



AVAG News

Spring/Summer 2026 • Volume 13 Issue 2

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TAPS

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AVAG veterans and families gathered at The Villa in Orange, California, to celebrate AVAG's 15th anniversary.

American Veterans Assistance Group Celebrates 15 Years of Serving Veterans and Families

What a memorable evening as the American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) celebrated its 15th Anniversary!

On April 26, 2026, veterans and the families who support AVAG gathered at The Villa in Orange for an evening of dinner, fellowship, raffle prizes, and celebration. The occasion provided an opportunity to reflect with gratitude on all that God has accomplished through AVAG during the past 15 years.

Every guest received a special gift thanks to our amazing partners at Children's Giving Gifts, and everyone was welcomed with warm smiles as they entered this beautiful event.

Our mission has always been to share the love of Jesus, support our veterans, and build meaningful fellowship within our community.

We extend a special thank you to Mr. Richard Simonian, founder of American Veterans Assistance Group, for sharing the story of how AVAG began and the vision for where we are going as an organization. Thank you as well to Scott McReynolds, AVAG Program Director, for speaking about who we are and how AVAG has impacted so many lives over the years.

We are also grateful to DJ Gabriel for the beautiful music throughout the evening and to Pastor David Loo of Hope Chapel Huntington Beach for helping with the video presentations that made the night even more special.

Thank you to everyone who attended and continues to support our mission. Here's to many more years of serving veterans and their families with love, compassion, and faith. 🙏

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AVAG Celebrating 15 Years of Faith, Fellowship, and Service



AVAG News



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AVAG Hosts 9th Annual Memorial Day Parade and Luncheon

American Veterans Assistance Group was honored to host our 9th Annual Memorial Day Parade and Luncheon at Cottonwood Church, and we were blessed with an incredible turnout!

So many people came together to enjoy the parade, presentations, lunch, and fellowship. It was wonderful seeing our community unite in support of our Veterans and remembering the true meaning of Memorial Day.

A special thank you to our guest speaker, Ryan Antes, whose powerful message about the true meaning of Memorial Day touched everyone — especially the veterans and Gold Star families in attendance. Thank you also to Rudy Jaramillo, the event's Grand Marshal.

We're also deeply grateful to our partners, volunteers, and supporters who made this event possible. Your support allows us to honor those who sacrificed so much for our freedom. 🦋





Charles Cruz Award presented to Manuel “Tony” Martinez on May 23, 2026

Each year since 2022, during the month of May, the Charles Cruz Award is presented to a “deserving” veteran at the AVAG Memorial Day Veterans Luncheon. To be considered for this award, nominees must be U.S. military veterans and still be actively involved in working with or helping other veterans in worthwhile projects or through veterans groups of some kind. This year’s recipient meets those requirements in an outstanding manner!

Manuel “Tony” Martinez has been selected as the recipient of the 2026 Charles Cruz Award. This former U.S. Army veteran (SP4, 1964–1967) has lived in Cherokee Senior Mobile Home Park in Anaheim for more than seventeen years. He is the “commander” there who helped identify the veterans who reside in his park and invited them to a Veterans’ Appreciation Luncheon at the park in mid-September of 2023. Each month, the luncheon, sponsored by AVAG, has grown larger as veterans spread the word. Currently, the monthly luncheon now has about fifty attendees!

The luncheon has the main meal provided by AVAG, or another sponsor, and many residents bring delicious side dishes and tempting desserts! There are many door prize drawings that include small kitchen appliances and televisions—all of which are graciously provided by Tony himself!

At his home park, Tony is not just interested in the attendance at the monthly luncheons but also in the welfare of the residents. He wants to share goodwill and says, “As a Christian, you’ve got to support the poor.”

This park has lots of low-income residents.” One “sponsor” that Tony showcased at a monthly luncheon owns a car repair business that is located very close to the mobile home park. This business owner, Atrak Rahmani of Karta Motor Works, has gained the trust of many of the seniors living at Cherokee because his work is not only reliable but also at a fair price. Tony also made the residents of his park aware of a government program that could make needed repairs to their homes. Whether organizing the monthly luncheons at his mobile home park, inviting guests who can offer beneficial services to his fellow residents, or informing the residents of much-needed programs, Tony (aka, The Commander) is actively involved in enriching the lives of the veterans of the local area and residents of his home park.

Tony Martinez was so amazed that he was selected as this year’s recipient of the annual Charles Cruz Award. He said, “I am so honored that I was even nominated! I don’t consider myself a hero.” But to anyone whose life has been touched by Tony’s service to others, they would all tell you that his selection was “well deserved”!

Congratulations, Tony, and “Thank You!” from the many veterans and widows of veterans whom you have blessed! 🙌





Remembering Absent Friends 75th Ranger Veteran Ryan Antes Reflects on Combat, Sacrifice and Memorial Day

The following is a transcript of remarks delivered by Ryan Antes at the 2026 Memorial Day event at Cottonwood Church.

Memorial Day started as Decoration Day in the wake of the Civil War. After our country tried so hard to tear itself apart, so many local tributes to the fallen emerged that eventually it was recognized as a holiday. A century later, President Johnson and Congress converted it to Memorial Day.

Set at the start of summer, for so many it means barbecue, picnics, and blockbuster movies. For the families of those who have served, it is so much more.

To have loved and lost someone in service to our great nation is heart-breaking. For us, the weekend is about sacrifice and service and remembering those men and women who paid the ultimate price for the freedoms we hold so dear.

It is we who know the cold, hard truth of the thing.

That it is not the late-night talk show host who fights for free speech, it is the Marines and Sailors. It is not the reporter who fights for freedom of the press; it's our Airmen and Coast Guard. It is not the preacher who fights for freedom of religion; it's our Soldiers.

Memorial Day brings a complicated mix of emotions. It is hard to think about absent friends without feeling the stinging emptiness of their loss. It is hard to attend a celebration like this one without seeing the faces of those young men and women who will never grow old.

I struggle every year with what to wish the people I greet in advance of this weekend. Happy Memorial Day seems far from the right sentiment.

Should we be happy when faced with the memory of so many fallen servicemen and women? Among the barbecues and parades and libations, I miss my friends all the more.

Francis Scott Key says it best.

Oh, thus be it ever, when free men shall stand
Between their loved home and the war's desolation!
Blessed with victory and peace may the heav'n rescued land
Praise the power that hath made and preserved us a nation.

Thinking of absent friends rolls back the decades to a day that feels a lifetime ago and yesterday all at once.

The crew chief called out "1 minute," and I echoed the warning. We had crammed 37 Airborne Rangers into a dual-rotor Chinook helicopter and were rocketing through the dead of another sweltering Arabian night. Our target was a terrorist training camp hidden among the dunes and wadis of the deserts in Northeastern Iraq. My Ranger Company had been granted this opportunity to bring the fight to the enemy. To do violence toward those who would murder civilians and soldiers alike from the shadows and call it a holy war.

I was the radio operator for our company, First Sergeant, and sat in on the mission briefing for what someone dubbed Objective Reindeer.



Mathematically we were outnumbered, but the Air Force planned to drop so many bombs on these terrorists before we arrived that when they said we would be mopping up, we expected to be issued a mop and bucket.

Objective Reindeer had no hardened structures, only tents and trenches among the sands and elephant grass of a seasonal creek system. On this 100-degree June night in 2003 the creeks were dry, but the elephant grass was over 10 feet tall.

The same crew chief shouted "guns tight," and I heard the electric whir of the minigun starting to return fire. The helicopter felt like a roller-coaster as it mapped the terrain of the earth. What I saw out the little porthole window only deepened the thrill. I saw contrails from rocket-propelled grenades and the rapid muzzle flash of machine gun fire.

The 30-second warning echoed throughout the cabin. I could feel my heart accelerate. Me and the heavy satellite radio that would serve as our link to command and ultimately to the casualty evacuation helicopter were running point for our little element. We were a motley crew of the Battalion Physician's Assistant, Company Senior Medic, First Sergeant, and our Supply Sergeant as an extra rifleman. Our piece of the mission was to set up and defend a Casualty Collection Point so that the medics could render aid to any Rangers injured on the objective.

I had always found that the antenna on the radio was a bullet magnet. It seemed that every bad guy with a rifle in any fight thought that I must be important and was clearly worth the expenditure of ammunition.

While having the kid with the backpack that doubled as a walking shoot-me sign on point wasn't optimal, I was pretty decent at it, and our little group had gotten into our share of fights before. I was the lowest ranking man by a couple of pay grades, and I wanted to be out front.

The ramp on the back of the helicopter dropped on a scene out of an amazing action movie. There was gunfire coming and going from every direction, there were explosions all over the place, and small attack helicopters we called "little birds" were strafing gun and missile fire all around the objective. Rangers were moving to contact and shouting commands over the cacophony of battle.

The Rangers ahead of me ran out the back of the helicopter, and I made a conscious effort to leave a separation like I had been instructed before the mission. I was glad I did when I watched a rocket buzz between me and the group ahead of us.

As we worked our way towards the elephant grass in the low ground so that we could set up our Casualty Collection Point, one of the little birds swooped down and launched rockets so close that I could feel the heat as much as the concussion of their impact.

One of the reasons the powers that be selected June 11, 2003, for this mission was the low illumination. Clouds obscured the moon and made everything pitch black. It was so dark that even the green glow of my night vision goggles couldn't remove all the shadows.

I selected our new route, and we headed down a ravine towards the low ground. Time was short, and we needed to be in place in case one of our Rangers took a wound. When the gunfire starts to zero in on you the sound changes. No longer just the bang of a distant shot, but snapping noises from the bullet traveling so close to your ear. There are cracks and little whizzing sounds from rounds ricocheting off rocks.

