



AVAG News

Spring/Summer 2024 • Volume 11 Issue 2

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AVAG Memorial Day Luncheon at Cottonwood Church

AVAG held its annual Memorial Day Luncheon at Cottonwood Church. Included are stories about the awards and special presentations, and about some of the veterans that participated in the event.

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The Hibard family visits Normandy for the 80th Anniversary of D-Day.

The Month of the Military Child:

Celebrating military-connected children, youth and teens

Vietnam Veterans Day

AVAG communities pay tribute to its Vietnam veterans.

AVAG Communities Celebrate Easter Mothers and Fathers Celebrated on Their Special Day

AVAG communities held events in honor of Mother's and Father's Day with lots of fun, games, and delicious meals.

AVAG Celebrates the U.S. Flag at Casitas Laverne

AVAG and Casitas LaVerne celebrated Flag Day with a special flag raising ceremony and a community luncheon.

Meet Our AVAG Veterans

AVAG in Action

Veterans helping veterans, AVAG puts words into action.

Meet Janeen and Fred Reiser of "Children Giving Gifts"

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In Memoriam

Our communities mourn the loss of three of its members.

AVAG Veterans Connect

Building community together — veterans AND spouses welcome!



Members of the 82nd Airborne Association Lew Millett Memorial Medal of Honor Chapter lead dignitaries at the front of the parade kicking off the AVAG Memorial Day Luncheon.

AVAG Memorial Day Luncheon at Cottonwood Church

Nearly four hundred veterans, spouses, widows, and supporters of veterans gathered at Cottonwood Church in Los Alamitos for a Memorial Day Luncheon and awards ceremony on Saturday, May 25th. The event was organized by Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and was made possible by the assistance of Cottonwood Church (which donated the facility and dozens of volunteers), American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) chaplains and volunteers, numerous table hosts, and a number of groups offering veteran resources.

At 11:30 am, the event opened outdoors with a parade on the sprawling plaza of Cottonwood Church. The parade's Grand Marshall Glenn Williamson accompanied the American Flag carried by retired members of the 82nd Airborne and dignitaries. Dignitaries included Los Alamitos Councilwoman Emily Hibard and Mayor of Cypress, Scott Minikus. As the flag passed by, more than a dozen veterans released white doves (sponsored by Torres Mortuary), and several dozen more spectators released white balloons. The second segment of the parade was a number of beautifully restored classic cars (including Vintage Ladies Car Club) that each carried veterans along the parade route lined with a flag-waving crowd of veterans and their families. The final wave of vehicles in the parade were dozens of Harley-Davidson motorcycles being ridden by members of the "Marine Riders" motorcycle riding club.

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AVAG Memorial Day Luncheon at Cottonwood Church continued

After the parade, the 82nd Airborne Association members folded the American flag in a moving ceremony that explained the meaning of each of the thirteen triangular folds of the flag and presented it to the Grand Marshall, Glenn Williamson, who was also honored by local dignitaries. Then a descendant of a survivor of the D-Day Invasion spoke about the importance of remembrance and honoring those whose sacrifices protected the freedoms and way of life that we so often take for granted.

On static display on the Cottonwood Plaza was a Vietnam Veterans of America UH-1 "Huey" helicopter. Not only did it provide photo opportunities for attendees, but it also brought back many memories for our Vietnam veterans.

As attendees at the event left the plaza and entered the building where the luncheon was served, they were able to look at photographs of veterans on the "Memory Table" put together by Mary Cruz and visit many resource tables of interest to veterans. Among the displays were:

- Veterans Legal Institute (Tustin): www.vetslegal.com
- Disabled American Veterans' Chapter 23 (Anaheim): www.DAV23.com
- Heart of Compassion Food Distribution (Montebello): www.heartofcompassionca.org
- VA/Long Beach Healthcare System, Public Affairs Specialist, Outreach Coordinator, office (562) 826-8000, x15373
- Quilts of Valor: www.socalqov.org
- American Legion Post 295 (Cypress): www.mylegion.org
- Torres Cremation and Burial Services (Monterey Park): www.torresmortuary.com
- Doctors Home Health (Home Healthcare) Lisa Abbott (909) 479-0324 or Doctorshomehealthsocal@gmail.com, provided two \$100 gift cards for the door prize drawing!
- Meridian Hospice Care, Craig Abbott, (909) 484-4810 or www.Meridianhospicecare.com
- Doctors Hospice of Southern California, (909) 465-9002 or doctorshospicesocal@gmail.com

Shortly after being seated in the banquet hall, the luncheon was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance and a prayer. Veterans (both male and female) had gift bags brought to them by children from the audience, courtesy of the "Children Giving Gifts" organization. Many of the tables had hostesses that had uniquely decorated their tables with colorful, patriotic centerpieces and provided cookies or other treats. The hostesses also served the meal and beverages to those seated at their table(s). The delicious meals, with a south-of-the-border theme, were prepared by Jason Cruz of "Meals on the Grill." There were also cupcakes provided by Lana Martinez.

After the meal, this year's recipient of the Charles Cruz Award was recognized. The program also included several slideshows and video clips featuring veterans and including scenes from WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf. There were also special speakers and program participants. They are listed below, but there are also short 'bios' of each of them in this edition of the AVAG News. You will also see a biographical sketch about the "Children Giving Gifts" founder, Janeen Reiser, and her husband, Fred.

- Lloyd Hall—Charles Cruz Award
- Glenn Williamson—Grand Marshall of the parade
- James P., Marine Corps Riders, gave his testimony.
- Wayne Ogilvie gave his testimony.
- Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, AVAG Head Chaplain
- Miguel Garcia, Army National Guard—example for Whole Armor of God

After the speakers, many door prizes were given away. Every attendee had received a "raffle" ticket. Among the prizes were military baseball caps, gift cards, small appliances, and wall decorations. Many of the prizes were provided by the generosity of the Richard Bruenig Foundation.

The event was a huge success! Long-time friends had the opportunity to renew friendships, and veterans were reminded that what they did in the line of service DID make a difference in our lives. Many reflected that regardless of the difficulties and challenges they faced as they served, they would willingly do it over again. 🦋



Los Alamitos Councilwoman Emily Hibard and Mayor of Cypress, Scott Minikus, posed for a photo with Grand Marshall, Glenn Williamson, Marine Corps veteran from Creek Orange, along with fellow Marine Corps veterans James W. Young and Lloyd Hall, and also Marine Corps Staff Sergeant Wayne Ogelvie, and Miguel Garcia, a National Guard Specialist.







The Whole Armor of God

AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto shared from Ephesians Chapter 6:10-17. US Army Specialist Miguel Garcia stepped up to assist, providing visual emphasis by putting on each element as she spoke:

1. Belt of Truth
2. Breastplate of Righteousness
3. Boots of the Gospel
4. Shield of Faith
5. Helmet of Salvation
6. Sword of the Spirit

Seven Veterans Honored with Quilts of Valor by SoCal Quilts of Valor



At the Memorial Day Luncheon, seven AVAG Veterans were proud recipients of custom Quilts of Valor handcrafted by members of SoCal Quilts of Valor. SoCal Quilts of Valor is a non-profit foundation whose mission is to cover service members and veterans touched by war with comforting and healing Quilts of Valor. Learn more about them at www.socalqov.org or contact Barbara Winkler at 562.925.7673 to inquire about a quilt for a veteran, for questions, or to donate fabric. ✂

The 2024 Charles Cruz Award Presented to Marine Corps Veteran Lloyd Hall

Lloyd Hall, who served in the Marine Corps, was selected as this year's recipient of the Charles Cruz Award, which is presented annually to a deserving veteran who serves other veterans. Lloyd is a member of the "Teufel Hunden" (Marine Riders) Motorcycle Club in Orange County and is active in many of the charitable causes supported by the group, many of which directly serve veterans.

Lloyd was born and raised in Missouri but attended college classes in nearby Illinois, where he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. He served from 1967 to 1971 and attained the rank of Staff Sergeant (E-6).

During his service, he was assigned to Camp Pendleton, Camp Lejeune, Quantico, Vietnam, and Okinawa. While in Vietnam, Lloyd was a guerrilla reconnaissance force leader. A "Kit Carson" scout serving with the Australian Army was assigned to Lloyd and served as the interpreter for the unit. Although they have not seen each other since they were in Vietnam, Lloyd still keeps in touch by Facebook with his "brother," Robert W. Lee, today! Since Lloyd served for several years in Vietnam, he was able to enjoy two R&R's: one to Europe, where he caught glimpses of Great Britain, Germany, and Italy, and once visited Australia.

After leaving military service, Lloyd followed a number of career paths. He started off in the automotive field as a mechanic. Then he was elevated to Service Manager and was employed for about six years in car dealerships with AMC, Nissan, and Jeep. Then Lloyd's career path switched to trucking. He began as a driver but then operated his own trucking firm. He arranged for the leasing of drivers and/or equipment, as requested. He stayed in this line of work for twelve years. For the final sixteen years, Lloyd worked to install manufactured homes and finish them for move-in. When he severely injured his knee doing this work, his physician told him he needed to retire! That was in 2010.

Lloyd does not regret retiring. His wife of 53 years, Nancy, an elementary school teacher for thirty years, retired in 2017. Since that time, they have gone on cruises together to places like Alaska, the Bahamas, the California Coast, Hawaii, and the Mexican Riviera. They also have a motorhome that they travel in for 30-day trips around the United States. One such trip took them to Sturgis, South Dakota, for the annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, the largest rally of this type in the world. He did not have his motorcycle with him, but loved the experience anyway!

