has always wanted to be close to her family. On one memorable vacation, the extended family of twenty-four members all went on a cruise together—a vacation that Donna still treasures! After Jim's passing in 2012, Donna was lonely again, so she



The newly repaired roof on veteran's widow Donna Grim's home in Cherokee Mobile Home Park will keep her dry and warm on rainy days and cool on sunny and hot Southern California days.

organized a weekly card game (known as "hand in foot", a variation of Canasta) at her home. Every week since 2012, Donna and five other ladies in the park meet to play cards and to share their lives together! Good way to conquer loneliness, Donna!

At the recent veterans' luncheon at Cherokee Mobile Home Park clubhouse, there were several guest speakers who shared about some benefits that many veterans may not be aware of, such as burial privileges in National Cemeteries for the veteran and his or her spouse.

Also, a representative from the Veterans' Administration helped some of the veterans in attendance at the event sign up for a number of helpful programs and services. It was at this event that Donna learned of a government grant program that would enable her to have her leaking roof repaired—at no cost to herself! An aide from Congressman Lou Correa's office had applications for grants that were available for repairs needed for health and safety concerns in the homes of veterans (or their widows). AVAG (American Veterans' Assistance Group), which sponsored the luncheon, helped Donna and a number of the other residents of the park complete the applications. Several weeks later, Donna learned that her application had been approved! A contractor came to inspect her home and determined that her roof was in "bad shape" and needed to be resealed, and some rotting wood needed to be replaced. It wasn't long after the inspection that the repair work began and was completed.

Donna says that it has been "a Godsend!" Not only is the leaky roof a thing of the past, but with the warmer days lately, she has discovered that the thicker, snow-white roof has kept the interior of her home quieter and cooler! She is thrilled and is forever grateful to the Congressman and to AVAG. She looks forward to more veterans' events at the park and getting to know the other members of the park's military community a little better. ✨

Meet More AVAG Veterans



Guy E. Gooding, Jr.
U.S. Marine Corps
1980–1985

AVAG Desert View MHP

Guy E. Gooding, Jr., served in the United States Marine Corps as a Combat Engineer and received a rifle expert badge. Growing up in the tough projects of Avalon Gardens, Los Angeles, he knew his mother had raised him right and decided to join the military to avoid the gangs and drug wars.

He married his high school sweetheart, Rhonda, and they had two sons while he served in the Marine Corps. His wife and two boys remained at Camp Pendleton when he was deployed. While serving his country, he spent time in the Philippines, Hawaii, and North Carolina.

After leaving the military, they had a third son. As he spoke about his sons, you could tell how proud he was of their accomplishments in life.

After his second marriage ended and his mother passed away, Gooding became homeless. He wound up at the VA in Long Beach, where they allowed him to park his car in the parking lot, fed him, and let him take showers. He stayed there for about six months, and as he shared the story of being homeless, he praised the Long Beach VA, saying, "They are the best," as tears welled up in his eyes.

Eventually, he then went to live in Virginia for about three or four years with his first wife, Rhonda.

He believes in encouraging young people to join the military so they can learn about and respect our country. He feels that if they join the military, they will do better in their lives.

With his guidance, his stepson, Keionta Martin, joined the Marine Corps, and he's doing amazing. He is already a corporal.

When asked if he would join the military again, Gooding said yes. What he enjoyed about the military was building things, blowing up things, and the camaraderie with the guys.

While serving, Gooding admired Senior Drill Instructor Staff Sergeant Powell, describing him as someone you would see in the movies; he fought for the American way of life. He also admired Senior Drill Instructor Staff Sergeant Carter, and he looked up to both of them.

In 2021, Connie from Santiago Sales called him to let him know that he had been approved for a home at Desert View Mobile Home Park. "My whole life got turned around," he said. Connie worked for a whole year to get him into a home.

AVAG provided down payment assistance for his home, and the manager helped him connect with AVAG to receive monthly rent credit. He is very grateful for AVAG's help with rent assistance, which helps him make ends meet, as does his monthly visit to the food bank. 🦋



Brian Williams
U.S. Air Force
1976–1982
Hope Chapel Veterans
Connect Group

Brian Williams, born and raised in Westminster, California, joined the Air Force at 18, serving six years. His first assignment was Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota, followed by Eielson AFB, near Fairbanks, Alaska.