I was mostly convinced that the gunfire targeting us was from the far side of the wadi system. Maybe 400–500 meters away. There were a number of muzzle flashes coming from that area as well as from the forest of elephant grass in the low ground. The shots felt a bit too close for comfort. The urge to shoot back was palpable, but we had a lot of Rangers moving around on the battlefield, and returning fire without a clean ID on a target felt unwise.

Memory is a funny thing. Sometimes things feel impossibly vivid, and events from half a lifetime back seem to have happened only a moment ago. I felt the weight of my rucksack and radio shift as my left shoulder strap exploded at the quick release. I looked down to realize that the terrorists who had just shot me from point-blank range were almost at my feet in a shallow depression.

They must have been as shocked as I was that they missed me because I saw one of them raise his eyes above the sights of his gun. It was his final mistake. I snapped off two rounds into his head and into his partner's head before either managed to squeeze the trigger again.

It was the next morning before I found the bruise on my chest and noticed that the ceramic plate in my body armor was shattered. The bullet failed to penetrate the interior layer of Kevlar on my body armor, but it was a near thing. Best I can figure, the rucksack strap bled off just enough force to make the system stop an AK-47 round from about a meter away.

I don't know what purpose God had in mind for me, but he must have decided that it wasn't my time. To come so close to death and be spared by millimeters. I suspect that divine intervention played its part.

I remember feeling like it was pointless to check the men I shot to see if they were still alive before searching them. There are two types of gunfighters: the quick and the dead. I was quick.

We were running out of time to set up the casualty collection point.

We rushed into the low ground and hit the wall of elephant grass. The pure chaos of that thicket of grass makes me grateful every day that

my war was fought in the deserts of Southwest Asia, rather than the jungles of Vietnam.

We couldn't see a thing. The tall grasses pressed in on all sides, making movement almost impossible. As claustrophobia set in, it felt like everything was either opening fire on us or exploding. I felt a couple of concussions so close I swore we must all be dead, but nothing scored a hit. The next day I had some scratches I couldn't explain, and my uniform was tore up, but that elephant grass seemed to eat enemy ordnance.

When we received the call that one of our Rangers had lost his leg to a rocket-propelled grenade, we abandoned the plan to establish a fixed collection point in the wadi and moved back to the high ground at a run.

My shoot-me sign was again in full effect, and I could see the bullets striking all around. I looked back to make sure I wasn't alone and noticed that everyone else was giving me a healthy buffer. I'm good at drawing fire, and my luck was holding.

We made contact with our wounded Ranger, and the medics went to work. The radio was still working, but calling in the medical evacuation helicopter proved a challenge. Ultimately, I had to run back into the gunfire on higher ground and relay the message through the Pentagon. I don't know if it is true, but I was told later that I swore heavily at a full bird colonel as the generals in the room snickered.

If I thought I made a tempting target before, I must have looked even better trying to call in the CASEVAC bird. It seemed like all the remaining enemy on the objective must have thought killing me was the key to victory. I caught myself flinching as dirt and rocks kicked up around me from bullet strikes.





By the time the helicopter arrived, the battle was over. No more gunfire, no more explosions. The calm that followed seemed eerily quiet, but we had wiped the terrorists off the target and good riddance.

Time and age have dulled my reflexes. That night was a lifetime ago and yesterday in the same moment.

On Memorial Day, we honor the memory of the men and women who heeded the call to serve their country. We honor those who refused to shrink from their duty. Whether by draft or by choice, they served. They defended this country that we love.

As intense as my combat experiences were, I wouldn't trade them for anything. It was an honor and a privilege to have served. It was the pride and joy of my life to have walked beside so many heroes of the 75th Ranger Regiment.

These were men who suffered through months of testing and overcame countless challenges to earn their place as an Airborne Ranger. They trained every single day to be the absolute best they could be. When the towers fell on 9-11, these were the men who stood up and said, "Send Me!"

In our sadness at the thought of absent friends, it gets easy to forget that they gave their lives fighting for the country they loved and for the men and women to their left and their right.

As my eyes cloud with tears thinking of those who are not sharing in the day, I am forced to reckon with the fact that my friends wouldn't want me to eschew celebration in their name. These are men and women who died defending their country. They volunteered to serve fully knowing the hazards of their chosen profession. They knew that service may cost them their lives, but they also knew that they were where they wanted to be, serving our great nation with the military family who would readily die to defend them if called to do so.

I think that sometimes I get so caught up in missing my friends that I fail to remember that critical piece of their sacrifice. For those of you here who have lost sons, daughters, family, and friends, I hope that sharing this harrowing part of my story will in some limited way help you to understand what combat is like for a soldier and that it might bring you some small measure of peace.



Robert Heinlein wrote:

"The best things in life are beyond money. Their price is agony, and sweat, and devotion. And the price demanded for the most precious of all things in life is life itself. Ultimate cost for perfect value."

It isn't always easy to shake off the melancholy that I feel at their absence, but I'll try. I thank God that I had the privilege of knowing so many brave heroes. I thank God for the honor of sharing in some small part of their stories.

I am grateful for my absent friends and know in my heart of hearts that they would want us all to live our best lives. Not to sit home and lament their passing, but instead to enjoy the pleasure of these great freedoms that they gave their life for. To go out and enjoy the barbecues, and picnics, and blockbuster movies in the greatest nation that history has ever known. To remember them and their sacrifice, but to enjoy this weekend just the same.

It is in that spirit that I will close by wishing you all a Happy Memorial Day. ✨

“Five Times a Sergeant”

By Rudy A Jaramillo, Grand Marshal of AVAG’s 2026 Memorial Day Parade and Luncheon.

Rudy A Jaramillo enlisted in the Army the same day the rest of his classmates graduated from Western High School in 1963.

While they walked across a stage in pressed gowns, he raised his right hand.

He was seventeen years old.

He told the recruiter exactly what he wanted.

“Airborne Infantry. And I want Korea. It’s a hot zone.”

The recruiter studied him — skinny kid, stubborn eyes.

“Most boys don’t ask for the hard road,” the man said.

“I’m not most boys.”

★ ★ ★ ★

Fort Ord – The Wrong Army

The Army sent him to Fort Ord, California. The old wooden barracks smelled like dust and sweat and Pine-Sol. Basic Training hardened him fast. He liked it. The marching. The rifles. The dirt.

Then the Army decided it knew better.

Instead of Infantry, they sent him to Supply School.

Two weeks into typing class, Rudy stood staring at the typewriter in front of him. Black metal. Quiet keys. Safe work.

Clerk work.

He picked it up, carried it to the window, and threw it out from the second story.

The crash echoed across the company area.

They marched him before the Company Commander.

“You’ve got two choices, Jaramillo,” the commander said calmly. “Court martial... or Advanced Infantry Training.”

Rudy swallowed.

“Sir, please don’t send me to Infantry Training.”

Reverse psychology.

The commander smirked.

“Advanced Infantry Training it is.”

That’s how Rudy Jaramillo earned his first MOS: 11B — Infantry.

Exactly what he wanted.

★ ★ ★ ★

Korea – Frozen and Promoted

He went to Korea by troop transport ship. Long gray days on open water. Assigned to the ImJin Scouts, where he earned another MOS: 11F — Reconnaissance.

Winter hit hard.

Second-degree frostbite chewed at his skin. Nights were knives. Patrols were silence and breath turning to ice.

He earned his first stripe there — PFC. Seventeen when he joined. A man before he turned eighteen.

After a year with the ImJin Scouts, he was reassigned to the 7th Infantry Division — the Bayonet Division.

He learned early: the Army will break you down, but if you push back hard enough, it sometimes gives you what you want.

★ ★ ★ ★

Almost Vietnam

After Korea, he went to Fort Riley, Kansas, assigned to the 1st Infantry Division.

They were heading to Vietnam.

He volunteered.

Instead, the Army reassigned him to Fort Benning, Georgia — to a new experimental unit: the 1st Cavalry Division (AirMobile).

Helicopters. Air assault. A new kind of war.

He would get Vietnam after all.

★ ★ ★ ★

Ia Drang – Nineteen Years Old

Another troopship carried him across the Pacific. Vietnam smelled like wet earth and rot and fear.

He was assigned to D Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment — Recon.

They scouted the Ia Drang Valley.

Later, he was reassigned to B Company, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry.

November 1965.



I wrote this on the back of my “steel pot” after the Battle of Ia Drang Valley November 65, because I was always on point after that—just because I was trained at a young age by my Grandfather how to track and read signs.



December 1965 a month after the battle of Ia Drang Valley. I just turned 20 years old.



January 31, 1966, after the Battle of the Rice Paddy. 50 Cal bullet deflected from the rice paddy up towards my back.



Left, South Vietnam getting ready to go on night patrol. October 1966.



1968 Panama Canal Zone. Having lunch near the Columns Panama Border during the Panamanian Rebellion.

He was nineteen years old.

He didn't think he'd see twenty.

The valley was fire and noise. Helicopters beating the sky. Grenades ripping trees apart. Shrapnel found him there — metal teeth biting into flesh.

He made Sergeant, E-5 in 1965.

He would make it five times.

And lose it five times.

At Fort Riley he'd been busted down once. The Army could take stripes as easily as it gave them.

But in Vietnam?

He didn't think he'd make it out.

"So I had a good time," he would say later — half grin, half ghost.

Eventually, he left Vietnam on a hospital plane.

Alive.

Barely.

★ ★ ★ ★

Broken but Still Standing

He recovered at Fort Ord.

Still a Sergeant E-5.

The Army wasn't done with him.

Panama, 1968–1970.

He put down a rebellion there in '68. In '69, he was sent to El Salvador to suppress another conflict.

In Panama, a bad parachute jump tore his right ankle apart. Later, he fell off a 75-foot cliff and broke his back — again.