Lloyd and his wife have three sons and six grandchildren. All of them live close to West Anaheim, where Lloyd and Nancy live. Lloyd feels very honored to have been selected as the Charles Cruz Award recipient and thinks very highly of Chaplain Doreen and the work that she does with veterans. 🦋



Shown above in December, 2023, Lloyd Hall and his wife, Nancy, have been supporters of AVAG's "Sponsor a Child" each Christmas.

The Charles Cruz Award: The story behind the award



Charles Cruz was a Vietnam veteran who served in the Army in a Field Artillery unit from 1970 to 1971. In his U.S. Army career, he attained the rank of Specialist 4 (E-4).

While in Vietnam, he was exposed to Agent Orange and suffered many ill effects as a result. His lungs began to fail, and he had to use supplemental oxygen in order to survive. In 2017, he was designated as a candidate for a complete lung transplant when lungs from a compatible donor became available. During the middle of the night, UCLA Medical Center called to say that he needed to come to UCLA immediately if he wanted to accept the lungs. Charles said, "Yes!". The transplant was successful! Now Charles had a new lease on life!

He and his family attended Cottonwood Church in Los Alamitos for many years. Later in 2017, he learned of a Veterans' Connect group that met at Cottonwood. That's where he first met Chaplain Doreen, who was leading the group at the time.

Charles began a deeper spiritual walk and wanted to make a public profession of his faith in Jesus Christ, so he asked Chaplain Doreen to baptize him in 2018! He was the first one, of many, that Doreen baptized! Since then, Charles' entire family has been baptized by Chaplain Doreen! Incidentally, she is now the godmother of all three of Charles and Mary Cruz's sons, as well as one grandson, Jayden!

Charles knew that his new lungs would give him more time with his family and to help lead others to a faith in Jesus. He was making many connections with fellow veterans and was known to many.

In late 2020, at the peak of COVID, due to a weakened immune system, Charles contracted bronchitis. He went to the hospital and was placed on a ventilator. His family could not see him in person, but they spent many hours with him daily using FaceTime. They talked to him and had Bible studies together. On December 29, 2020, Charles went home to be with Jesus.

Three years ago, Charles' family and Chaplain Doreen began to discuss the possibility of something now known as the "Charles Cruz Award." The first recipient received the award in 2022. Now, each year at the Memorial Day Veterans Luncheon, a new recipient accepts the




award, presented in the memory of the late Charles Cruz. The honoree receives personalized gold dog tags and certificates of appreciation from local cities, the county, and local members of Congress.

When asked how recipients for the Charles Cruz Award are selected, Joshua, his youngest of three sons, said that the entire Cruz family and Chaplain Doreen create a short list of nominees. With all of the connections Chaplain Doreen has throughout Southern California, there are always plenty of veterans that are worthy nominees.

Narrowing the field down to just two or three is the most difficult task! There are only a few basic criteria that must be met.

1. Must be a U.S. military veteran,
2. Must still be actively involved working with or helping other veterans in worthwhile projects or through veterans groups of some kind.

It does not matter when the veteran served, how long he or she served, what branch of service the veteran was in, or what rank he or she attained. From the list of nominees being considered, the family chooses one of the veterans as the next yearly recipient. The nominee is asked how he/she feels about being honored. If they decline to be a nominee, the family selects the second veteran on the nominee list as the recipient.

The family has also discussed the possibility of establishing a foundation that would honor the memory of Charles Cruz well into the future, but there are no firm plans to create such a foundation at this time. 



Thank you to our Memorial Day Luncheon Volunteer Team!

We're incredibly grateful to the dedicated volunteers who made our annual Memorial Day Luncheon a success! Many components go into planning this event, and your contributions were invaluable.

- A warm thank you to our hostesses who beautifully decorated the tables, creating a welcoming atmosphere for our guests.
- Our caterer was **Jason Cruz with Meals on the Grill**.
- **Lana Martinez** designed cupcakes, that were as beautiful as they were delicious!
- **Melissa Breunig** deserves a special shout-out for assembling all the exciting raffle prizes.
- **Doug, Stacey, and Frank** efficiently managed the gift bag station donated by Children's Giving Gifts.
- **Karl**, our "dove wrangler," expertly coordinated the release of doves, ensuring a touching tribute to our veterans.
- **Valerie Saldana and Ray Ray** went above and beyond by organizing the placement of veterans with the classic cars in the parade. Valerie's dedication extended to recruiting her car club for participation.
- Our amazing **Cottonwood** volunteers provided invaluable assistance with the concierge cart, parade navigation, and various other tasks.
- A special thanks to **Mary Cruz** for setting up the POW/MIA table and the Memory Table, honoring those who served.

Thank you to each and every one of you! Your helping hands make events like this possible. 🙌



AVAG Memorial Day Luncheon: Meet Our Veterans



Glenn Williamson, at center in the group above, wearing a dark blue suit, was selected to lead the AVAG Memorial Day parade.

Glenn Williamson

On Saturday, May 25th, 2024, American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) invited veterans to a Memorial Day luncheon at Cottonwood Church in Los Alamitos, CA. More than four hundred veterans, their spouses, and supporters attended! The event began outdoors with “the colors” being carried to start a parade of classic cars and Harley-Davidson motorcycles. Accompanying the color guard from the 82nd Airborne (retired), were dignitaries, such as the Mayor of Cypress, city council members, representatives from the offices of several U.S. Congress members, and the Grand Marshall. This year, Glenn Williamson, who served with the Marines, was selected to lead the parade.

Glenn first met Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto about five years ago when she conducted a funeral service for a mutual friend, another veteran. One of Glenn’s veteran friends invited him to a veterans luncheon at the clubhouse in the senior mobile home community in Orange where he lives. Chaplain Doreen visited that park often and Glenn and Doreen soon became friends. Glenn was surprised when she approached him recently about being the Grand Marshall for the parade at Cottonwood in late May. Doreen does not just pull names out of a hat, but considers many veterans that should be honored by such an opportunity. Humbled, and somewhat embarrassed when Doreen asked him, Glenn accepted.

After the parade, there were several speeches and presentations. Chaplain Doreen asked Glenn to say a few words. Not known as a man of many words, Glenn simply said, “I appreciate the honor to have been selected as this year’s Grand Marshall. God bless America! Let’s go eat!” With that, all of the attendees went indoors for a delicious lunch, gift bags, door prizes, moving testimonials, and a living demonstration of “the Whole Armor of God” by Chaplain Doreen and an Army National Guard soldier.

In 1965 Glenn received a Selective Service “invitation” to serve our nation (a “draft notice”). He immediately decided that since he had to enlist, he would rather NOT join the Army because he

had grown up near Fort Ord, CA, and knew that Army life was not what he wanted! He chose to become one of the “few and the proud”, a U.S. Marine.

He served from 1965 until 1968 and attained the rank of Corporal (E-4). He carries vivid memories of his service in Vietnam, but as one might expect, he is reluctant to talk about his experiences and the circumstances leading to his becoming a Purple Heart recipient. As a Marine recruit, Glenn was sent to MCRD San Diego and has stood on the yellow footprints and been called a “maggot”, like so many Marines before, and after, him. He served as a rifleman in the jungles of Vietnam (and Laos) for thirteen months. During that time he was able to travel to Hong Kong for an “R&R” lasting a memorable five days. He met some “Aussie” military members who served in Australia’s equivalent of the Marine Corps and they hung out together for his brief stay in Hong Kong.

After Glenn’s tour of duty was over in Vietnam, he stopped briefly in Okinawa and Guam, and finished the rest of his enlistment at Camp Pendleton, California. After his discharge he did not join any military reserve component because he was “done with it!”

A number of years later, Glenn had some physical issues that related to his service in the Marines. He went to the Veterans Administration Hospital, but recalls that “nobody got satisfaction” (at that time) from making attempts to file disability claims. That was until about five years ago when Glenn met Chaplain Doreen for the first time. She told him he should go file a claim. He was reluctant because of his previous experiences with the VA, but Doreen persisted and told him that she would take him to the VA herself, if that’s what it would take!

He agreed to let one of Doreen’s “helpers” start the process with him. As it turned out, the head of the department they went to filled out the paperwork for Glenn and submitted the claim! Upon review, Glenn’s claim was approved on the first try AND he was classified as 100% disabled! A few months later he began receiving monthly benefit checks, something that has changed his life! He expresses much gratitude to Chaplain Doreen, a strong advocate for all veterans! He urges other veterans to file for claims even if they have filed previously.

When asked if he would serve again (if he were a teenager again) he said, “Yes, but only if I was guaranteed a different job specialty!” He indicated that he really would have liked to have gone into the Navy or the Air Force and have become a Warrant Officer so he could fly. Flying helicopters also would have appealed to him.

In the many years since his discharge, Glenn worked in construction and in commercial fishing. Eventually he started his own drywall and painting business, but prefers doing drywall. He still retains his license (though it is currently “inactive”) to do this type of work if he “feels like working”, but otherwise he considers himself semi-retired. He has lived in Santiago Creek Orange Mobile Home Park for the past sixteen years and enjoys getting together with fellow veterans. 🦋

Wayne and Marla Ogilvie

Wayne Ogilvie was one of the featured speakers at the Memorial Day Veterans Luncheon held at Cottonwood Church.

Wayne came from an all-American family with a family tree filled with veterans. As part of such a family, Wayne was very patriotic and joined the U.S. Marine Corps in 1984, where he remained on active duty until 1996. After discharge, he joined the Marine Corps Reserves at MCAS El Toro for two years. When MCAS El Toro began preparing for closure, the unit was moved to MCAS Miramar Marine Corps Air Station. Wayne remained in the Reserves until 1999, attaining the rank of Staff Sergeant (E-6).