As a Heating Systems Specialist, he worked in the steam-heated, underground utility tunnels, a stark contrast to the sub-zero, arctic chill of the long Alaskan winter. It was like jumping from a deep freeze into a sauna! One December, based on a tip from a friend, he hopped on a C-5A Galaxy airplane to California to spend a warm Christmas with his family.

His last duty assignment was Castle AFB, in Merced, California—just a few hours drive from his family in Orange County!

At the tender age of eighteen, Brian left home to start a new life. He admits that he made many bad choices, following the lead of his young airmen colleagues. If he could go back in time, he would definitely live his life differently.

One wise choice Brian made was to join a gospel choir while stationed in Alaska. He wanted to be appreciated and loved to sing, and the choir provided him with a supportive community of friends who lived lifestyles that were very different from his own. Brian began to make better choices, putting him on a better spiritual path that he continues to follow today.

Brian and his wife of 38 years have three sons, three grandsons, and three granddaughters. None live further away than five hours by car, so he looks forward to the many occasions they all get together.

In civilian life, Brian has been employed for about one year by Stater Brothers as a night stocker, but he has over 26 years of merchandising experience.

Brian's military tours taught him a lot, and he misses the camaraderie of his fellow airmen. He joined Anaheim Chapter #23 of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), where he actively serves on its Executive Committee. His words of wisdom to everyone are, "Life is too short! Enjoy your life while you can!" 🦋

AVAG Serve Day

Serve Day is a one-day event to love and serve neighbors in our local community through practical projects and acts of service.

Serve Day at Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park

AVAG and Quality Material Handling (QMH) partnered on Saturday morning, September 16, 2023, to serve the community of Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park.

Ten volunteers from QMH and seven volunteers from AVAG arrived at 8 a.m. in the morning to prepare.

Sixteen households were blessed as these amazing volunteers came out to do gardening and home projects, such as power washing their homes and removing large items and debris.

It was great to have our veterans, Dale Fredrick and Michael Goens, from our Sequoia AVAG chapter volunteer to bless this community. 🙏



The QMH and AVAG volunteer team.



From Lilly Green: "Thanks so much to you and the young ladies for your help, as well as Mr. Mike."



From Roberta Gardner: "Thank you and the young ladies for the work they did. It was much appreciated!"



Brenda Pinto trimming bushes for Air Force veteran, **Valerie Miller**.



From Pam Van Goey: "Please thank your team of volunteers for all their hard work. That was so nice!" She was so happy they power washed her home.



Cora, thrilled that her yard was being taken care of, couldn't stop thanking Hector Pinto for pulling out a stump in her yard. She'd been wanting to get rid of it for years!



Veteran **Dale Fredrick** from Orangewood Mobile Home Park volunteered.



Ellie Finneran, with QMH owners, Hector and Julia Pinto, who helped by power washing her home (Julia shown in action at right) and cutting back her cactus. She's 85 years old and these things she cannot do anymore. She said she didn't know what she would do without them.



Karen Tomlin, who cares for three autistic children, was grateful volunteers worked on her house.



Patricia Torres, whose home was power washed, with volunteers.

2023 COMMUNITY CLEANUP WITH AVAG

By Danae Arreola, posted on October 6, 2023, <https://www.qmhinc.com/2023-community-cleanup-with-avag/>

On September 16th, 2023, Quality Material Handling, Inc. joined forces with American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) at a mobile park in San Bernardino, CA with tools in hand, ready to help veterans and their families clean up their lovely community.

American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) is a wonderful non-profit organization who focus on helping veterans in any way possible. Our team at Quality Material Handling have had the pleasure of working with AVAG in the past. Therefore, it was an amazing opportunity to work with their wonderful Chaplain, Doreen Matsumoto, and the rest of their team once again. It is always a pleasure teaming up with an organization who focus on doing good throughout their community.

Since it can be difficult to perform upkeep on the community due to accessibility, a total of 16 homes eagerly waited to be cared for. There were a wide range of projects, consisting of gardening, power washing, and removal of debris. Our volunteers were quick to get to work and help in any way they could. Snacks and beverages were also provided to ensure that everyone was fueled for the day and taken care of.