He had already broken it once before.

His body was keeping score.

By the time he returned stateside — Fort Lewis, Washington — he was medically discharged.

Sixteen and a half years.

Five infantry divisions. One brigade.

Five combat MOSs.

Second-degree frostbite. Grenade shrapnel. Two broken backs. A destroyed ankle. A torn lateral collateral ligament in his right knee from running from a tank in 1987.

His body couldn't take it anymore.

"Being Airborne Infantry isn't a job for anyone," he would say. "It's something you survive."

★ ★ ★ ★

One More Time

In 1980, he enlisted again — California National Guard.

Some men chase comfort.

Rudy chased purpose.

He earned E-6. Then E-7.

But even iron bends.

Eventually, the damage caught up. His body was broken in places doctors could see — and in places they couldn't.

★ ★ ★ ★

The Truth of It

Rudy Jaramillo raised his hand at seventeen because he wanted the hardest road.

He got it.

He made Sergeant five times.

He survived Korea's cold, Vietnam's fire, Panama's fall, and a lifetime of jumps from perfectly good airplanes.

He outlived nineteen.

He outlived the valley.

He outlived the war.

But the wars never fully left him.

And if you asked him whether he'd do it again?

He might grin.

And say,

"Airborne." ✈



Rudy A. Jaramillo, Grand Marshal of AVAG's 2026 Memorial Day Parade and Luncheon, at left in the foreground, with fellow veterans, left to right, Mark Miller, Erik Berg, and Travis Mayfield.

Serving Those Who Serve



On June 4, 2026, our Chaplain Team was honored to host the First Responders Appreciation Luncheon for the Huntington Beach Police Department, Huntington Beach Fire Department, and Marine Safety. We were grateful for the excellent turnout and the opportunity to thank the men and women who faithfully serve and protect our community.

A special thank-you goes to Hope Chapel for their continued support and partnership in this outreach. We are also grateful to our sponsors, including a memorial donation honoring Chaplain Patrick Duffy, Huntington Beach Credit Union, Children's Giving Gifts, and American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) for helping make this event possible.

Guests enjoyed a wonderful meal provided by Los Mojica's Tacos, along with pies and desserts generously donated by Polly's Pies.

We would like to recognize our dedicated volunteers and chaplain team members, including Tom and Wendy Loveless, Marla and Wayne Ogelvie, Mellissa Breunig, Jimmy Arita, Doug and Cheryl Zimmer, Bonnie Robba, Angela Clitherow, Louren Case, veterans Raine Bouchard and Charlie Aroz, Pastor David Loo, Ricky, and Charlie's friends Steve and John for their valuable assistance with setup, support, and tear down.

Most importantly, we thank our first responders for their courage, sacrifice, and commitment to serving our community. It was a privilege to honor them and express our appreciation for all they do. 🦋





AVAG Members Enjoy Fellowship and Reflection at the Nixon Library

AVAG was blessed to have 26 participants attend an outing at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library & Museum on June 3, 2026. It was especially significant for many of the veterans, as Richard Nixon was President during the Vietnam War. Throughout the day, I noticed many of them sharing stories and memories with one another. Looking through the photos, you can truly see the emotions and reflections the experience brought back.

Our group especially enjoyed the beautiful gardens and peaceful atmosphere. They toured Richard Nixon's childhood home, viewed the Air Force One helicopter, and explored the special exhibit celebrating the 250th anniversary of the United States.

We are incredibly grateful to the Richard Nixon Presidential Library & Museum for their generosity and hospitality. The staff was amazing—welcoming, helpful, and genuinely kind throughout our visit. Their support helped make the day special for everyone who attended and allowed our group to fully enjoy this experience.

The day consisted of friendly interaction, educational experiences, and some thoughtful discussions. It was a pleasure to see everyone sharing memories, enjoying the exhibits, and reflecting on our nation's history.

Opportunities like these help build community, create lasting memories, and provide meaningful experiences for our seniors and those who served our country. 🦋



Conrad Barrera Steps Up for Veterans

We want to take a moment to recognize and honor the incredible efforts of Conrad Barrera, a proud Army Veteran and Commander with the American Veterans Assistance Group at Diamond Bar Mobile Home Park.

Conrad participated in the 2026 Steps for Vets 5K – Run, Walk, Roll, stepping up in a powerful way to support the mission of ending veteran homelessness across the United States. As part of his journey, he invited others to join him in raising awareness and standing our nation's heroes. Thanks to his generous supporters, Conrad was able to raise \$525 of his \$500 goal for donations to this cause.

This year, Conrad completed the 5K run/walk in honor of three Vietnam Veterans:

- Eddie Cervantez—Vietnam War Gold Star Veteran from Illinois, served December 12, 1968 to January 30, 1968
- Richard Valdez—Vietnam War Gold Star Veteran from California, served December 19, 1968 to June 6, 1969
- Robert Flores—Vietnam War Gold Star Veteran from Arizona, served February 17, 1967 to December 15, 1967

Through every step, Conrad carried their legacy forward—honoring their service, their sacrifice, and their stories.

His dedication is a reminder of what it means to continue serving even after the uniform comes off. We stand with Conrad and all those participating in this mission to ensure that no veteran is left without a place to call home.

Take Steps For Vets With U.S. Vets!

While the 2026 Steps for Vets 5K – Run, Walk, Roll season has officially concluded, the group is looking forward to welcoming participants back in 2027! Registration for the 2027 season opens October 1!

Visit <https://honor.usvets.org/campaign/steps-for-vets/c558261> for the latest news and event updates. 🦋



Edward Eddy
Cervantez



Richard Paul
Valdez



Robert Lee
Flores

AVAG Vets and Families Spend an Evening at Angel Stadium

AVAG had an unforgettable night hosting our veterans and their families at the ballpark!

We enjoyed an exciting matchup between the Los Angeles Angels and the San Diego Padres on Saturday evening, April 18th. From our Club Level seats in Section 340, the energy was incredible from first pitch at 6:38 PM all the way through the spectacular Star Wars-themed fireworks show after the game!

Everyone showed up proudly wearing their AVAG shirts, sharing great food, lots of laughs, and nonstop cheering throughout the night. It was truly special to see our veterans and their families come together, relax, and create lasting memories. 🦋



AVAG Partners: Working Together to Serve Our Veterans

AVAG, American Legion Post 295, and Richard Breunig Foundation Partner to Support Burgos Family

In June, AVAG, in partnership with American Legion Post 295 and the Richard Breunig Foundation, hosted a successful fundraiser in support of Felix Burgos and his family as they face the challenges of his battle with Retroperitoneal Sarcoma.

Thanks to the generosity of our community, riders, donors, sponsors, volunteers, and supporters, a total of \$3,900 was raised to help with medical expenses and household needs.

One of the highlights of the event was when the winner of the dollar game generously donated the winnings back to the Burgos family. Congratulations to Buffy from Lifestyle Cycles, winner of Best Bike of the Night.

The raffle was a great success, featuring a 55-inch TV donated by Scott Moore and a Big Bear getaway donated by David Breunig. Thank you to everyone who donated prizes, purchased raffle tickets, volunteered, and supported this important cause.

We are grateful for the compassion and generosity shown by our community as we came together to support the Burgos family during this difficult time. 🙏



AVAG and Richard Breunig Foundation Join Forces at Post 295 to Support Montebello's Heart of Compassion

In August, the Richard Breunig Foundation and American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) held a community fundraiser at American Legion Post 295 in Cypress, raising over \$1,500 for our community partner, Heart Of Compassion in Montebello.

Heart Of Compassion provides food and support to thousands of people in need throughout the community. We are grateful to Cristina and the Heart Of Compassion team for joining us and sharing their mission.

A special thank you to everyone who donated, purchased raffle tickets, volunteered, and helped make this fundraiser a success. 100% of the raffle proceeds go toward the organization being supported.

We are thankful for the opportunity to come together and give back to our community through our valued partnership with Heart Of Compassion. 🙏



Stater Bros. Markets Steps Up Again for AVAG Veterans

Once again, Stater Bros. Markets has shown up for AVAG again and again — through generosity, hospitality, and heart.

On March 3, Stater Bros. in Orange (Collins and Tustin, Store #28) presented AVAG with a generous \$1,000 donation. The management team welcomed our veterans warmly, shaking hands and gathering everyone together for a check presentation to AVAG founder Richard Simonian. Confetti filled the air as applause and appreciation echoed through the room, with special thanks going to AVAG member Brian Williams for helping make the moment happen. Commanders from several of our chapters, along with AVAG members, were on hand to celebrate the milestone.

That same Store #28 opened its doors again on July 2 for a Grocery Shopping Day that blessed 19 veteran families with groceries just ahead of the Fourth of July. Stater Bros. staff went above and beyond, even opening a dedicated checkout stand for our veterans. The day began in prayer, asking God's blessing over the families and giving thanks for the chance to serve. Founder Richard Simonian joined the celebration too—and the AVAG family got to celebrate his birthday right alongside the veterans he serves. It was a day of service, fellowship, and gratitude, and a powerful reminder of how much this grocery program means to the families who count on it.

Days later, on July 7, the partnership extended to Stater Bros. in Hemet, where AVAG hosted another Grocery Shopping Spree — this time serving Army Veteran Joseph Walker Jr., National Guard Veteran Jack Krajczan, and Navy Veteran Steve Fabian. Store Manager Leslie and her team welcomed everyone with the same outstanding hospitality, and volunteer Janice Castillo once again showed up faithfully to serve our veterans with kindness and compassion.