As a Marine, Wayne served at MCAS El Toro, Camp Pendleton, Twenty-Nine Palms, and on Okinawa. He was trained as an Aircraft Firefighter. This career path and the challenges faced by all Marines changed his life in many ways. His unaccompanied tour to Okinawa put additional strains on his marriage, as is the case with many military members in similar situations. In the testimony that he gave at the Veterans' event at Cottonwood, Wayne referred to one specific event, while he was assigned at MCAS El Toro, that set him on a path in a totally different direction.

As a young boy, Wayne was raised in a Christian home, attended church regularly, and called himself a "Christian." Once he was out on his own, enlisted in the Marine Corps, and had gotten married, he drifted away from God. Other things became priorities in his life. That all changed on May 2, 1993, at MCAS El Toro, located in Orange County.

The MCAS El Toro hosted a spectacular air show every year. As a member of the Crash Fire Rescue team in 1993, Wayne had a close-up view from the flightline of every plane that performed at the air show. His team was strategically placed and ready to spring into action in the event of an emergency.

A crowd of over 500,000 was enjoying every thrilling aerial demonstration! A slight change was made in the scheduled events due to one of the pilots being ill and unable to perform. A "dogfight" had been originally scheduled, so the pilot of the second aircraft, an F-86 Sabre, decided that he would do a solo act so the crowd would not be disappointed.

The unthinkable occurred while the pilot was flying over the runway in an aerial loop, too low to finish the loop safely. The jet slammed into the runway in a thunderous ball of flame and heat. Wayne and his team responded immediately, but Wayne knew their efforts were not going to make a difference to the pilot, who died in the crash. Wayne realized that some things in life are not in our control but that we can make choices that ARE within our control. From that moment on, Wayne changed many things in his life. The best choice he made was to communicate daily with God and ask Him for guidance.

After Wayne left the Corps and the Reserves, he began a new career at the University of California/Irvine (UCI), where he worked until his retirement in mid-2023. Not long after beginning a second career at UCI, his marriage ended in divorce. It was at this point he started taking notice of a friendly, beautiful coworker. Marla, whose mother had been a Marine and whose father was in the U.S. Navy, took a liking to Wayne right away. Wayne and Marla married at a later date.



Marla retired from UCI in 2021. With more available time, she began participating in activities that she didn't previously have time for. One new endeavor was joining an Hawaiian dance class at the Costa Mesa Senior Center in early 2023. She really enjoyed this activity and the new circle of friends. When Wayne, her husband, retired in mid-2023, she convinced him to join the class with her. She introduced him to the only other male ("kane") in the class, Doug "Chief" Zimmer.

When the Chief (a retired Air Force veteran) learned that Wayne was a veteran, he invited Wayne and Marla to the monthly "Veterans' Connect" at Hope Chapel in Huntington Beach. That's where Wayne and Marla first met Chaplain Doreen! Not many months later, Wayne and Marla began helping Chaplain Doreen at various outreaches sponsored by AVAG (American Veterans Assistance Group).

Prior to the Christmas season last year, they placed a box for toy donation at "Wilma's Patio" restaurant (owned by a friend) on Balboa Island. The collected toys were donated through AVAG at Christmas events for the children of veterans. It wasn't long after that Wayne and Marla began reaching out to veterans and senior adults in mobile home parks, senior centers, and at church.

Whenever AVAG receives an excess of donated items, such as toiletries from CVS Pharmacy, cosmetic bags, cell phone chargers, iPad covers, bag sealers, gift bags, and clothing items, Wayne and Marla help distribute those much-needed items to people who need them. One example is that many of those toiletries and over-the-counter drugs found their way into Christmas stockings that the Hawaiian Dance Class at the Costa Mesa Senior Center was providing to senior Pacific Islanders. They have also found grateful recipients for clothing items and have actively participated at Mother's Day and Father's

Day events for seniors and veterans. Because of their volunteerism, they were recently featured in an article in a monthly edition of the Costa Mesa Senior Center News!

This volunteering couple also lends a helping hand at events at Amistad Medical Clinic in Santa Ana, catering to low-income Hispanic seniors. They have also participated at events for Vietnamese seniors and visited the Blind Rehab Center at the VA Hospital in Long Beach. It is not uncommon for them to assist Chaplain Doreen in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties or to serve at a funeral. They also both recently joined the American Legion Post 291 and have participated in ship-

ping care packages for troops and other volunteer events at the post. These are some examples of the many ways they serve and are always on the lookout for additional ways they can serve others!

Wayne and Marla enjoy their lives together, full of purpose and service to Christ as they serve others! Consider joining them at the monthly Veterans' Connect at Hope Chapel on the fourth Saturday each month. Who knows where it might lead you?!

Veterans' Connect meets on the 4th Saturday, from Noon-1:45pm at Hope Chapel, located at 715 Lake Street, Huntington Beach, CA 92648 🦋

Ray Davis

Ray Davis is the epitome of a self-made man! Growing up, one of nine children in his family, at age thirteen, he went out on his own. He "couch surfed" at the homes of friends until he enlisted in the Navy.

At the Memorial Day Luncheon at Cottonwood Church, Chaplain Doreen told the audience she knew veterans who had changed the dates on their birth certificates in order to enlist before they were actually "of age." Ray was one of those eager teenagers who, when he was only fifteen, changed his birth certificate and enlisted in the U.S. Navy. While he was still in basic training, he became ill and was sent to the Naval Hospital, where his true age was discovered! He received an honorable discharge and was told that he could enlist again when he had reached the age that he could legally enlist. Ray wanted to reenter the Navy later, but the realities of life took priority. Before long, he had gotten married and started a family.

Ray never did go back into the Navy, but there has always been a special spot in his heart for veterans. Not surprising since his father had served in the Navy for nine years, one brother retired from the Navy as a Master Chief Petty Officer (E-9), and another brother served in the Army for three years. He also married into a military family, the Charles Cruz family.

Because his wife's uncle was Charles Cruz, it is not surprising that Ray met Chaplain Doreen! She was part of many Cruz family events. At one such event she baptized Charles. Ray had never been baptized, so he had Chaplain Doreen baptize him at a later date. She is now his "Godmother!"

At the recent Cottonwood event, Ray participated in several ways. First, Chaplain Doreen asked him to bring his beautifully restored 1956 Chevrolet Bel Air to the parade of cars. Always wanting to own a classic car, six years ago Ray bought this car and, with the help of friends and a professional paint job, he restored it to show quality. While waiting in the lineup for the car parade at Cottonwood, Chaplain Doreen placed another veteran and his wife in the car with Ray. Together, they all waved at the veterans along the parade route as they cruised by! Secondly, Ray has always wanted to "give back" to veterans. One way he has done this was by having a special challenge coin made. He distributed more than thirty of these coins at the Memorial Day event.

After his short Navy career, when Ray was a civilian again, he "started at the bottom," driving trucks and doing sales work for a produce company. Twenty-six years ago, with the skills he had gained, he



started his own produce company, Pacific Sun Distributing, located in the city of Bell. He sells California-grown produce all around the world, but mainly in the Pacific Rim countries. He also had a military contract to provide fresh produce to U.S. military personnel in the Middle East for about three years. He ships fresh produce by land, sea, and air based on the needs of the buyer.

Being a business owner is not for the faint-hearted! Not only does he seldom take a vacation, but his business is greatly affected by the economy at the time. During COVID, for example, business really dropped off. Many companies laid off their employees, but as difficult as it was, Ray decided to not lay off any of his employees since he knew that they all had families and expenses. He's always thinking of others!

Last year, Ray took his wife of 47 years on a long-awaited vacation—the first one in twenty-six years! They went to Hawaii, but Ray found himself working online and on the phone every day anyway. Due to the three-hour time difference from the mainland to Hawaii, he found himself working as early as 1 a.m.! Ray would like to "retire" by the end of this year, but has not yet found a realistic "exit plan!"

As mentioned earlier, Ray loves helping out veterans. Last year, the commander of a nearby Army National Guard unit contacted him about providing food to some of its lower-ranking members during the holiday season. Ray was able to fill the need. From time to time he is approached by other organizations, such as AVAG. Ray has seen to it those needs are taken care of as well. Ray makes an effort to express his gratitude to veterans for their contributions to the life we have in a free America today. He wants everyone to know that many of the freedoms and privileges we take for granted were made possible by the sacrifices made by servicemen and servicewomen in the various branches of our U.S. military. Ray is forever grateful. We ALL should be! 🦋

Miguel Garcia

Miguel Garcia is a “traditional Guardsman” in the California Army National Guard stationed at Los Alamitos Joint Forces Training Base here in Orange County. A traditional Guardsman is sometimes referred to as a “weekend warrior” because he/she has a civilian job during the week and then attends a Monthly Unit Training Assembly (a “drill”) one weekend per month and a two-week Annual Training Period, usually in the summer (aka, “Summer Camp”). The National Guard is also the State component of the U.S. Army, as opposed to the Army Reserve, which is a federal reserve component. California National Guard members have two Commanders-in-Chief; the President of the United States and the Governor of California. A Guard unit can be activated by either of these. The California National Guard has been activated locally for emergencies such as wildfires, riots, and Operation Medfly—helping to remove fruit from trees in areas affected by the Mediterranean fruit fly.

It is not easy balancing two careers. Each employer expects the most out of their employees and a Guard member needs to be a productive member at each place of employment. In his capacity as a Guard member, Miguel is currently a Specialist/E-4 at the 640HSC and serves as a Human Resources Specialist (42A). As a civilian, Miguel has worked in the home healthcare industry as a service coordinator, but currently is a Human Resources Generalist with the Mischeler Financial Group, a veteran-owned financial services company specializing in capital markets, bonds, and other investments. He has been with Mischeler a little more than a year now.