Following the cleanup, the community expressed their gratitude to our extraordinary team of volunteers through heartfelt messages. Karen Tomlin expressed to us, "Thanks for the help with my yard. I really appreciate it and all the people who do such great things in the community. You are a true blessing." We also received a message from Roberta Gardner, which stated "Thank you to the volunteers who helped me on my front yard. Being old is tough and every bit of help from a reputable group of yours is a lot to us."

Overall, we are all so thrilled to have been apart of this glorious event. One of our core values is that "We Serve," so being given the opportunity to go out and serve such a loving community is truly rewarding. We are so appreciative of the hard work that all of the volunteers put into this event. Thank you so much to AVAG for allowing us to be apart of such a wonderful team. We look forward to more opportunities to give back to our communities in the future. ✂



Air Force veteran, **Valerie Miller**: "Just wanted to thank you again for all the hard work. Things look so much better. You have a good crew there. I really appreciate it."



From **Angela Rambo**: "Thank you again for the help you provided; I suffer from back injury and cannot lift more than 7 lbs."

Serve Day at Santiago Creek Orange Estates

AVAG and Cottonwood Outreach from Cottonwood Church partnered for a Serve Day at Santiago Creek Orange Estates in Orange, California. We worked on twenty homes.

Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto's friend, Doug Duran, lent us one of his employees and a trailer to put all the trash in.

Alex Gavidia sent two of his skilled workers from his company, Gavidia RRP. They helped with repairs we couldn't have done without their expertise. They took on veteran George Roth's big tree project.

Volunteers from Cottonwood gardened and pulled weeds, and they also washed windows.

AVAG volunteers helped out too. Always-helpful veteran Mike Goens drove out of San Bernardino to lend a hand.

Thank you to everyone for their hard work.

AVAG team: Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, Flagman Frank Waldrop, and Paul Buron

Cottonwood Outreach Volunteers: Nancy, Natalie, Noomi, Jude, Brice, Blake, Chris, and Gale 🐦





AVAG Forms a New Partnership with Westmount of Cypress Senior Living

On July 17, we started a new Operation Timothy Bible study at Westmount of Cypress Senior Living.

We received a call from Natalie Favela of Cottonwood Church looking for a ministry team to lead a Bible study or church service once a week at Westmount. With the help of Chaplain Mellissa Breunig and Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, we have been providing ministry support and discipleship training.

AVAG provides all of the Bibles and study materials from the four-book series Operation Timothy.

We start off our Bible study with singing praise and worship songs, and then open with a prayer, and then onto our Bible study. It's amazing to see the seniors passion for the word of God.

We spoke to Erica Powell, the Activities Director, and asked her how many more veterans were in the community. A screen displays their photos on the TV as you walk in. We couldn't believe how many veterans were at this location.

Partnering with Barbara Winkler and Rochelle from So Cal Quilts of Valor, we were able to present them all with their own personal Quilts of Valor. The residents that participate in Bible study came out to volunteer and help.

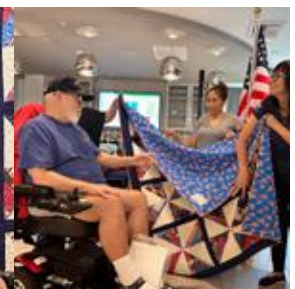
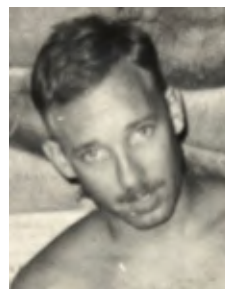
It was great to have Natalie Favela come from Cottonwood Church, who donated all of the refreshments. Honoring the veterans touched them so much. Over 20 veterans received Quilts of Valor. 🦋



Operation Timothy Bible Study group



So Cal Quilts of Valor presentation event.



Santiago Arvizu, U.S. Army WWII veteran.

Arthur Newman served in the U.S. Army during Vietnam



Robert Timms

Robert Timms, a 91-year-old Army veteran, lives at Westmount of Cypress Senior Living. He quit Cypress High School and entered the service when he was 17 years old. At the time, he wasn't a fan of school. His mom and dad were divorced, and he had to get one of them to sign him up.