From a generous check presentation to grocery aisles filled with gratitude, Stater Bros. Markets continues to be one of AVAG's most steadfast partners. We're deeply thankful for their generosity, their staff, and their heart for the veterans who have served us all. 🦋





Generous Donation of Mobility Equipment Will Support Veterans in Need

We were truly blessed to receive a generous donation from Rocio Alvarado, who donated her late husband's mobility equipment, including his scooter, wheelchair, cooling pad, and walker, to American Veterans Assistance Group.

A special thank you to Mellissa and David Breunig, along with Marla and Wayne Ogelvie, for taking the time to pick up the donated items. Their willingness to serve is greatly appreciated.

It is a blessing to see our community come together to help Veterans in need. We are especially grateful for the trust families place in American Veterans Assistance Group by entrusting us with these donations, knowing they will be used to bless and support other Veterans.

Together, we continue making a difference by serving those who have faithfully served our nation. 🙏



Veteran Air Mechanical Supports AVAG Veterans

AVAG is grateful to partner with Victor and Toni Munoz of Veteran Air Mechanical, Inc. as we work together to serve Veteran families in our community.

Wayne and Lucy Giffin were in need of air conditioning repairs, and Veteran Air Mechanical completed the work professionally and with great care.

We appreciate Victor and Toni's willingness to come alongside AVAG in helping Veterans in need. Their support and commitment make a meaningful difference, and we are thankful for their partnership. 🙏

AVAG Supports Special Forces Association Chapter 78 Valor Luncheon

American Veterans Assistance Group proudly supported Special Forces Association Chapter 78 at their Valor Luncheon. We were honored to host 48 guests for a beautiful afternoon filled with a delicious lunch, desserts, and inspiring guest speaker, Henry (Dick) Thompson, Ph.D., retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel and legendary MACV-SOG Vietnam veteran.

The event also featured exciting raffle prizes and a silent auction, all coming together to raise funds for Sunburst Academy at the Joint Forces Training Base and the ACL Afghan refugee Mojave community.

It was a meaningful day of community, support, and giving back to those who serve and future leaders. 🦋



Meet AVAG Veterans

Gaillane Chock – A Life Built on Loyalty

Gaillane Chock served in the United States Air Force from 1968 to 1974, proudly serving his country during a significant period in American military history. He completed his active-duty service as an E-4, and although he was offered the opportunity to reenlist and advance to E-5, Gaillane made the decision to return home to his family. He also continued his commitment to service by spending two years in the reserves.

When asked if he would serve again, Gaillane didn't hesitate: "Yes."

His years in the military taught him many important lessons about life, but when asked what stood out above all the others, his answer was one word: *Loyalty*.

For Gaillane, loyalty wasn't simply something he learned in the military. It became something he carried with him throughout his life.

One of the hardest parts of military life for Gaillane was being separated from his family. He was married to his beloved wife, Lisa, and supporting his family was one of the reasons he chose to serve in the first place.

Family was always important to him.

During his military career, Gaillane spent approximately four years in Japan, where he lived off base and became acquainted with many other military families. Those relationships gave him a unique perspective on military life—not just as a service member, but as a husband and part of a military family.

His service also gave him the opportunity to travel throughout the Far East, including the Philippines, Hong Kong, Thailand, Taiwan, and other locations.

Gaillane says that he probably would never have had the opportunity to see many of these places if he had not joined the military.

He also spent time serving in Hawaii at Hickam Air Force Base, near Pearl Harbor.

Hickam has a remarkable place in American military history. Located next to Pearl Harbor, the base was attacked during the Japanese attack on December 7, 1941, and became an important Pacific military installation. During Gaillane's time there, Hickam was part of the Pacific Air Forces and continued to play an important role in supporting American military operations throughout the Pacific. The 15th Air Base Wing was activated at Hickam in 1971, overseeing base operations and supporting the military community in Hawaii and the Pacific.

Gaillane and his family lived off base in Hawaii, giving him another opportunity to experience military life alongside other military families.

His military occupational specialty was clerical, but Gaillane was the kind of service member who could be sent wherever he was needed. His ability to take on different assignments and serve where he was needed made him a valued member of the military.

And Gaillane has an interesting observation about military life that made us laugh.

There is a common saying that the Air Force has the best food and the best accommodations. But Gaillane has a different opinion.

After spending time around service members from different branches, he felt that the Navy had better food and, in his observation, did a better job of taking care of military families.

And for Gaillane, that mattered.

Because while he was serving his country, he was also thinking about the people waiting for him at home.

His transition back into civilian life was relatively smooth. After leaving the military, Gaillane entered the world of real estate, working with properties and eventually becoming successful in the business.

But his connection to service never really ended.

Today, Gaillane continues to serve—not in uniform, but through his actions.

He has been a tremendous supporter of AVAG. Whether we are holding a backpack event for children, an Easter celebration, a Christmas event, or another major AVAG gathering, Gaillane is there to help.

He doesn't just occasionally show up.

Gaillane has been to every AVAG chapter meeting.

And although he supports Veterans throughout our organization, there is one chapter he considers home: Diamond Bar.

That is where Gaillane and his fellow Veterans gather, where friendships have grown, and where he continues to give his time and kindness to others.





Gaillane Chock and Creek Orange's Commander Glenn Williamson

Many of the people Gaillane served with during his military years are no longer here. Over the decades, he has lost many of the friends and fellow service members who shared those important years of his life.

But the lesson they left with him remains:

Loyalty.

Loyalty to family.

Loyalty to those who serve.

And loyalty to the Veterans who continue to walk beside him today.

Gaillane's story is a reminder that military service doesn't necessarily end when someone leaves the uniform behind. For some Veterans, the spirit of service becomes a lifelong way of living.

Gaillane served his country.

He supported his family.

He built a successful life after the military.

And today, he continues to show up for others.

Often, he is there early, helping behind the scenes and making sure things are ready for everyone else. He doesn't need recognition. He simply sees something that needs to be done and steps in.

That is loyalty in action.

We are incredibly grateful for Gaillane Chock, for his years of service to our country, for the sacrifices he made for his family, and for the countless ways he continues to support our Veterans and the American Veterans Assistance Group.

Gaillane, thank you for your service, your friendship, your kindness, and most of all, for living out the very lesson you learned in the military:

Loyalty.

We are honored to have you as part of our AVAG family and proud to call the Diamond Bar chapter your home. 🦋



Daniel Kellogg – A Journey of Service, Love, and Community

Daniel served his country with dedication for many years, beginning his active-duty service on September 6, 1984, and continuing until September 29, 1992. He then continued his commitment to serving in the Reserves from March 1993 through September 2001.

His military occupational specialty was Supply, a job that required him to make sure the people around him had what they needed. Whether it was equipment, materials, or other necessary supplies, Daniel had the responsibility of keeping things moving and making sure his fellow service members were taken care of.

That responsibility wasn't always easy.

Daniel remembers that sometimes people would ask him for things they wanted or needed, but he had to learn how to stand his ground and follow the rules. Being responsible for supplies meant making decisions based on what was authorized and what was needed—not simply giving someone whatever they asked for.

That experience taught him an important lesson about doing his job with integrity, even when it wasn't always easy.

When asked about some of the difficult parts of military life, Daniel remembers that at times it could feel "cutthroat." He felt that some people were primarily looking out for themselves, and he wished there had been more of a sense of teamwork.

For Daniel, being part of the military was supposed to be about working together and looking out for one another.

Still, when asked the question, "Would you do it again?"

Daniel didn't hesitate.

"Yes."

His military service also took him places he may never have had the opportunity to see otherwise. He was stationed in the Philippines, where his life changed in a way he could never have expected.

It was there that Daniel met Mila. They fell in love, and their relationship eventually led to marriage. What began as a military assignment became the beginning of a lifelong love story.

Today, Daniel and Mila share their life together in the same community where our American Veterans Assistance Group chapter in Diamond Bar meets.

Daniel also had the opportunity to travel to Germany during his years of service. Looking back, he recognizes that the military opened doors to experiences and places he may never have encountered had he not chosen to serve.



After leaving the military, Daniel entered civilian life and worked in the gas station business. Like many Veterans, transitioning from military service to civilian employment was not easy. Daniel found it difficult to find a job after leaving the military, and starting over in the civilian world presented challenges of its own.

But Daniel continued moving forward.

Today, his military service is only one part of the story.

He and Mila have become part of the Diamond Bar community, and through AVAG, Daniel has remained connected to other Veterans. Over the years, AVAG has also had the privilege of helping Daniel and Mila in many different ways, supporting them as part of our Veteran family.

What makes Daniel's story especially meaningful is the kindness he shows toward other Veterans. He understands what it means to serve, what it means to transition back into civilian life, and how important it is to have people around you who understand your journey.

His story reminds us that sometimes the greatest things that come from military service aren't found on a duty assignment or written on a service record.

Sometimes they are found in the people we meet.

For Daniel, one of those people was Mila, the woman he met in the Philippines and fell in love with. And today, their story continues right here in the Diamond Bar community.

We are grateful for Daniel's years of service, for the sacrifices he made, for his kindness toward other Veterans, and for the friendship he and Mila have shared with our AVAG family.

Thank you, Daniel, for serving our country and for continuing to be a blessing to the Veterans around you. We are honored to call you one of our AVAG Veterans. ✕



William "Bill" Lensky – A Proud American and a Sailor at Heart

William "Bill" Lensky served in the United States Navy from 1971 to 1975, proudly serving his country during the Vietnam era. During his time in the Navy, Bill served aboard two different ships and experienced places and cultures around the world that he says he probably would never have seen if he had not joined the military.

Bill achieved the rank of E-5, and his service included time aboard

the USS Floyd B. Parks (DD-884) and the USS Hepburn (DE-1055).