Miguel’s Dad and one uncle were both in the Army and his other uncle served in the Marines. His brothers, both who are older than Miguel, regretted not joining the military while they were still eligible (at a younger age). Miguel, being patriotic and wanting to follow the path his father and uncles had taken, and NOT wanting to have the same regrets as his brothers, decided to join the Army National Guard.

Following his enlistment he wanted to travel and obtain a security clearance. He performed basic training at Ft. Jackson, SC, and went to his specialty training (AIT) for a career as an Intelligence Analyst. After nearly a year in training, he barely missed qualifying and was required to retrain into another career field—Human Resources, a skill he now uses in both his military and civilian careers. He did, however, gain the security clearance that was one of his goals. Unfortunately, all of this training and months away from his home and young family caused much strain on his marriage relationship, which ended in an amicable divorce. His former wife and he share 50/50 custody of their three children—two daughters, ages 6 and 12 and one son, age 10.

In early May, Miguel was called into the office of his military commander. He was asked if he was willing to represent the Army National Guard at an upcoming event for veterans—the Memorial Day Luncheon at Cottonwood Church. He was told that all he needed to do was to show up, look sharp in uniform, and put on various pieces of his body armor in front of an audience of several hundred veterans!

Specialist Garcia accepted the challenge! During the event (detailed on page 5), Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto spoke about spiritual warfare and the importance of being prepared and protected. She introduced the topic using the passage in the Bible about “The Whole Armor of God”, Ephesians 6:10-17.



As Chaplain Doreen read, “...put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy...” (v. 13), she had Specialist Garcia, standing at attention next to her on stage, put on each additional protective item as she read about it in the Bible. In verse 14, she read, “putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness”. Miguel donned the flak jacket. She continued reading verses about shoes, the shield of faith, the helmet, and the “sword of the Spirit” - the Holy Bible. Specialist Garcia’s on-stage presence was a good object lesson for visual learners listening to Chaplain Doreen’s message. His three young children were at a table directly in front of the platform as their “Daddy” participated on stage.

Miguel lives in Westminster. He has a strong faith in God and is well-connected with a local church. Both he, and his children have participated in Shining Light Ministries food giveaways. He is modeling service to others to his young children. He says that when you have two careers and a young family, it is vital to “have faith in the Lord and a Christ-centered lifestyle”. He plans to continue helping others and to train his children in the habit of serving.

After the event, Specialist Garcia noted that he didn’t feel that he had accomplished anything that could compare to the sacrifices of the veterans in the audience at the Cottonwood event. He felt “unworthy” of the honor of being called a veteran. Many veterans of the wars and conflicts our country has engaged in don’t call themselves heroes either. Their sense of duty and heroism is pointed out by OTHERS who witnessed what they did, even though they, themselves, would say that they were just doing their job. If everyone “just did their job” what a remarkable world it would be! Miguel, you ARE doing your job! You volunteered for a job and continue to be trained to perform whenever and wherever you are needed! Maybe you will never be called on to do some of the things your fellow veterans have endured, but you are ready to meet the call just as they were. Thank you for your service! We are proud to call you a fellow veteran! 🇺🇸

James Young

James Young was one of the featured speakers at the recent Memorial Day Luncheon at Cottonwood Church in Los Alamitos on Saturday, May 25th, 2024. He served in the Marine Corps from 1985 to 1991 and is a combat veteran of the Gulf War. He attained the rank of Corporal (E-4) and was stationed in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Camp Pendleton, California.

Recently, James received a text message from Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto inviting him to speak at the Cottonwood event. You may wonder how Chaplain Doreen came to know James. Well, one may find her almost anywhere in Southern California at events related to veterans, so one night when she was at American Legion Post 295 in Cypress for “bike night,” she met James. Coincidentally, David Breunig, who serves as a chaplain with Chaplain Doreen at AVAG, is also the chaplain at Post 295! James admires Chaplain Doreen and says she is “phenomenal, heartwarming, and much appreciated.” So, when she asked him to participate at the Cottonwood event, he told her that he would help.

James is the President of the Orange County chapter of the Marine Riders, “Teufel Hunden,” a veteran’s motorcycle riding club (marineriders-th.com). He says that his chapter adopted that name to honor “Devil Dogs.” The name originated back in World War I in France. The occupying German troops called the U.S. Marines “Teufel Hunden,” literally “Devil Dogs,” when they encountered them in the fierce Battle of Belleau Wood in France in June 1918. The Marines stubbornly kept the Germans at bay. There were heavy casualties on both sides. The name “Devil Dogs” has stuck with proud Marines to this very day.

James does not like accolades and attention being brought to himself, but Chaplain Doreen convinced him that fellow veterans would like to know a little more about him and what he does, so he reluctantly agreed to be interviewed. He claims that being involved in various veterans’ groups is the only thing that keeps him sane! He strongly believes that he must have strict priorities in his life: family first, work second, and riding motorcycles third.

The Marine Riders love to ride their Harley-Davidson motorcycles, but they also love to participate in many charitable events. James and many members of the club ride to Las Vegas twice each year—in June and November—in support of the Toys for Tots program organized by the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve. In June, they participate in a number of fundraising events there to support the program. In November, they deliver toys and financial contributions to the Leatherneck Club in Las Vegas at approximately the same date as the U.S. Marine Corps birthday (November 10th).

Memorial Day is not about all veterans, according to James. It is meant to honor veterans who gave their all for their country. Many well-meaning people may greet veterans with, “Happy Memorial Day!” It is not intended to be a holiday that brings happiness, but as a time to reflect on what many brave service members, men and women, have sacrificed for those of us who remain to remember them.

Originally, James joined the Marine Corps because he wanted to be part of the greatest and best brotherhood. He believes that ALL veterans are brothers and sisters united by a common bond.



When James was discharged from the Marines in November of 1991, he met his five-month-old son for the very first time! After becoming a civilian again, he found employment in the welding supplies and distribution business. He has been in that line of work for the past thirty years. Nine years ago, he was hired by Encore Gas & Supply, a company that supplies welding gas, welding supplies, safety equipment, and lasercutting equipment. He continues to work there at the present time.

In his free time, if he is not volunteering with charitable events, James loves riding his Harley-Davidson, dove hunting, sport fishing, promoting safe riding, and helping veterans in need. Some of the charitable organizations that he contributes his time to are Patriots and Paws, Honoring Our Fallen, Totally Kids, and BACA (Bikers Against Child Abuse). He also supports the Marine Riders Breakfast held at the American Legion Post 295 on the third Sunday of every “odd” month.

James has been married for thirty-five years and has one son, one daughter, and one granddaughter. Incidentally, his son, the five-week-old son that he met when he was discharged from the Marines, has also served as a proud member of the U.S. Marines! 🦋

Los Alamitos Councilwoman Emily Hibard's D-Day Story: The Hibard Family Visits Normandy for the 80th Anniversary of D-Day

George, Harold, Floyd, Jack, and Charles Hibard, all brothers, served in World War II. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, Harold Hibard of the 101st Airborne Division and 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, made the ultimate sacrifice in Normandy, France. Harold Hibard was buried in Normandy, but later brought home and re-buried in his hometown of Dancy, Wisconsin.

A portion of a 1944 Wisconsin newspaper article reads as follows:

Private Harold Hibard is Killed on D-Day. One of 5 brothers in service from Dancy, Wisconsin dies in combat. Death in combat on D-Day, when Allied troops started their invasion of continental Europe by invading France June 6 has broken the ranks of the "Five Fighting Hibards" of Marathon County. It was officially revealed Tuesday when the War Department at Washington DC announced the death of Private Harold Hibard, 22, son of Charles Hibard, Dancy. Four brothers are serving on the scattered fronts throughout the world. Sergeant Floyd Hibard is stationed at an air base in India. Sergeant Charles Hibard is with the Army Air Corps in India, and Jack and George Hibard, both privates first class, are with the Marine Corps that is now engaged in wiping out scattered Japanese enemy resistance after the bloody battle of Saipan.

George Hibard survived, moved to Los Angeles, married, and named one of his sons after his brother Harold.

"Throughout my childhood, grandma and grandpa (George Hibard) would come over for dinner to our house in Downey on Sunday nights. He was always telling stories about the war. He said they were all ill-trained and unequipped, but they fought like hell and did as they were told. He was 22 when he signed up and was nicknamed "grandpa" and "old man" by the other guys who were all of 17 and 18 years old. He never seemed like the war bothered him much. I remember him being happy, and laughing, telling stories, and reciting poetry from memory," recounts Emily Hibard, George's granddaughter.

D-Day has never been just a historic marker for the Hibards, a Gold Star Family. A thousand stories have been shared about World War II, what led up to it, what countries were on which side, who was courageous, who wasn't, how many lives were lost, what was at stake, how it ended, and how the world was forever impacted...all while sitting around the kitchen table.

"A handful of Hibards had visited Normandy over the years, most recently being the 75th anniversary, but we were never all there at the same time. The 80th anniversary of D-Day would be different," said Emily Hibard. "In 2023, we scheduled time off work, booked flights, reserved vans, and secured a Normandy Airbnb big enough for all of us," she went on to say.

"My Great Uncle Jack is 99 years old and is the only one of the 'Five Fighting Hibards' still with us. He lives in Pomona, California and looks after his horses. Uncle Jack didn't make the trip, but the rest of us went to pay our respects. Our group consisted of Baby Boomers, Millennials, and Generation Alpha kiddos (ages 4 and 6)," said Emily Hibard."



Emily Hibard and family posed for a family group photo while visiting Normandy on the 80th anniversary of the D-Day invasion. Five Hibard brothers served in World War II, and one brother, Harold Hibard, of the 101st Airborne Division and the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, was killed on D-Day.