Robert served from 1950–1953 in the United States Army. He was a BARMAN (Browning Automatic Repeating Rifle) in the 2nd Recon, Second Infantry Division. His job in recon was to go behind enemy lines in North Korea to gather information and create confusion.

While in North Korea on November 30, his unit was trapped by the Chinese. During this encounter, he was hit by enemy fire, wounded by shrapnel in his left thigh and body, and shot in his left shoulder. The temperature at the time was 30 below zero, so his blood clotted and froze with the material and his skin, which saved his life.

Robert hid in the bushes and crawled and walked for a couple days in the wilderness until he saw an American truck

coming down the highway. As it was driving by, and he was able to flag them down. They took him to the hospital, and then he went to an Army station hospital in South Korea. Shortly after, he was flown to a hospital in Kyoto, Japan, where he remained for 3 months.

As a result of his wounds, Robert was awarded a Purple Heart on October 15. He stayed in the service but did not see any more combat.

After he got out of the service, he returned to Cypress and worked for a little while. His future mother-in-law recommended that he go work for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). He got a job at LAUSD in 1960 and worked there until he retired in 1990. He has now been retired for 32 years.

At LAUSD, he held the following job titles: Building and Grounds Coordinator, School Facilities Planner, and Project Engineer.

While working for the LAUSD, he went back to school and earned three degrees: one in Civil Engineering, another in School Management from Pepperdine, and a third degree that he can't remember.

Robert married his wife, June Ann Thomas, on January 31, 1962, in Las Vegas.

In recognition of his service, AVAG presented him with a quilt of valor on September 6, 2023. AVAG also presented him with a Purple Heart Challenge Coin as well as an AVAG Challenge Coin.

When asked if he would do his service all over again, he said that he would volunteer to fight again.

Robert said that at 91, he is still feeling good. 🦋



Anita Bean served in the U.S. Army for three years during the Korean War, her rank was private first class, her duties MOS lab tech.



Nicolas Stassi served in the U.S. Navy during Korea for four years. His rank was BT3. Job duties operator boiler duties.



Fred Hamlyn served in the U.S. Army during the Cold War for two years. His rank was SPO3. He was an engineer, and he repaired heavy equipment.



Mike Scuro served in the U.S. Navy for 23 years, and served in Vietnam. His rank was Lieutenant Commander and he was a helicopter pilot.

Happy 100th birthday to World War II veteran Harold Gomer!



Harold Gomer, WWII Navy veteran, with his family at his 100th birthday celebration at Santiago Creek Orange Estates.

AVAG organized a 100th birthday celebration for WWII veteran Harold Gomer on October 21, 2023, at Santiago Creek Orange Estates. Harold's friends, the community, and his entire family, who traveled from all over the nation, turned out in large numbers.

Congressman Rep. Lou Correa read to Congress in Washington, DC, honoring Harold Gomer. This day is a permanent record of the history of the United States.

The festivities commenced with Mr. Gomer seated outside, awaiting the start of the parade in his honor. The parade included over 65 motorcycles representing all of the various legions in the surrounding area. Thank you to Jeff from American Legion Post 295—Cypress, who worked with the Legion Riders at our local Orange American Legion.

Our friends from American Legion 555—Midway City attended to celebrate Harold's birthday, and presented him with a generous gift of \$100.

Congresswoman Young Kim also sent a proclamation, a beautiful flag, and a special challenge coin.

Special thanks to DAV Chapter 23, who came out in full force, presenting a gift of \$500 in cash—now that's a birthday present!

A special thank you to our exceptional caterer, Jason Cruz of Meals on the Grill, who provided a delicious lunch for everyone in attendance.

Thank you to Michael Lynn from the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) in Buena Park; he brought him a beautiful plaque and a generous check too.

The Cottonwood Church outreach team presented him with a gift certificate and two beautiful big baskets full of goodies.

The outpouring of gifts and cards was heartwarming, with local schools contributing stacks of cards from the children. The City of Orange Police Department presented Harold with a certificate and a challenge coin. A sea of police cars followed the motorcycles as they drove in at the start of the parade. Two of the police officers were veterans, so it was nice to share AVAG's mission with them.

Harold also received special medals in recognition of his service, and the entire community came together to wish him a joyous 100th birthday. It was a truly spectacular and unforgettable event. ✨