The USS Floyd B. Parks was a Gearing-class destroyer that was commissioned in 1945, just as World War II was coming to an end. The ship went on to have a long career in the Pacific and played an important role during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. During Bill's time aboard the ship, the Floyd B. Parks served off the coast of Vietnam as part of the Navy's naval gunfire support operations.

Bill also served aboard the USS Hepburn, a Knox-class destroyer escort commissioned in 1969. Ships like the Hepburn were designed for missions including anti-submarine warfare, escort duties, patrols, and naval gunfire support. During her Vietnam deployment, the Hepburn conducted search-and-rescue duties in the Gulf of Tonkin and later provided gunfire support to forces fighting ashore.

For Bill, one of the most memorable parts of his Navy career was working with the crew on gunfire support.

He served at the forward gun mount, working with the ship's 5-inch/38-caliber gun.

The 5-inch/38 was one of the Navy's most trusted naval guns. During the Vietnam War, destroyers equipped with these guns regularly operated along the Vietnamese coast, providing fire support for troops on the ground. From offshore, the ships could deliver accurate fire against enemy positions, bunkers, staging areas, and other targets while supporting American and allied forces ashore.

For the sailors manning those guns, it was demanding work that required teamwork, communication, precision, and trust in the men serving beside them.

Bill remembers one part of Navy life that he definitely did not enjoy: being at sea for 45 days at a time.

Life aboard a Navy ship meant long stretches away from land, family, and the comforts of home. But those experiences also created a bond among the sailors who shared them.

Bill's Navy career also gave him the opportunity to travel to Japan, Hong Kong, Australia, and other parts of the Pacific.

One of his favorite memories was visiting Australia, where the ship made port calls at places including Sydney and Geelong. Bill remembers visiting a small mining community where the people were incredibly kind to the American sailors.

He remembers that many Australians still had a deep appreciation for the Americans who had come to their aid during World War II. That history of friendship between Americans and Australians made an impression on Bill.

He also remembers another interesting part of his travels: the places where American sailors could trade for souvenirs and everyday items.

One item that was especially popular?

Zippo lighters.

Zippo lighters had become closely associated with American service members during World War II. During the war, Zippo devoted its entire production to the U.S. military from 1943 until the end of the conflict, making the windproof lighter a highly sought-after item among servicemen.

For Bill, these stories about trading and collecting Zippos became another reminder of how much history surrounded the places he visited.

Looking back, Bill realizes that the Navy opened the door to experiences he might never have had otherwise.

He visited Japan, Hong Kong, Australia, and Vietnam. He saw places around the world, met people from different cultures, and became part of a brotherhood of sailors who shared the experience of serving at sea.

His friendships from the Navy remained important to him long after his service ended. Bill and many of his Navy friends stayed in touch over the years. Sadly, those friends have now all passed away.

But Bill still carries their memories with him.

After leaving the Navy, Bill transitioned into civilian life and began a completely different chapter of his life.

He became a Teamster and spent an incredible 38 years driving trucks and delivering bread for Oroweat.

In 1977, two years after leaving the Navy, Bill met the woman who would become his wife.

His father-in-law, Paul Brown, was a Marine who had served at Iwo Jima during World War II. Paul introduced Bill to his daughter, and Bill and Paula eventually married.

Another generation of military service had brought two families together.

Bill's story is not simply about the ships he served on or the countries he visited. It is about a young man who joined the Navy, served his country, traveled the world, formed lifelong friendships, and then came home and built a life of hard work and family.

And today, Bill continues to demonstrate the same spirit of service.

Bill is a very proud American.

Anyone who knows him through our American Veterans Assistance Group meetings knows that he is often one of the first people to arrive. Before the meeting even begins, Bill is already there helping set up the tables and getting everything ready.

He doesn't do it for recognition.

He simply sees something that needs to be done—and he helps.

That may be one of the greatest reflections of the man Bill has always been.

He served aboard Navy ships where teamwork was essential. He spent decades working hard as a Teamster. He stayed connected to the friends he served with. And today, he continues to show kindness and generosity to the Veterans around him.

Bill is, without question, one of the kindest men you could ever meet.

His service may have taken him around the world, but his greatest legacy may be the way he continues to serve others right here at home.

We are grateful for William "Bill" Lensky, for his years of service to our country, for the sacrifices he made, for the friendships he has carried throughout his life, and for the kindness he shows to his fellow Veterans.

Bill, thank you for serving our country.

We are honored to call you one of our AVAG Veterans—and even more honored to call you our friend. 🦋



Olic Dunning, Jr. – Answering the Call: Reflections on Service, Adventure, and Family

Rancho La Paz, a 55+ community in Anaheim, is the home of Army veteran Olic Dunning, Jr. He served in the U.S. Army from 1969 to 1971 in Vietnam and attained the rank of SP4.

He received his initial training at Ft. Ord, California, served as a platoon

leader, and was then sent to Vietnam. Having been trained in both Supply and Transportation, his duties required him to regularly travel to the front lines.

Despite the danger that he was in as he performed his duties, he said that he would do it all over because of the "adventure!"

When asked if he would do anything differently, he said, "No."

He really liked meeting people while he was in the military but was glad to be out! He did add that he thought that every young man should experience the military.

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

While he was in the military, the Motor Pool Sergeant that he worked for really "watched out for the guys." This made the hard times a little easier for Olic. He never had any R&R while he was overseas. He went to Vietnam, served his time, and returned to the States.

Olic especially recalls his return to the United States. When the transport plane that was bringing home troops landed at McChord AFB, in Tacoma, Washington, many of the guys kissed the ground after they exited the plane! It WAS good to be "home!"

Olic has made his home in California for his entire life, except for his time in Vietnam. He has been married for forty-one years and has six children and eleven grandchildren!

It was a pleasure meeting him at the Veterans' Appreciation Luncheon at Rancho La Paz's clubhouse on August 30th, sponsored by the AVAG. 🦋

Travis Mayfield – Courage, Leadership, Faith, and a Life of Service

Travis Mayfield served in the United States Army from 1967 to 1968, achieving the rank of E-5, Buck Sergeant. His military service took him to Vietnam, including Da Nang, Phu Bai, and Saigon.

Travis proudly carries reminders of his military service with him.

One of his tattoos reads:

AIR ASSAULT
101st AIRBORNE

The 101st Airborne Division, known as the “Screaming Eagles,” has a long and distinguished history in the United States Army. Its soldiers are known for their demanding training, discipline, courage, and ability to deploy into some of the most difficult environments.

Travis’s military training prepared him for the realities of combat.

When Travis talks about his military service, there is no hesitation about whether he would do it again.

He would.

In fact, when asked if he would be willing to serve again today, Travis jokingly said he would want to be called back so he could “straighten those suckers out.”

That answer pretty much captures Travis’s personality.

When asked if he would do anything differently, his answer was just as direct:

“No. My job was to take care of business.”

Travis remembers being paid just \$98 a month and being asked to do things that most people would consider crazy. Sometimes, he says, the Army would offer an additional \$50 for taking on something especially dangerous.

His response?

“Of course I did it.”

That willingness to take on difficult assignments became a defining part of Travis’s military experience.

He trained at Fort Benning, Georgia, preparing for the realities of combat. He learned how to survive in the jungle, fight in difficult environments, use numerous weapons, handle demolitions, recognize and deal with booby traps and mines, and jump from aircraft and helicopters.

Travis enjoyed many aspects of military life. He appreciated the discipline it taught him and the ability to take care of himself, adapt to difficult circumstances, and learn how to live off the land.

He entered the Army through the buddy system, never expecting that he would become a leader.

But the Army had other plans.

Travis remembers an incident involving his buddy Rick Tracy. The two of them got into a big fistfight. Instead of simply punishing them, their leaders separated them and ultimately made them squad leaders.



And Travis remembers one benefit of becoming a squad leader with a smile—he never had to do KP again.

But behind the humor was a serious responsibility.

Travis became a Buck Sergeant and developed into an excellent leader. He learned that leadership wasn’t necessarily about having the highest rank. It was about experience, responsibility, and knowing how to take care of the men serving alongside you.

Travis remembers being frustrated with some of the young lieutenants who had just come out of school. In his experience, they didn’t always understand what was happening in the field.

He believed the best thing they could do was listen to the sergeants who had been there and knew what they were doing.

That belief in experienced leadership became even more important during his time in Vietnam.

The Day Everything Changed

There is one date that carries deep meaning in Travis’s life:

August 9, 1967.

Travis was in Vietnam, serving in a dangerous area where enemy forces had placed booby traps and mines. He encountered an explosive device that had been rigged as a booby trap.

Travis attempted to dismantle it, knowing the danger he was facing.

Then the explosive detonated.

The blast severely wounded Travis, taking part of his hand.

But for Travis, August 9, 1967, was not only the day his life was changed by war. It was also the day his life was changed forever by faith.

On that day, in the midst of one of the most difficult moments of his life, Travis gave his life to the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior.

But the danger wasn't over.

Only a few minutes later, the other soldier who had been with Travis was shot by enemy fire.

Despite his own serious injuries, Travis immediately went to help him.

He held the wounded soldier in his arms, initially unaware of how seriously he himself had been injured. He was in shock and focused on helping his fellow soldier.

When other soldiers finally reached Travis and began getting him out of the dangerous area, he remembers telling them:

"Look for my fingers."

The events of that day would remain with Travis for the rest of his life.

August 9, 1967, represents both tremendous loss and a new beginning.

It was the day Travis was wounded.

It was the day his life changed.

And it was the day he gave his life to Jesus Christ.

From that moment forward, Travis carried not only the physical reminders of his service, but also the faith that became an important part of his journey.

Travis remembers going through training with approximately 200 men, yet only two of them ultimately went to Vietnam. The experi-

ence of being one of those men—and everything that happened to him there—became a defining part of his life.

His story is not simply one of surviving an explosion.