"On the morning of June 6, we drove to a meetup point in Saint Lo, Normandy, where we went through TSA-like security, boarded large busses, and were driven to the Normandy American Cemetery. The major freeways were shut down to local traffic to make way for the busses headed to the cemetery. Because President Biden and President Macron were there, security was tight. US Senator Joe Manchin and I were walking towards the cemetery at the same time. There was an excitement in the air. An awe almost. Nearly 200 World War II veterans made their way onto the stage amid the crowd's applause and adoration. The Greatest Generation will only be with us a little longer; everyone at the ceremony knew it. For some of these veterans, it might just be the last time they stand before a crowd of patriotic Americans and grateful French people, honoring them for their bravery back when they were in their teens and twenties. The stage was in front of us, jumbotron screens were peppered behind us, and to our left were the famous Normandy crosses. The crosses seemed to never end.

"In 8th grade, my English teacher made me memorize a poem called 'In Flanders Fields.' I thought of it as I was staring out at the crosses:

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

"Our world has changed a lot since The Greatest Generation was at the helm. Politics has left many veterans, many Americans, disheartened. But I wanted to share my story, my family's D-Day story, to encourage veterans...to encourage Americans. Do not lose heart.

"I'm a Millennial. I was born in the 1980s and supposedly, my generation does not remember what our grandfather's generation did. Supposedly, we don't know what was at stake throughout Europe. Supposedly we forgot that a group of people were rounded up, packed onto trains, and imprisoned in camps, where they were starved, tortured, and incinerated. Supposedly my generation has never walked in eerie silence through those camps in Dachau, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and the like. But many of us have. I have. And I remember. I am grateful.

"I have been able to travel to all seven continents, and when I return from international trips, I clap my hands when we touch down and kiss the ground. I love the United States of America. I am a

"Daughter of the American Revolution" (I'm the descendant of a soldier who fought in the American Revolution) and somebody in my family has fought in every major war since the American Revolution.

"Our country has certainly had its fair share of ups and downs, but we're Americans and we push forward. Armed with our God-given unalienable rights, we live our lives with a right to free speech and a right to protect ourselves. Unapologetically. The God of the Bible often spoke with a whisper. Tune in to this country's whisper and tune out the loud, forced voices speaking against our great country.

"The Longest Day lives on in you and me." 🦋

The Month of the Military Child: Celebrating Military-Connected Children, Youth and Teens

The spirit of community and support for military families shone brightly on Saturday, April 27, 2024, at the Month of the Military Child event held at Cottonwood Church. Every April, all month long, groups that support our military celebrate the courage, perseverance and tenacity demonstrated by our military-connected children, youth and teens and what they mean to our community.

At the request of event organizer Strong Families, Strong Children, AVAG brought out the beloved "shopping booth" for military kids attending the event. Children Giving Gifts provided us with goodies, while Cottonwood Church and our own volunteers ensured a smooth shopping spree. The Sunburst Academy cadets from the Joint Forces Training Base truly went above and beyond, helping set up, dismantle, and even guide the children. Cottonwood Church's generosity overflowed—not just with the venue, but with additional gifts and even a surprise truckload for our upcoming Mother's Day event!

Month of the Military Child has been originally focused on active-duty families, but we know veterans' children serve too. This event celebrated the strength of ALL military families, past and present. 🦋



Vietnam Veterans Day

AVAG Pays Tribute to its Vietnam Veterans

On Vietnam Veterans Day, March 29—the anniversary of the departure of the last American troops from Vietnam—we honor all who served on active duty in the U.S. Army and their families at any time between November 1, 1955 – May 15, 1975, regardless of duty location.

Veterans Social Connection, Long Beach VA

Once a month, generally the last Friday of the month, the Veterans Social Connection meets at the Long Beach VA Hospital from 8:30-10:30. In March, in honor of Vietnam Veterans Day, the usual breakfast event was expanded to become an all-day FREE event held on the patio adjoining the Patriots Cafe in Patriots Park, in the center of the expansive VALB grounds. The event included breakfast, lunch, haircuts, a live jazz band during lunch, and resource tables sponsored by a variety of organizations helping veterans.

Even though AVAG did not have a resource table at the event, two of its chaplains, Doug Zimmer and Patrick Duffy, attended the day-long event and mingled with the attendees. AVAG Veterans Frank P. and David S. who regularly attend AVAG's monthly "Veterans Connect" also attended the Vietnam Veterans Day Event at VALB. Monthly, AVAG visits the VA Hospital Blind Veterans Rehab, headed by Liz Greco. Several of the veterans at the Rehab Center for refresher training attended the all-day Vietnam Veterans Day Event. One of them, "Stoney," a professional blues musician, participated as a guest artist in several of the jazz/blues music sets that entertained event attendees. It was a top-notch band!

Several hundred veterans of all ages, from all branches of the service, came to the event. Each attendee was given a name tag with their first name and the branch of service in which they served. There were a wide variety of delicious FREE food choices for breakfast and lunch.

The resource tables included SoCal Quilts of Valor, the VA, the VFW, the American Legion, healthcare providers, and tables of new, or gently-used, clothing items. The female veterans enjoyed a large area with clothing catering totally to the women!

At every table, chair, food line, and resource booth in the Patriots Park veterans were connecting with other veterans. The nametags made it easy! There was friendly service rivalry, laughter, storytelling, joke telling, and friendship building. If you have not attended any events for veterans lately, why not consider the monthly Veterans Social Connection at the VA Hospital in Long Beach?

Also, if you haven't been to AVAG's "Veterans Connect," it meets every on the fourth Saturday of every month at Hope Chapel, 715 Lake Street, Huntington Beach, CA 92648 from 12:00 p.m. – 1:45 p.m. It includes a short, easy Bible study, a great lunch (FREE), door prizes, and camaraderie. You never know who you might meet at one of these events! 🦋



Rancho La Paz Mobile Home Park

The AVAG team and the Rancho La Paz community hosted a fantastic Vietnam Veterans Day event!

Guest speaker, Travis Mayfield, shared his story, leaving a lasting impression. Janet Brown graciously assisted in presenting certificates to the veterans, a well-deserved recognition for their service.

We were happy to fulfill Jack Gutman's wish and present him with a brand new AVAG shirt. Everyone enjoyed delicious In-N-Out Burgers, while the Children Giving Gifts table offered a delightful selection of goodies for all ages.

The presence of chaplain Steve from Life Pacific University added a special touch to the event. The event at Rancho La Paz was a resounding success, filled with inspiring words, delicious food, and a spirit of celebration for our Vietnam veterans. 🦋



Cherokee Mobile Home Park

The Vietnam Veterans Day event at Cherokee Mobile Home Park was a real success! The veterans were all smiles as they received brand new AVAG shirts and special gifts donated by Children Giving Gifts.

A heartfelt presentation was held in their honor, and we were proud to pin each veteran with Janet Brown's kind assistance.

Congresswoman Michelle Steel and Congressman Lou Correa were in attendance to present recognition certificates to these brave men and women. To top it all off, everyone enjoyed delicious In-N-Out Burger and refreshments thanks to Commander Manuel Martinez's generosity.

It was a fantastic day to show our appreciation for the Cherokee Mobile Home Park's Vietnam veterans! 🦋



Santiago Creek Orange Estates

Santiago Creek Orange proudly honored its Vietnam veterans on Vietnam Veterans Day. Guest speaker, Travis Mayfield, shared a powerful testimony about his time in service, how he came to Christ, and how his involvement with Veterans Connect has helped him to grow in his faith.

The event featured a special pinning ceremony for the veterans, with certificates presented from the offices of Congresswoman Michelle Steel and Congressman Lou Correa. Travis assisted AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto in pinning the veterans.



The event wasn't just about honoring veterans—we shared birthday wishes for Kenny Boheim, who turned 85, and we welcomed new residents! It was a wonderful day filled with appreciation, inspiration, and community spirit. 🦋

AVAG Communities Celebrate Easter

Pedley Mobile Home Park

The sunshine sparkled over Pedley Mobile Home Park, a welcome sight for the day's Easter event. Sheree from Casitas Laverne had contacted AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, suggesting that the event be planned for the park in Pedley, and that her sister Jan, who happened to be the park manager at Pedley would be able to help with the planning. So Doreen and Jan joined forces to bring some spring-time cheer to the residents.

The event bustled with activity. There were colorful Easter baskets overflowing with goodies, just waiting for eager little hands. Kids had fun participating in games—all hoping to snag a golden egg. For the more artistic residents, a coloring contest offered a chance to showcase their talents. Four were gifted with McDonald gift cards in recognition for their excellent sportsmanship throughout the games.

But the merriment didn't stop there. Jan, a true team player, kept everyone fueled with refreshing drinks and snacks. Then came the highlight – the grand Easter egg hunt! With Amanda Breunig sporting a fluffy bunny costume, the children scattered across the park, their baskets at the ready, determined to collect as many colorful eggs as possible.

A huge thank you went out to the amazing volunteers who made the day possible. Wayne and Marla, along with David and Mellissa Breunig, lent a hand wherever needed. Even sprightly 95-year-old Sumi Breunig joined in the fun, along with Nancy and Dallas. Their dedication ensured that everyone, young and old, had a memorable Easter celebration. 🐰



Diamond Bar Estates

The spirit of Easter filled Diamond Bar Estates with joy as a fantastic Easter event unfolded. There were smiles galore as 50 colorful Easter baskets, generously overflowing with goodies donated by Pastor Eric from Heart of Compassion, were handed out. A massive Easter egg hunt then sent the children on a delightful egg-collecting adventure across the park.

The Easter bunny, played by one of Diamond Bar's very own teenage volunteers, was a big hit! Kids lined up eagerly to capture a photo with the fluffy visitor. The event wasn't just about fun and games; it was also a chance to celebrate the true meaning of Easter.

Speaking of organization, a big round of applause went to the dedicated volunteers who made the day possible. The event's Bible Study members chipped in with their time and effort, ensuring everything ran smoothly. Special thanks were also given to Mellissa and David Breunig, whose help with filling the Easter baskets was invaluable.

Refreshments kept everyone energized throughout the day, and fun games with golden egg prizes added another layer of excitement for the children. Working alongside Yessie, the amazing manager, made the entire experience even more enjoyable. Her dedication and positive attitude were truly appreciated.

The Diamond Bar Easter celebration proved to be a heartwarming success, thanks to the collaborative spirit and the tireless efforts of all involved. 🐰



Mothers and Mother's Day Celebrated in AVAG Communities

Santiago Parkside Estates

We had a great turn out for our Mother's Day celebration at Santiago Parkside Estates. The ladies enjoyed an afternoon of socializing, a delicious lunch, along with a raffle and playing some bingo. Each mother received a gift bag donated to us by Children Giving Gifts and special goodies from the Cottonwood Outreach team. 🦋



Westmount of Cypress

At our regular Bible Study at Westmount Senior Living in Cypress California, we were able to bless the ladies with a special Mother's Day gift. Special thanks to Mellissa Breunig for helping to put these gifts together. 🦋

Santiago Orangewood Estates

The Mother's Day celebration at Santiago Orangewood Estates was also attended by residents of nearby Pacific Palms MHP and Sequoia Plaza MHP. Lunch was served and the ladies enjoyed playing bingo and winning prizes. There were raffles and special gifts for all the ladies. We had a freebie table which included donations recently received from Burlington Coat Factory. 🦋



AVAG Spreads Father's Day Cheer at Community Events

Sequoia Plaza MHP

For our Sequoia Plaza MHP June community meeting, AVAG supplied the goodies which were used by the community's kids to make Father's Day gift bags. The Father's Day meeting included the potluck meal which everyone enjoys supporting. The group enjoyed games of Left Right Center, the winners received a \$25 gift card to Stater Brothers and two \$10 gift cards to Starbucks, courtesy of Torres Mortuary who kindly donated them for this event. 🦋



Bike Night Fundraiser at the American Legion Post 295/Cypress

At the June 15th Bike Night Fundraiser at the American Legion Post 295/Cypress AVAG distributed special Father's Day gift bags to the attending veterans. Thank you to our friends at Children's Giving Gifts for generously providing Doreen with plenty of goodies to pass out to our veterans. 🦋





AVAG Celebrates the U.S. Flag at Casitas Laverne

On June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress approved the design of a national flag. Since 1916, when President Woodrow Wilson issued a presidential proclamation establishing a national Flag Day on June 14, Americans have commemorated the adoption of the Stars and Stripes in many ways—displaying the flag in the front of their homes, parades, and other patriotic observances. Prior to 1916, many localities and a few states had been celebrating the day for years. Congressional legislation designating that date as the national Flag Day was signed into law by President Harry Truman in 1949; the legislation also called upon the president to issue a Flag Day proclamation every year.

This year AVAG and Casitas LaVerne celebrated Flag Day with a special flag raising ceremony. The community enjoyed lunch and special gifts were given out to all the fathers that attended. At that point flags were offered to everyone there to display in front of their home if they didn't have one. There was only one person that needed a flag and we made sure to put it up. 🇺🇸



Meet AVAG Veterans

Sergio L. Olvera

In the late 1960's, many young American males were drafted into the military. Sergio L. Olvera was one of many who were tasked to serve. He served as a combat medic (91B20) in the U.S. Army from 1967 until 1969. He ultimately attained the rank of SP5 before his discharge.

Sergio is a descendant of the family that settled in the sleepy pueblo of Los Angeles centered around a dusty street later renamed "Olvera Street" in 1858 to honor his forefather, California judge and politician Agustín Olvera. Sergio left his native Los Angeles, after he was drafted, and reported to Army Basic Training at Fort Ord, in Monterey, California. From there he was sent to Advanced Individual Training (AIT) at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. At AIT, soldiers receive specialized training pertaining to their newly-assigned MOS (Military Occupational Specialty). Sergio was originally designated as an infantryman.

After AIT, Sergio was assigned to a unit in Heidelberg, Germany. While enroute, through no fault of his own, he and three other soldiers were diverted to West Point, New York, site of the United States Military Academy. In the meantime, four soldiers from West Point were sent to Heidelberg in their places instead! When Sergio didn't show up in Heidelberg, he was declared AWOL (absent without leave)! As a result, his pay (a mere \$106/month for an E-2 in 1967!) was immediately stopped! He at least had a bed to sleep in and meals, but during the three months it took to get the Army to believe that he wasn't AWOL he was assigned to work in the Post Hospital during the week, Monday through Friday. When he had "free time" he had to "wheel and deal" with fellow soldiers to pull their KP (kitchen duty) or guard duty in exchange for a few dollars a day so that he would have a little spending money.

Finally, "headquarters" removed him from AWOL status, got his pay started again, and gave him the option to report to San Antonio (again), or to go home for two weeks. Since he was a young married man, he, naturally, opted to go home to Los Angeles to be with his wife! Following these two weeks he reported back to Fort Sam Houston for training into a different MOS from his initial "infantry" designation. He was reassigned as an army combat medic. Sergio's training in this new career field lasted six months, after which he was sent to Vietnam to utilize his new skills as a combat medic.

With his new MOS of "medic", Sergio was almost always "in the thick of things", including being assigned to the front lines during the Tet Offensive of 1968. God certainly protected him as he performed his duties admirably while diving from bunker to bunker and attending to the needs of his fellow soldiers. He recalled one especially difficult firefight when the captain in charge had just "lost it" and was making Sergio's job more difficult. He said that he had to "put the captain out" with a heavy dose of sedative so that he (Sergio) could continue to help the men that really needed his help. He also said how he had to train the soldiers he was with to refer to him as "doc", not "medic" since if they shouted, "Medic!" when someone was wounded, he (the medic) would automatically be the target of enemy fire!



Midway in his Vietnam tour of duty, Sergio was able to go on a one-week "R&R" (rest, recovery, relaxation, recuperation, etc.) to Hawaii. Since he was married, he planned for his young wife, Jo Ann, to meet him in Hawaii for his R&R. His wife didn't know that in the many months since she had seen him, he had lost over sixty pounds! As a result, when Sergio's flight landed in Hawaii, she rushed up to the stream of young military men exiting the plane and was hugging and kissing a "gordo" (fat guy!) that she THOUGHT was Sergio, because when she had seen him last, he was a little "chunkier" than the lean, mean machine he had become! Fortunately, she discovered her mistake quickly and was reunited with the real love of her life, Sergio! They made the most of the short seven days that they were together in Hawaii.

Even though he was fortunate enough to not be seriously hurt in any of his time in combat, he almost died! One day Sergio was experiencing a lot of pain in his lower abdomen. He wanted to go to the First Aid station, but his superiors sent him out to another duty location where there was heavy fighting and many casualties. He helped to carry wounded soldiers to safety, but finally his own physical pain was too much to endure so he went to the First Aid station. His appendix had burst and he had a life-threatening infection. Sergio was flown out to Japan on a medevac flight. He spent two months there, close to death.

When he was stable enough to travel, he was sent back to Fort Ord, CA. He was given the option to be discharged from the Army or stay and recuperate. He chose to stay at Fort Ord and recuperate. He was

assigned to fairly easy duties that put him in charge of showing training films to newly-assigned nurses until he was discharged, a few months later, after he had completed his two-year military draft obligation.

Sergio said he would willingly serve again to defend our nation and the freedoms which we enjoy today. He said that he would try to do things “by the book”, but admits that that doesn’t always work, so thinks that “common sense should rule.”

Soon after Sergio was discharged from the Army, he became a United States citizen. He used his benefits, as a veteran, to go to trucking school to learn a marketable skill. Since then he has spent many years as a warehouse worker and truck driver. For the first twenty-five years Sergio drove a concrete mixer truck to multiple tracts of new homes springing up everywhere. He also hauled cement for the rebuilding of the freeways (5 and 14) that were destroyed in the Northridge earthquake of 1994.

Following this, he went to work for the Hollywood studios as a member of Teamsters Local. One of his jobs was to drive a water truck for the Hollywood movie studios. In this capacity he helped cre-

ate Hollywood rainstorms, snow storms, and explosion abatement. He also had trucking jobs that supported the Tournament of Roses Parades, the Academy Awards, and more! He has been a union member for nearly fifty years.

Now, he considers himself as “semi-retired” and will only do local jobs since he likes to be home at night with his wife, Jo Ann, of 56 years. A favorite hobby of Sergio’s is fixing “old” cars—1970’s, and older. He currently has fourteen cars, two of which are in Albuquerque, NM.

Sergio recently learned about the American Veterans Assistant Group (AVAG) through his brother-in-law, Tony Martinez. Cherokee Mobile Home Park, in Anaheim, where Tony lives, hosts a monthly veteran’s luncheon in the park’s clubhouse. Sergio and his wife drive from their home in Sylmar to attend this gathering every month! He likes the informative speakers that are guests at the monthly luncheons and is glad that veterans, and their spouses, are learning about benefits that they may be entitled to. Also, there is a lot of camaraderie among the attendees around the tables as they eat lunch together. 🦋



Cathy Rubino

Generally, when people hear the term “veteran,” they tend to picture a male who was in the military, but many females have served their country and should also be considered as veterans. Cathy Rubino is a woman who served in the U.S. Army “WACs” (Women’s Army Corps) from 1955 until 1959. She actually had two enlistments.