It is a story of courage, sacrifice, faith, and looking out for another soldier even while he himself was seriously wounded.

Coming Home

Travis's return home was very different from what many people might imagine.

When he landed at Travis Air Force Base, there was no welcoming crowd waiting for him.

He had been away serving his country and had not fully understood what was happening back home with the growing protests surrounding the Vietnam War.

After Vietnam, Travis spent approximately six months in Japan, where he worked in operations and helped with the movement and care of wounded American service members.

He saw men returning from war with devastating injuries.

He witnessed the human cost of combat.

And eventually, he returned to the United States and had to figure out how to build a civilian life.

But Travis did what he had always learned to do:

Take care of business.

From Maintenance Man to Managing Thousands of Apartments

After leaving the Army, Travis initially found work in the jewelry business. When the employer failed to pay him properly and on time, Travis left.

He was living in an apartment building at the time and offered to help clean and maintain the building.

That opportunity became the beginning of an entirely new career.

Travis discovered that he enjoyed the apartment industry.

He began doing maintenance work and eventually became an assistant manager and then a property manager overseeing 182 units.

His responsibilities continued to grow.

He went on to manage larger properties, including a 360-unit community, where he became involved in staffing, sales, marketing, and management meetings.

One of the challenging properties Travis managed was a 460-unit apartment community in West Covina, located in what he described as a particularly rough neighborhood. It required strong leadership, organization, and the ability to work with both residents and employees.

The largest property he managed was a 724-unit apartment community in Fullerton.

By the end of his career in the apartment industry, Travis had grown from maintaining an apartment building to overseeing approximately 5,000 apartments and 175 employees.



Over more than 25 years in the apartment industry, he built a successful career from the ground up.

The same qualities that made him an effective soldier—discipline, determination, responsibility, and leadership—became the qualities that helped him succeed in civilian life.

Still Serving Others

But Travis's story didn't end with his career in apartment management.

Today, he operates Next Level Wellness Center, where he helps Veterans and others through services that include chiropractic care, physical therapy, acupuncture, and other wellness services.

In many ways, Travis's life has come full circle.

He once served alongside wounded Veterans.

Today, he helps Veterans improve their health and quality of life.

Travis is also actively involved with American Veterans Assistance Group Veterans Connect.

Every Thursday, Travis treats Veterans to lunch at JoJo's in Long Beach.

It isn't about recognition or attention.

It's about bringing Veterans together.

Sharing a meal. Building friendships.

And making sure no Veteran feels forgotten or alone.

The man who once served beside fellow soldiers in Vietnam now creates opportunities for Veterans to sit together, talk, laugh, and connect.

In many ways, he is still taking care of business.

What Matters Most

After everything Travis has experienced—from military training and combat to surviving a devastating injury, building a successful career, and continuing to help others—there is one thing he considers especially important:

Relationships.

For Travis, strong relationships are built on respect, trust, loyalty, and genuinely caring about other people.

His military service taught him discipline and courage.

Vietnam taught him the cost of war.

His injury taught him perseverance.

His civilian career taught him leadership.

And his faith gave him strength through the journey.

Travis didn't plan on becoming a leader when he joined the Army. He certainly didn't plan on everything that would happen to him in Vietnam.

But through every chapter of his life, he continued to move forward.

He took care of business.

And he kept serving.

We are grateful to Travis Mayfield for his service to our country, for the sacrifices he made, and for the courage he demonstrated during some of the most difficult moments imaginable.

We are also grateful that Travis has taken the experiences of his life and used them to help others—especially his fellow Veterans.

His story reminds us that sometimes the strongest people aren't the ones who never get knocked down.

They are the ones who get back up, keep moving forward, hold on to their faith, and use what they have learned to help someone else.

Thank you, Travis, for your service, your sacrifice, your courage, your leadership, and your continued commitment to helping others.

August 9, 1967, changed Travis's life forever.

It was the day he was wounded.

It was the day he survived.

And it was the day he gave his life to Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

We are honored to call Travis Mayfield one of our AVAG Veterans. 



Calvin Nichols – A Life of Service, Friendship, and Perseverance

Calvin Nichols is a Veteran whose life has been shaped by service, friendship, courage, and perseverance.

Calvin began his military career in the United States Air Force, where he served for six years and achieved the rank of Sergeant. He later continued his service in the United States Army, serving

another four years, reaching the rank of Corporal. He also spent two years serving in the Reserves.

Calvin's military career took him from Korea and Vietnam to California, while also giving him the opportunity to experience places

such as Tokyo, Okinawa, and Thailand. These experiences became an important part of the memories he carried with him throughout his life.

During his Air Force career, Calvin served in Security Police, including the 3rd Security Police Squadron. His duties involved protecting the air base, personnel, and important military resources.

Two officers in particular made a lasting impression on Calvin, and he wants to give them the recognition they deserve—1st Lt. Howard N. Tanner, who served as the Officer in Charge of Air Base Defense, and Major John C. Bonnette, who was the Commander of the 3rd Security Police Squadron.

Calvin remembers both officers with great respect and says they were the two officers he looked up to during his military service. Their leadership and the example they set left a lasting impression on him.

For Calvin, the people he served alongside were one of the most meaningful parts of military life. (Continued on next page)



When asked what he liked most about the military, his answer wasn't about the places he traveled or the assignments he received.

It was the friendships.

The buddies he made during his years of service became some of the most important memories he carried with him. There is a special bond created among people who serve together, especially those who face difficult circumstances side by side.

But military life also had its difficult moments.

When asked what he liked least about the military, Calvin immediately remembered the jungles of Vietnam.

His experiences in Vietnam left a lasting impression on him, and those memories followed him home. Through his years of service, Calvin says he learned one of life's most important lessons:

Patience.

Patience with other people.

And patience with himself.

That lesson became especially important when Calvin transitioned from military life back into civilian life. For him, that transition was very difficult. Like many Veterans, Calvin carried experiences from his service that didn't simply disappear when he left the military.

Calvin experienced PTSD, and learning how to move forward became part of his journey. The patience he learned during his years of service became something he needed not only for others, but also for himself.

Yet despite the challenges, Calvin has no regrets about serving his country.

When asked whether he would serve again if called upon, his answer is clear: "Absolutely."

That answer says a great deal about the way Calvin looks back on his military service. He remembers the difficult times, but he also remembers the people, the friendships, the experiences, and the pride that came with wearing the uniform.

After completing his military service, Calvin continued building his life in California. His connection to the military community has remained an important part of who he is. That connection eventually led him to the American Veterans Assistance Group.

Calvin originally became part of our AVAG chapter at Casitas LaVerne, where his service was recognized and celebrated. Today, he is part of our Diamond Bar Mobile Home Park chapter, where he continues to be part of our Veteran family.

(Continued on next page)



AVAG is more than a place where Veterans gather. It is a community where Veterans can find fellowship, friendship, understanding, and people who appreciate the sacrifices they made.

For Calvin, those connections are meaningful.

His story reminds us that military service can shape a person for a lifetime. The friendships remain. The lessons remain. The memories remain. And sometimes, the struggles remain as well.

But Calvin's story is not defined by the challenges he faced.

It is defined by his strength to keep moving forward.

It is defined by his willingness to serve.

It is defined by the friendships he made.

And it is defined by the pride he still carries in having worn the uniform.

Calvin has shared that his time in the military was an experience he would gladly do again, and he is grateful that he was able to make it home.

Those words capture so much of Calvin's story.

We are honored to have Calvin Nichols as part of the American Veterans Assistance Group family. From Casitas LaVerne to Diamond Bar, we are grateful for his friendship, his fellowship, and the story he has shared with us.

We also honor the memory and leadership of 1st Lt. Howard N. Tanner and Major John C. Bonnette, two officers Calvin looked up to and who made a lasting impact on his military journey.

Thank you, Calvin, for your service, your sacrifice, and for sharing your story. We are honored to call you one of our AVAG Veterans. ✕



Bob Saczawa – United States Air Force

Bob Saczawa served in the United States Air Force from 1961 to 1965, achieving the rank of Airman First Class. During his years of service, Bob was stationed in both Alaska and California, experiencing military life in very different parts of the country. He also spent two years serving in the Air National Guard Reserve.

After more than six decades since his military service began, Bob still speaks about his time in the Air Force with pride—and with that same straightforward sense of humor that clearly makes him who he is.

When Bob looks back on his time in uniform, he hesitates for no time at all when asked, "Would you do it again?"

His answer is simple: "Yes. I wouldn't do anything different."

Bob describes his time in the military almost casually, saying it was "a piece of cake." But behind that easygoing answer is a lesson he carried with him long after his uniform came off.



One of the most important things the military taught Bob was how to keep his mouth shut and listen. It was a lesson in discipline, paying attention, and knowing when to speak and when to simply listen—skills that stayed with him throughout his life.

Bob also has some strong opinions about the different branches and military installations he experienced. While serving at Fort MacArthur in California, he remembers the food as being terrible compared with

what he was accustomed to in the Air Force. The barracks, he recalls, were also old and outdated.

That may help explain why, even all these years later, Bob still makes his position very clear:

The Air Force is the best branch to serve in!

In fact, during his interview, Bob's wife, Julie, jumped in with a reminder:

"Don't you always say the Air Force is the best to serve?"

Bob's answer to that seems to be a lifelong yes.

After leaving the military, Bob went on to work for McDonnell Douglas, an aerospace company that became one of the major American aircraft manufacturers. He worked during the era of the DC-9, a twin-engine commercial passenger aircraft developed by Douglas Aircraft Company and first flown in 1965. The DC-9 became an important part of American aviation history and was widely used by airlines for passenger service.

Bob's journey from serving his country in the Air Force to working in the American aerospace industry is another part of his story—a life that connected military service, hard work, discipline, and the changing world of aviation.