Cathy grew up on the Hawaiian island of Maui. Her family lived in a plantation house since her father worked on a sugar cane plantation. There were five siblings in the family. When Cathy was just eight years old, her father died, and her mom had to support the family on a meager pension of \$45 per month. After Cathy graduated from high school, she enlisted in the Army.

Cathy was sent to Fort McClellan, Alabama, for six weeks of Basic Training. Next, she went to Fort Lee, Virginia, for six more weeks of training as a Supply Specialist. While there, she joined a volleyball team. After her schooling was complete, she was assigned to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, where she issued weapons in the weapons pool in support of Men’s Basic Training.

At Basic Training, Cathy had to grow up and learn how to iron and wash clothes. Not long after being stationed at Fort Jackson, she used

her new-found ironing skills to earn a little extra money! She started starching and ironing hats for fellow soldiers for \$1 per hat! Since basic pay for new recruits in 1955 was less than \$85 per month, ironing hats helped out a lot!

While at Fort Jackson, the female commander of the WACs was told to select some “volunteers” for an upcoming traveling variety show. Cathy was one of the four women chosen. The selectees were sent TDY (temporary duty) to Atlanta, Georgia, to 3rd Army Headquarters as part of a traveling variety troop that consisted of four women and eighteen men. This special duty lasted nine months as the show toured many U.S. Army bases in the southern United States. The variety show included dancing, such as a “Hillbilly Dance” accompanied on the fiddle by Roger Miller (before he became famous!), singers, a band, roller skating, and comedy acts—even a “gorilla”!

After the variety show tour ended, Cathy still participated in both the women’s softball and basketball teams on the Army post. Her teams had the opportunity to compete at various Army bases in the region. They were so good that they ended up in second place in an important tournament! Shortly after all of this excitement and activity, Cathy’s two-year enlistment ended, and she headed back to her home in Maui, Hawaii.

Once Cathy was back home, she quickly realized that there was nothing to do there and that there were no promising job opportunities for her, so she decided to re-enlist in the Army for another two years to explore paths to her future as an adult.

In 1955, when Cathy enlisted the first time, there was no longer a “G.I. Bill,” so her dreams of going to college vanished, which prompted her to enlist the first time. She hoped to be assigned to Germany on her second enlistment, but she was stationed at Fort Dix, New Jersey, instead and never had the chance to go overseas.

While at Fort Dix, she was a training specialist and showed a lot of training films. She also continued to participate on the women’s sports teams. Cathy had leadership skills that surfaced and was selected as a platoon leader. As such, she marched the WACs to training sites and to parades on the post whenever they took place.

While at Fort Dix, Cathy met a young U.S. Navy sailor. They fell in love and got married. Under Army policy at the time, WACs who got married had to be discharged from the military, so in 1959 she left the Army. Cathy had attained the rank of Specialist Third Class (E-4). She then followed her new husband to his next duty assignment, in Boston.

Within a year, Cathy’s new husband was discharged from the Navy, so they headed back to his home-of-record, Youngstown, Ohio—a steel town. He secured a job at the local steel mill. Soon, Cathy and her husband had two young sons. They had a third son in California in 1966. Unfortunately, in the early 1960’s steel production in Youngstown was on the decline, and in 1962 the steel mill closed down, leaving the young family with no income.

Since there were no jobs in the “rust belt,” they broadened the job search to Southern California and moved the family there when Cathy’s husband found work in Wilmington painting oil storage tanks

at the refineries there. He continued to work there until he found a better job in Garden Grove in an automotive repair shop where he learned to rebuild transmissions. With this skill, and a generous father-in-law who put up \$500 to help him get started, he opened a transmission repair shop. He was the owner/operator of the shop for many years. He later relocated the shop to Fullerton.

One day, a customer came to the shop and told Cathy’s husband about the great opportunities that could be had in the home air conditioning business. Not long after that, they decided to close the transmission repair business and go into the air conditioning business. Cathy worked in the new office, and her husband hired salesmen and installers. They sold many brands of air conditioners, but were recognized by Rheem as a top outlet for Rheem air conditioners in California. The family enjoyed financial security and were able to go on many vacations that Rheem gave to them for their outstanding sales figures. Cathy worked in the office at their company. Sadly, in 1980, Cathy and her husband divorced.

After her divorce, as a single mother of three, Cathy continued to do office work, but went to work at another company. As a single mom, who did not receive any child support, Cathy had to work hard and manage her money carefully to make ends meet. For many years she worked for a company that made brass musical instruments, but this career ended on a “sour note” when the company closed following a steady decline in sales. Fortunately, Cathy received a generous severance package, and she found her final career job in Santa Ana with QED, a company that manufactured aircraft pressure gauges for Kidde. Cathy worked there from 1987 until her retirement in 2005.

The year after her retirement, Cathy is very proud of the fact that she was able to purchase a home on her own at Cherokee Mobile Home Park in Anaheim, a beautiful, resident-owned park for senior adults. She still lives there with her cat, Abigail.

Cherokee is a friendly, close-knit community with a number of veterans and widows of former veterans. There are monthly veterans’ luncheons sponsored by AVAG (The American Veterans Assistance Group) featuring speakers highlighting programs of interest to veterans. Many of the veteran residents of her park have qualified for government grants to fix health and safety concerns in their homes. Cathy has many friends there due, in part, to the “social club” at the park. In recent years she has taken an active role in the club and plans dinners, helps out as she can, and serves as the club’s treasurer.

In her retirement, she also served as a volunteer for two years with the Anaheim Police Department, work that she found to be very “interesting.” Wanting to give more to her community, Cathy also committed time to visit homebound people through the organization YANA (You Are Not Alone) while she could still get around without difficulty.

Her parting advice is, “Don’t wait to do things! Do things while you still can! Don’t put off things for later!” We would all probably be a lot happier if we heeded Cathy’s example and sage advice! 🦋

AVAG In Action



A new water heater was installed for veteran Melvin Green at the Pacific Palms Mobile Home Park.



Army Veteran Alvin Corbett at Mountain View Mobile Home Park requested assistance with obtaining a new couch for his home. AVAG was able to obtain one and have it delivered. He was so happy! He's shown above with his dog relaxing on his much appreciated gift. ♡



Doreen Matsumoto, AVAG Chaplain, received a call from her friend Mrs. Tiffannie Jochum, who wondered if AVAG could use some mobility scooters that belonged to her late husband, "Pappy" Jochum. She thought they might benefit AVAG veterans.

AVAG volunteers, Marine Corps veteran Wayne Ogilvie and his wife Marla, stepped in to pick up the scooters. They delivered them to Mike Gross, who cleaned and fitted each with new batteries before they were handed over to their new owners.

One scooter found a delighted recipient in Judy Heart, a veteran widow who couldn't contain her excitement, giggling like a child receiving a new birthday bike. Wayne Ogilvie ensured she received directions on safe scooter operation.

The second scooter was allocated to Rose Malow, another veteran widow who had been waiting months for a scooter to ease her commute, particularly crucial for her frequent dialysis visits.

The third scooter went to Army Vietnam Veteran Sergio Olvera, who was overwhelmed with gratitude. He found it hard to believe that AVAG had bestowed such a generous gift, which would not only benefit him but also his wife, who struggled with mobility. ♡

QMH SERVE DAY



The QMH team volunteered to perform a variety of tasks ranging from removing oversized tree stumps, pressure washing mobile homes, cutting down a 15' cactus, cleaning gutters and numerous landscaping cleanups, and even changed a deadbolt. Not the normal daily work day for the team, but the 14 QMH family members didn't back down. The QMH team lived their core value "WE SERVE" that day, providing much needed assistance to the veterans and seniors in the community. 🦋



AVAG's Food Assistance Program: AVAG perseveres in its commitment to fighting hunger in its communities across Southern California. Thanks to Bill Bracken, founder of Bracken's Kitchen (www.brackenskitchen.org), supplies freshly prepared meals, and our teams of dedicated volunteers, AVAG can ensure that vulnerable residents have access to nutritious food in its communities. 🦋



Meet Janeen and Fred Reiser of “Children Giving Gifts”

Janeen and Fred Reiser are a married couple that is totally committed to blessing others. Janeen is the Founder and CEO of a Christian, non-profit 501(C)(3) organization by the name of, “Children Giving Gifts”. We are reminded in the Bible, in Acts 20:35 that “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Everything that Janeen and Fred do shows that they believe this with all of their hearts.

In the late 1960’s, Fred served in the U.S. Army Reserve as an infantryman. He was activated for a period of about ten months, during which time he served at Fort Ord, CA and Fort Lewis, WA. At the end of the active duty period he was reassigned to the 349th General Hospital Reserve Unit in Lakewood, California. As a member of this unit, he performed administrative duties for the Army at the Letterman Hospital in San Francisco. In total, Fred served in the U.S. Army Reserve for about six years and attained the rank of E-5.

After his Army Reserve time, Fred gravitated toward the restaurant business. As is the case with many restaurateurs, he began as a waiter. He found his first passion in the food service business and was associated with the Rusty Pelican restaurant chain, for several decades, as a partner.

Fred then had a new dream for his skills. In the late 1970’s he opened

the Crazy Horse Steakhouse and Saloon in Santa Ana (next to the 55 Freeway) as an operating partner. This highly popular site was very successful and nearly every top country music artist performed in the concert hall seating 300 people. Over its nearly twenty year history, Ray Charles also performed a number of times at the Crazy Horse.

The facility also boasted a 200-seat steakhouse as well. Fred knew everyone who was anyone in the business! One day, at the Crazy Horse, after just returning from a business trip to Las Vegas, he met his future wife.

Janeen, a single mother at the time, had a young daughter. Janeen wanted a job that would allow her to be at home with her daughter rather than depending on daycare. She found such a position at the Crazy Horse as a member of the wait staff.

Janeen grew up in Las Vegas and her parents were employed in the restaurant and entertainment business as it began to expand there. Many new casinos, such as the Sahara, were being built “way out of town” along what is now known as “the Strip”. Coincidentally, in 1981, while at her job at the Crazy Horse, Janeen bumped into Fred Reiser (the owner) in a hallway. He said he had just returned from Las Vegas. She asked where he had stayed while he was there and he explained that he had stayed with friends and business associates. Come to find out, the folks he stayed with had been friends of Janeen’s family for years!

Two years later, in 1983, Fred and Janeen were married!

In 1997, Fred sold his interest in the Crazy Horse to another investor. The facility remained at the Santa Ana location for about two more years, until 1999, when it relocated to the Irvine Spectrum Center where it operated until it closed in 2005.

After Fred sold his interest in the Crazy Horse, he didn’t want to be “tied down” by starting and operating another restaurant so he served as a consultant for a number of years to investors hoping to get into the restaurant business. Also, he toured, part-time, with Garth Brooks as Garth’s West Coast Concert Promoter!

Meanwhile, Janeen wanted to make a difference in the world. Her strong Christian faith guided her decisions in life and she had ideas which moved her toward serving others in a bigger way than she had ever done up to that point. Fred supported her dream and in 2008 she founded the “Children Giving Gifts” (CGG) organization.

She sought out professional guidance at every step of the journey so that she could clearly define the mission of the new charity and build it on a firm foundation. CGG started out small at first. Its purpose was to give disadvantaged children the opportunity to give gifts to their parents, grandparents, guardians, or loved ones when they wouldn’t possibly have had the resources or abilities to do that on their own.

Financial donors give tax-deductible gifts to CGG and Janeen and Fred go buy merchandise in quantity, at wholesale prices, and make it available (for FREE!) to the children in planned events. During the organization’s infancy, Janeen and Fred’s home became the warehouse for the many boxes of giftable merchandise destined to be given by children to the loved ones in their lives.



Now, 16 years later, Fred and Janeen still work out of their beautiful home (decorated with many exquisite portraits that Janeen has painted!), but now have storage facilities nearby to house the ever-changing inventory of gifts that are appreciated by the recipients and the young givers.

A typical “Children Giving Gifts” event may be held at a Title One school in a low-income community, a military base, a women’s shelter, a church, or a community center. Points of contact at these sites let Janeen know that they would like to hold an event on a particular day, such as at the beginning of the Christmas season.

Adult volunteers are recruited, flyers are printed for distribution to advertise the event, items that were previously purchased are organized, and gift tables are set up at the event site.

On the day of the event, children show up with their parents or guardians and they are given gift bags that they can decorate. (This may be done by students in their classrooms prior to the event.) The children are treated to snacks and trusted adult volunteers escort the students into the gift selection area while their parent/guardian waits for them in the welcome area.

The adult “shopper assistants” let the children see the selection of gifts. Gifts for males might include wallets, watches, sunglasses, key fobs, or ball caps. Items for female recipients might include fancy cosmetic bags, a wide selection of earrings and jewelry, sunglasses, small vases with flowers, etc. Children are told that they may select two gift items for each of their two recipients.

After they have made their selections, colorful tissue paper is stuffed down into the mouth of the bag to ensure that the gifts are not seen by the adult recipients until the child presents them to the adult at home on Christmas morning (or whatever the occasion is). Children love to be able to give something to someone else. Some of the heart-warming comments that volunteers hear from the children, who are quivering with joy are, “This is the best day of my life!” or, “Wait! Stop! I’ve never had this much excitement before!”

About five years ago, Janeen met AVAG’s Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto through a mutual friend at a Children Giving Gifts event. There was an immediate bond between them and Chaplain Doreen, through AVAG, has hosted a number of these events.

Many of the items provided by “Children Giving Gifts” also end up in the hands of military veterans at AVAG-sponsored events that take place in various locations around Southern California.

In short, the “Children Giving Gifts” ministry has reached countless thousands of people—children and adults. Fred and Janeen never envisioned how much the organization would grow and are humbled by how many lives it has touched.

Thank you, Janeen and Fred, for bringing to reality the vision you had for “Children Giving Gifts” in 2008! 🦋



TAPS

Celebrating Lucy's BO's Sparkle Life.

Lucy Macedonia Varela

From Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto:

Not only was she my friend but she was a Prayer Warrior. Lucy took on the task to collect all the prayer request that came into our group. She always did it with excellence, never forgetting anyone.

God calls us to see prayer as a powerful tool – a way to relate with our Heavenly Father, a way to express our need for Him, a way to show the Lord's devotion and trust, and as a tangible way to support others.

The Lord is our Commander and Chief, He shows us how to take back from the enemy all he has stolen that is rightfully ours.

We do that in prayer as prayer warriors!

In addition, prayer warriors learn how to use prayer as an effective weapon in spiritual warfare.

Do not be afraid; only believe" (Mark 5:36)."

What is a prayer warrior? The term prayer warrior means someone who seeks the Lord wholeheartedly and prays regularly. Typically, a prayer warrior has learned to trust God, even in hard times, and knows we can rely on God.

Also, a prayer warrior enjoys sitting at the feet of Jesus and cherishes the opportunity to spend time in God's presence. As a result, Lucy took this commitment to pray for others seriously.

James 5:16 reminds us, "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."

Let us be reminded how important prayer was to Lucy.

We will miss you my friend. Till we see you again. Please keep her family in prayer.

Thank you to all the volunteers who helped make her service special.

Jimmy Arita
Mellissa Arriola Breunig
Mary Cruz
Lana Martinez
Doreen Matsumoto
Judy Sanchez Chavarria
Doug Zimmer
Martha Rivera Barreras
Cheryl Rollins
Geraldine Lagman 🦋

Mike Newminski



Army veteran Mike Newminski, a long time members of our AVAG chapter at Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park, passed away earlier this year. His son Craig asked if Chaplain Doreen could do the service at Riverside National Cemetery.

Drafted into the Army on June 26, 1963 and serving until March 26, 1965, Mike Newminski served as a truck driver while stationed in Korea at Camp Casey.

Mike has been part of our AVAG Sequoia San Bernardino Chapter since its inception. During his time at Sequoia, we were able to give him a recliner and work on his bathroom and floor, for which he expressed his gratitude.

Mike was a genuinely kind man who loved attending AVAG community meetings, actively participating in games, and generously helping distribute food to everyone. His presence and contributions will be deeply missed.



In Memoriam:

Sgt. (Ret.) Brian H. Alvarado U.S. Marine Corps

December 20, 1980 - January 22, 2024

On February 22, 2024, we laid to rest one of the most amazing veterans that we'd ever come to know—Brian Alvarado, a United States Marine Corps veteran.

Despite enduring severe injuries in the burn pits during his military service during the Iraq War and battling cancer after leaving the service, Brian was a steadfast advocate for the homeless veterans on the streets of Los Angeles. Brian's voice was silenced by a tracheostomy tube, and his ears bore the scars of battle. He felt most comfortable serving the homeless veterans, who never judged him for the way he looked.

Last Memorial Day, despite having just been discharged from the hospital literally right before the event, Brian served as the Grand Marshal of our Memorial Day parade. He should have been in a wheelchair, but instead proudly marched with the aid of his walker alongside Congressman Lou Correa. At the event, the 82nd Airborne presented him with a U.S. flag, and Congressman Correa honored him with a special recognition.

Brian was a committed and active member of the AVAG community. He attended every AVAG event.

One of his last requests was that his coffin be taken to Riverside National Cemetery in his beloved Toyota truck. Members of the Patriot Guard secured the coffin into the bed of the bright red truck, emblazoned with the Marine Corps emblem, carefully transporting it to the cemetery. They were met there by an escort of motorcycles with flag-bearing riders and traveled along a route lined with flags and saluting veterans, including a Marine platoon honor guard.

AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto was honored to give the message at services held for him at Hope Chapel in Huntington Beach and then the final message at the Riverside National Cemetery, where Marines stood by his coffin during the service. Awards were presented to Brian's wife, Rocio, and his daughter, Rihanna, in recognition of his service and sacrifice. And as a poignant farewell, doves were released into the sky, symbolizing peace and freedom, ideals that Brian had fought for tirelessly. ✕



Veterans Connect: Building Community Together – Veterans AND Spouses Welcome!

Calling all veterans and their spouses! Join us for Veterans Connect, a monthly gathering held on the **fourth Saturday of the month at 12 noon – 1:45 p.m. at Hope Chapel in Huntington Beach.**

We especially want to extend a warm welcome to our veterans' spouses! This group offers a welcoming space for veterans and their families to connect, share experiences, and build a supportive community.

Here's what you can expect:

- **Open forum:** Veterans are encouraged to share their stories and what they're involved in, while spouses can connect and build friendships with others who understand the unique challenges and rewards of military life.
- **Book discussions:** The group is currently focused on *Operation Timothy, Book Three*.
- **Free lunch:** Enjoy a delicious and complimentary meal with fellow veterans, spouses, and friends.
- **Raffles and fellowship:** Fun activities and a chance to connect with others are part of the program.

Recent highlights:

- The group recently celebrated Howard Koch's 99th birthday!
- Jason, a Navy SEAL who joined the June meeting, made a life-changing decision to be baptized.
- Marine Corps veteran Wayne Ogelvie was presented with a Quilt of Valor.

Join the community!

AVAG's Veterans Connect is a great opportunity to meet fellow veterans and for spouses to connect with others, share stories, and be inspired. *We look forward to seeing you at the next meeting!* 🐦



AVAG News

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