For the past 10 years, Bob has also been a valued member of our American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) chapter at the Diamond Bar Mobile Home Park. Over the years, he has become part of our Veteran family, joining other Veterans in fellowship, sharing stories, and being part of a community that honors the men and women who have served our country.

We are grateful to Bob Saczawa for his service to our country, for the lessons he has carried throughout his life, and for the 10 years he has been part of our AVAG family.

Thank you, Bob, for your service and for being part of our Veteran community. ✕



Loren Applebaum – Reflections on Service, Memorable Rides, and Veteran Support

Loren Applebaum served in the United States military from 1967 to 1969 after being drafted following two years of community college. At the time, his family accepted the reality of his service, and military life was already familiar in their household—his brother was serving in the Navy stateside.

During his time in Vietnam, Loren served for 13 months in artillery. He began as an artillery gunner and eventually became the sergeant of the gun, a role that carried responsibility for both the weapon and the crew operating it. The experience demanded discipline, efficiency, and strong leadership—qualities Loren says stayed with him long after his military service ended.

One of Loren's favorite memories from his time in Vietnam happened just as he was beginning a long-awaited period of rest and recuperation (R&R). His journey started with a helicopter ride to the first of two base camps he needed to pass through before heading to Long Binh. While trying to find transportation to the next base camp, he suddenly heard someone call his name. It turned out to be a soldier he had gone through basic training with who was now serving as a general's driver.

When Loren explained that he was trying to reach Long Binh, the soldier told him the general was headed there as well and offered him a ride. Loren met the general, climbed aboard the helicopter, and the two began the trip together.

During the flight they were able to talk through their headsets. As they approached the base, Loren noticed that his former captain was on the ground along with a colonel and several other officers. The general suggested that Loren stay in the helicopter and step out last.

When the helicopter landed, the crew and the general exited first. The general stood at attention and saluted as Loren stepped off the aircraft. The officers on the ground followed suit, assuming he must be a high-ranking officer. His former captain quickly recognized him and called out, "Applebaum, you haven't changed a bit!" Loren had a reputation for getting into trouble with that captain, often sneaking into his tent to steal his chair and fan. Thanks to the general's sense of humor, it turned into a memorable and lighthearted start to Loren's much-anticipated R&R.

Although Loren does not regularly stay in contact with those he served with, he did have an unexpected reunion after returning home from Vietnam. One day at an ice cream parlor, he ran into a young man who had previously rented a room from Loren's parents before going into the service. The chance meeting was a reminder of how many lives had been touched by the war.

The lessons Loren learned during his time in the military continued to shape his life after service. The discipline, leadership skills, and ability to perform under extreme conditions proved valuable throughout his civilian life.

Loren and his wife, Melissa, have now been married for 51 years. For many of those years, their friend Chaplain Doreen encouraged him to apply for the veterans' medical benefits he had earned through his service.

When he finally decided to visit the VA hospital, the experience proved to be much easier and more positive than he expected. With Chaplain Doreen's help, the application process was completed in less than an hour, and Loren found the medical team to be both professional and caring.

He also received assistance from Army veteran Catherine Barnett, a AVAG volunteer who helped him file his disability claim online. Loren says the process was far simpler than he had anticipated, thanks in large part to Catherine's computer skills and guidance.

Looking back, Loren is grateful that he finally took the steps to access the benefits available to him. His service not only shaped his life but also instilled values of resilience, leadership, and perseverance that have remained with him ever since. 🦋



AVAG Communities

Celebrating Spring and Summer

Diamond Bar Estates

The AVAG Diamond Bar chapter continues to grow and build strong relationships within the community. The chapter meets every third Wednesday at 6:00 PM for a time of fellowship, guest speakers, games, pizza, and laughter. Special thanks to Commander Conrad Barrera and his wife, Cindy, for continuing to pour their time and care into the group.

AVAG also hosts a Bible study at Diamond Bar Estates, where the group comes together to study God's Word, build relationships, and encourage one another. The Bible study group also works together to host the community Kids Club, giving the children an opportunity to sing, read Scripture, learn Bible stories, and enjoy snacks, bingo, and raffle prizes. Volunteers from the Bible study, including Alice Shouse and Julie, help make the Kids Club a special time for the children. It has also been wonderful to see the older children helping and encouraging the younger ones.

Community Outreach

Throughout the year, AVAG and the Diamond Bar community have enjoyed several special events for local families. The children were blessed with a summer pool party and a backpack giveaway to help prepare them for the new school year. These events provided opportunities for families to have fun together while experiencing the care and support of the community.

The Diamond Bar community also came together for a special Easter celebration. Families enjoyed Easter baskets, treats, and a big Easter egg hunt. Mellissa and David Breunig supplied golden eggs filled with money, adding extra excitement for the children.

A total of 150 Easter baskets were made possible through donations from the Richard Breunig Foundation and Heart of Compassion. Veteran Gaillane Chock also contributed boxes of candy. The Women's Auxiliary from American Legion Post 295 in Cypress assembled the baskets, and the Diamond Bar Mobile Home Park manager provided additional treats for the children. Amanda Breunig brought even more joy to the celebration by dressing as the Easter Bunny.

Through the AVAG chapter, Bible study, Kids Club, and community outreach events, Diamond Bar continues to be a place where relationships are growing, families are being supported, and the children are being reminded that their community cares about them. 🐰





Ninth Street MHP

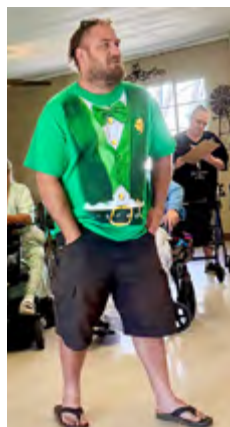
Our first Easter Basket Giveaway and Easter Egg Hunt was a success! Held on March 12 at Ninth Street Mobile Home Park in San Bernardino, it was a truly wonderful day filled with smiles, laughter, and community spirit.

This special event was made possible by the generous support of our amazing community partners: The Richard Breunig Foundation, American Legion Auxiliary Post 295, and Heart of Compassion—and a special thank you to one of our wonderful veterans, Gaillane Chock. Your generosity and support helped make this day so memorable for the children and families in our community.

The kids had a great time choosing their special Easter baskets and taking photos with our Easter Bunny, also known as Mellissa Breunig! Afterward, everyone headed to the park area where David Breunig and our dedicated volunteers had hidden Easter eggs—including some extra special golden eggs with money inside. The kids had so much fun running around searching for eggs!

A very special thank you as well to Margaret and Cora, who brought food to share with the group. Your kindness helped bring everyone together and made the day even more special.

A joyful day for the kids and our community—we're so grateful to everyone who helped make our first Ninth Street Easter event such a great success, and we look forward to many more in the future! 🐰



Santiago Palm Vista

St. Patrick's Day was a fun-filled celebration at Santiago Palm Vista in Hemet! Residents enjoyed a festive luncheon—yes, we even had green eggs—along with plenty of activities, including a lively game of trivia. Congratulations to Janice Castillo for taking home the trivia win!

We also held a "Most Festive St. Patrick's Day Outfit" contest, with two fantastic winners who really brought the holiday spirit.

Santiago Palm Vista is a special community, and we're grateful for the opportunity to bring residents together for events like this. Thank you to everyone who joined in the fun and helped make it a memorable celebration! 🐰



Santiago Creek Orange Estates



AVAG members at Santiago Creek Orange Estates gather monthly for fellowship, food and support. Highlights from recent months:

In March, the chapter marked St. Patrick's Day with a festive celebration, including a historical presentation on Ireland by Larry. The event also featured a St. Patrick's Day trivia contest, won by Kathy Watson. A lively St. Patrick's Day dance off took place, with Larry claiming victory amidst applause. Thanks to Commander Glenn and Nancy and our volunteers pastor Crispin Tenorio and Beth Ramirez for all their help making this event such a success.

In April, the chapter welcomed guest speaker Orasee Russell, a Marine Corps veteran and broker associate with Wedgewood Homes Realty, for pizza, fellowship and prayer.

June's meeting featured a shared meal and dessert, with thanks to Rain for her cookies. Chapter Commander Glenn Williamson and Nancy were recognized for their work making meetings welcoming for veterans.

July brought several highlights: veteran Ray Parra returned after an injury and hospital stay, sharing how a friend helped save his life and publicly honoring that friend. Korean War Veterans Association representatives spoke about preserving veterans' legacies, Brian Williams updated the group on AVAG's growing partnership with Stater Bros. Markets, and Chaplains Marla and Wayne Ogelvie shared upcoming veteran activities.

August brought a double celebration—Glenn Williamson's 80th birthday and Nancy's birthday—with Glenn's favorite meal, In-N-Out, plus desserts and gifts from grateful veterans.

AVAG expresses its appreciation for ekklesia.today church, whose volunteers' ongoing support helps make the Santiago Creek meetings possible. 🙏





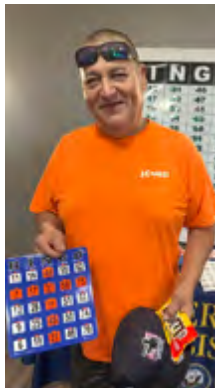
Sequoia Plaza MHP

AVAG members at Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park in San Bernardino gather each month for fellowship, friendship and fun. July and August brought plenty of all three.

The July meeting featured a potluck dinner with enchiladas, chicken, pizza, side dishes and desserts, followed by several rounds of bingo and prizes for the winners. Sandy Reyes, an independent Medicare agent, also joined the group to answer questions about Medicare and dental coverage and offer information to the veterans in attendance.

August's gathering again included a potluck dinner and bingo, with gift cards and other prizes adding to the fun. It was especially nice to welcome Eleanor and Mike back after they had been under the weather, while three new members—Augustine, George and Sylvia—joined the group.

The monthly gatherings at Sequoia Plaza provide veterans with an opportunity to share a meal, enjoy some fun and, most importantly, build friendships and a sense of community. 🦋



Rancho La Paz MHP

AVAG's Rancho La Paz community gathers monthly for fellowship and connection. Highlights from March and April:

In March, Commander James and his wife, Charro, provided an Italian lunch. Guest speakers included Janet Brown from Congressman Lou Correa's office, who updated attendees on the planned veterans cemetery near the 91 Freeway, and Westminster City Councilwoman Amy Phan, who shared her experiences. Army veteran Catherine was recognized for volunteering to help fellow veterans with their claims. Thanks also went to Pastor Cris and ekklesia. today church volunteers for their continued support.

April's speaker was Army veteran and former 75th Ranger Regiment Infantryman Ryan Antes, who shared stories from his Afghanistan and Iraq deployments, including his role in the Jessica Lynch rescue mission and surviving a near point-blank AK-47 round thanks to his body armor. Now a civil trial lawyer with his own practice, Ryan gave members a powerful firsthand account of his service.

Commander James and Charro again provided lunch, with Brian Williams and Pastor Crispin Tenorio bringing sides and Mary Cruz and Carrie contributing desserts—generosity that helps make Rancho La Paz meetings a welcoming space for veterans and their families. 🦋



Casitas La Verne Mobile Home Estates

AVAG was honored to host a wonderful Father's Day celebration at Casitas La Verne in the City of La Verne!

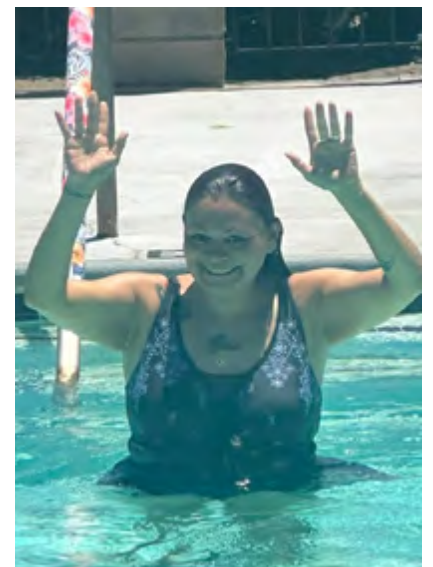
Our veterans, seniors, and community members enjoyed a fantastic afternoon filled with great food, fellowship, music, and fun.

A special thank you to Sheree from Santiago Communities for providing a beautiful lunch and for helping make this event such a success. We were thrilled to feature the talented Budsoul Band through the Blues for Vets program with the Long Beach Blues Society. Their incredible jazz and blues music had everyone smiling, singing along, and enjoying the day. Some guests were dancing, others were relaxing by the pool, and a few even took a swim while enjoying the beautiful sunshine. It was truly a joyful day filled with laughter, friendship, and community spirit.

In honor of Father's Day, all of the men in attendance received a special gift, including patriotic socks, a watch, and a thermal cup. It was a small way to show our appreciation for the fathers, veterans, and men who have made a positive impact on their families and communities.

We are so grateful to Casitas La Verne and Santiago Communities for welcoming our veterans and seniors and helping create opportunities for connection, appreciation, and fun.

Thank you to everyone who attended and helped make this Father's Day celebration so memorable! 🦋





Pacific Palms MHP

Our monthly luncheon and bingo afternoons, hosted by AVAG, at Pacific Palms in Highland, are great opportunities for residents to gather and enjoy fellowship and time together as a community. The event also features a potluck with a range of delicious food options, followed by bingo, with winners receiving gift cards, which in April were to In-N-Out Burger and IHOP.

At the April meeting attendees also received special gifts from our community partner Children Giving Gifts. The women received totes and sparkly baseball hats, and the men received the Centennial Americana hats and watches.

At the June meeting, attendees were able to select from clothing and household items to take home, helping meet practical needs within the community.

A special thank you to our dedicated volunteers, Paul and Mary, for faithfully serving and helping make each gathering welcoming and enjoyable. 🦋



Cherokee Senior Mobile Home Park

The American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) chapter at Cherokee Mobile Home Park continues to draw enthusiastic crowds on the last Thursday of every month, thanks to our dedicated volunteers and Commander Manuel Martinez.

A recent guest speaker was former Army Ranger Ryan Antes, who was also the featured speaker at AVAG's Memorial Day event. The chapter also honored Purple Heart recipient Paul Posadas and Gold Star mother Karen Fisher, with a special luncheon sponsored by Karta Motorwerks.

In May, members enjoyed great fellowship over an In-N-Out Burger lunch, exciting raffle prizes, and an informative presentation from the City of Anaheim Recreation Department regarding local community resources.

Thank you to all who attend and help make these monthly gatherings a success! 🦋



AVAG's Veterans Connect

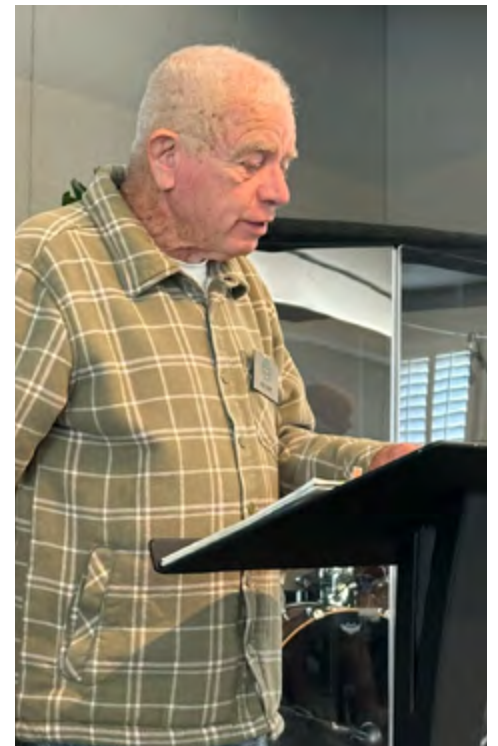
There have been great turnouts at our AVAG Veterans Connect events which are held on the fourth Saturday of every month at 12 PM at Hope Chapel in Huntington Beach. It's always wonderful to enjoy fellowship with these amazing veterans.

We are currently studying Operation Timothy Book 4. Thanks to all who contributed the delicious entrées and desserts, we enjoyed a beautiful lunch. At our March meeting in particular, everyone was especially excited to enjoy Mellissa Arriola Breunig's famous chili. A heartfelt thank you also to Marla and Wayne Ogelvie all the ways they contribute.

Councilwoman Amy Phan West attended our March meeting and shared her testimony with our group.

The April gathering was especially memorable, when veterans enjoyed receiving thoughtful gifts from Children Giving Gifts. Each received a pair of decorative socks with messages like "I am a Veteran" and "Home of the Free Because of the Brave." Their smiles said it all!

Thank you to David and Mellissa Breunig who donate the gift cards and prizes to raffle off at our meetings. 🦋



In Memoriam



Lucille Bosch

From AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto:

I had the honor of officiating Lucille “Lu” Bosch’s celebration of life at Casitas LaVerne. Lucille (1932–2026) lived a full and joyful life, devoted to her family, music, and friendship, and will be deeply missed by all who knew her.

It was truly wonderful to spend time with her family and the many friends from the community who came together to celebrate her beautiful life. 🦋



John Hampton

On Thursday, April 16, we said goodbye to one of our beloved residents at Casitas LaVerne, John Hampton.

John was a familiar, welcoming presence at all of our AVAG events in the clubhouse. He truly enjoyed being

part of this community, and it showed in the way he showed up and connected with others.

Casitas LaVerne has lost another wonderful senior, and he will be deeply missed. 🦋



John Hodges

John Hodges, Army veteran and member of the AVAG Rancho La Paz Chapter from its very first meeting, was honored on July 27, 2026, with a viewing at The Rock Church in Anaheim and military honors at Riverside National Cemetery.

John sat down at the piano at that first meeting and became the heart of our chapter. His music, laughter, and joyful spirit will be deeply missed. We keep his wife, Rachel, daughter, Marietta, and family in our prayers. 🦋



Gary Oran Masters

On July 18, AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto had the honor of offering the invocation and sharing a message at the celebration of life for Gary Oran Masters at Casitas La Verne. Gary was a United States Army Veteran who faithfully served during the Vietnam War era.

The serviced honored Gary’s life, military service, and legacy. Military honors were provided by the VFW Post 12034 “Band of Brothers,” who honored Gary with military respect and dignity.

Please keep John’s family in your thoughts and prayers. 🦋



Tony Melvin

On July 25, 2026, we celebrated the life of our dear friend, veteran, and brother in Christ, Tony Melvin. Thank you to the 82nd Airborne Veterans for the beautiful military honors, and to everyone who helped honor him.

Tony’s journey was one of perseverance, courage, and faith, and he touched many lives through Veterans Connect at Hope Chapel. We will miss him deeply, but rejoice that he is now with his Savior. 🦋



Cathy Rubino

Cathy Rubino, a U.S. Army veteran and beloved member of the AVAG Cherokee Chapter at Cherokee Mobile Home Park, served in the Women’s Army Corps from 1955 to 1959, retiring as a Specialist Third Class (E-4). Stationed at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and Fort Dix, New Jersey, she was selected as a platoon leader.

After her service, Cathy devoted herself to her family and community. She served as treasurer of the Cherokee MHP social club, volunteered with the Anaheim Police Department, and visited homebound individuals through YANA. We are grateful for her service and will remember her fondly. 🦋