



The California Zephyr



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WINTER 2024

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

As I write the presidents message, I am also in the process of preparing for agent orange related surgery next week. Last June three cancerous tumors were found in my abdomen. The cancer they discovered was liposarcoma, an agent orange cancer. After five weeks of radiation treatment, they are ready to remove the tumors. I should be cancer free after the surgery.

I missed both the June and October state council meetings. I was hoping I was able to attend the October meeting, when we implemented Saturday night dinner for the delegates. Last year the state council provided breakfast for all the attendees on Sunday morning. The breakfast was so successful we decided to provide dinner Saturday night for all the attendees. The reports I received after the meeting was that both meals were very successful and sixty-one attendees were fed.

I am looking forward to seeing everyone at the January meeting and enjoying the Saturday dinner and Sunday breakfast.

Alan Cook, CA State Council President

DIANE CARLSON EVANS

By Kate O'Hare-Palmer

Military Women Memorial- "Women of the Vietnam Era."

Diane Carlson Evans

Founder and President Emeritus

Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation

Chair, Advisory Group Vietnam Women's Memorial/Eastern National

US Army Nurse Corps 1966-1972

Vietnam 1968-1969

Diane Carlson Evans served for a year in Vietnam as a trauma nurse on the surgical and burn wards at Vung Tau, and later as head nurse of a surgical unit at Pleiku. She came home in 1969 and served stateside. Fast forward in time after starting to raise her family.

Diane attended the dedication of The Wall in 1982 and the unveiling of Frederick Hart's Three Soldiers Statue in 1984. In Mr. Hart's words, his statue was "consistent with history." This statement left Diane with a nagging question, where were the faces of the women?

Without the women, this sacred area was an incomplete and inconsistent representation of history. 265,000 women had voluntarily joined the military and had honorably served their nation during the Vietnam era.

What would the war effort have been without us? We were together then...we should be together again. The lack of recognition of women was unacceptable, and you, Diane, weren't having any of it. And once we got a whiff of it ... and the movement started, we were all on board.

The work began. And it developed steam. It eventually became a locomotive, rolling across the country. State coordinators had been identified, and they, in turn, recruited volunteers in their regions. As Diane said, soon our brothers in arms joined us as did our communities. We incorporated. Now we were official, and the donations rolled in.

The Vietnam Women's Memorial was ten years in the making. It's difficult to understand and shocking that, in the beginning, with the vision and increased public awareness, there were so many who opposed it. Hate mail, threats, and angry phone calls poured in.

The federal bureaucratic process to get this Memorial approved on the National Mall was a tedious and convoluted chase. Diane describes this in detail in her article, "Moving a Vision: The Vietnam Women's Memorial," which describes the complex and difficult legislative path that led to the final dedication of the Memorial on November 11, 1993.

Tenacity overcame adversity, and all the stumbling blocks were only temporary obstacles. A quote from Margaret Mead has always stayed with her: "Never doubt that a



Vietnam Womens Memorial - Veterans Day.



Wreath laying at the Wall after the Veterans Day Ceremony
L-R AVVA wreath--Jackie Otte(Red Cross-312th Evac. Chu Lai-68-69) Martha Green-6th Convalescent Hosp. Cam Ranh Bay, Chu Lai AFB 69)

small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Thirty years ago, over 5,000 women veterans came to Washington for the dedication of our memorial.

Feelings swirled with expectation, joy, memories, and some trepidation. There were military unit reunions and a parade down Constitution Avenue. The streets of D. C. were lined with thousands of enthusiastic supporters, sharing our overwhelming exhilaration, as they waved flags and cheered us on.

Who knew that many of the men would be carrying their medical records, trying to find their nurses in the crowds!

We were Red Cross workers; intelligence officers; supply and clerical staff; navigation and air-support crew; journalists, Stars and Stripes staff; and so many more of us who had served all over the world.

The tears began. The "Memorial Mass of Thanksgiving to Honor Women Vietnam Veterans," hosted by Vietnam Veterans of America, brought us together. We could remember our loved ones who died and those whom we touched that didn't come home. At the Candlelight ceremony, with blessings from our Native American sisters and brothers, our hearts cracked opened, some for the first time since coming home.

This was also the first time many of us recognized our personal struggles with PTSD, and it was through this experience that we finally recognized that invisible burden, laid upon us so many years ago. This healing IS what Diane had envisioned.

We all went home, and the memories began flowing. There were many late-night phone calls, reconnecting with old friends. The Vietnam Women's Memorial made us visible to the world and began the healing process that we so desperately needed.

This statue was a touchstone for coming to terms with us and our place in history,

We came to learn that our strength in the creation of the Vietnam

Women's Memorial would continue forward through time for those who come after us.

VVA was proud to present you, Diane, with our lifetime achievement award at our National Convention in 2022.

The Memorial stands as a forever remembrance of and to us all.

On this, the 30th Anniversary of the dedication of the Vietnam Women Veterans Memorial, we thank you Diane, for your tenacity, perseverance, and finesse working in and through the hurdles on your way to the finish line. We were beside you all the way!!

Kate O'Hare-Palmer, VVA Women Veterans committee chair.



(l-r) Kate O'Hare-Palmer(2nd Surg and 312th Evac '68-69 Chu Lai and Lai Khe)
Diane Carlson Evans('68-'69-36th Evac-Vung Tau and 71st Evac-Pleiku)
Patti Ehline(2nd Surg and 312th Evac Chu Lai-68-69)

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The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the views of VVA, the State Council or its mem-bers.

Who Are The Vietnam Veterans Of America?
Founded in 1978, Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. is the only national Vietnam veterans organization congressionally chartered and exclusively dedicated to Vietnam-era veterans and their families. VVA is organized as a not-for-profit corporation and is tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Service Code.

VVA'S FOUNDING PRINCIPLE
"Never again shall one generation of veterans abandon another."

PURPOSE
The purpose of Vietnam Veterans of America's national organization, the state councils, and chapters is:

To help foster, encourage, and promote the improvement of the condition of the Vietnam veteran.

To promote physical and cultural improvement, growth and development, self-respect, self-confidence, and usefulness of Vietnam-era veterans and others.

To eliminate discrimination suffered by Vietnam veterans and to develop channels of communications which will assist Vietnam veterans to maximize self-realization and enrichment of their lives and enhance life-fulfillment.

To study, on a non-partisan basis, proposed legislation, rules, or regulations introduced in any federal, state, or local legislative or administrative body which may affect the social, economic, educational, or physical welfare of the Vietnam-era veteran or others; and to develop public-policy proposals designed to improve the quality of life of the Vietnam-era veteran and others especially in the areas of employment, education, training, and health.

To conduct and publish research, on a non-partisan basis, pertaining to the relationship between Vietnam-era veterans and the American society, the Vietnam War experience, the role of the United States in securing peaceful co-existence for the world community, and other matters which affect the social, economic, educational, or physical welfare of the Vietnam-era veteran or others.

To assist disabled and needy war veterans including, but not limited to, Vietnam veterans and their dependents, and the widows and orphans of deceased veterans.

FUNDING
Vietnam Veterans of America relies totally on private contributions for its revenue. VVA does not receive any funding from federal, state, or local governments.

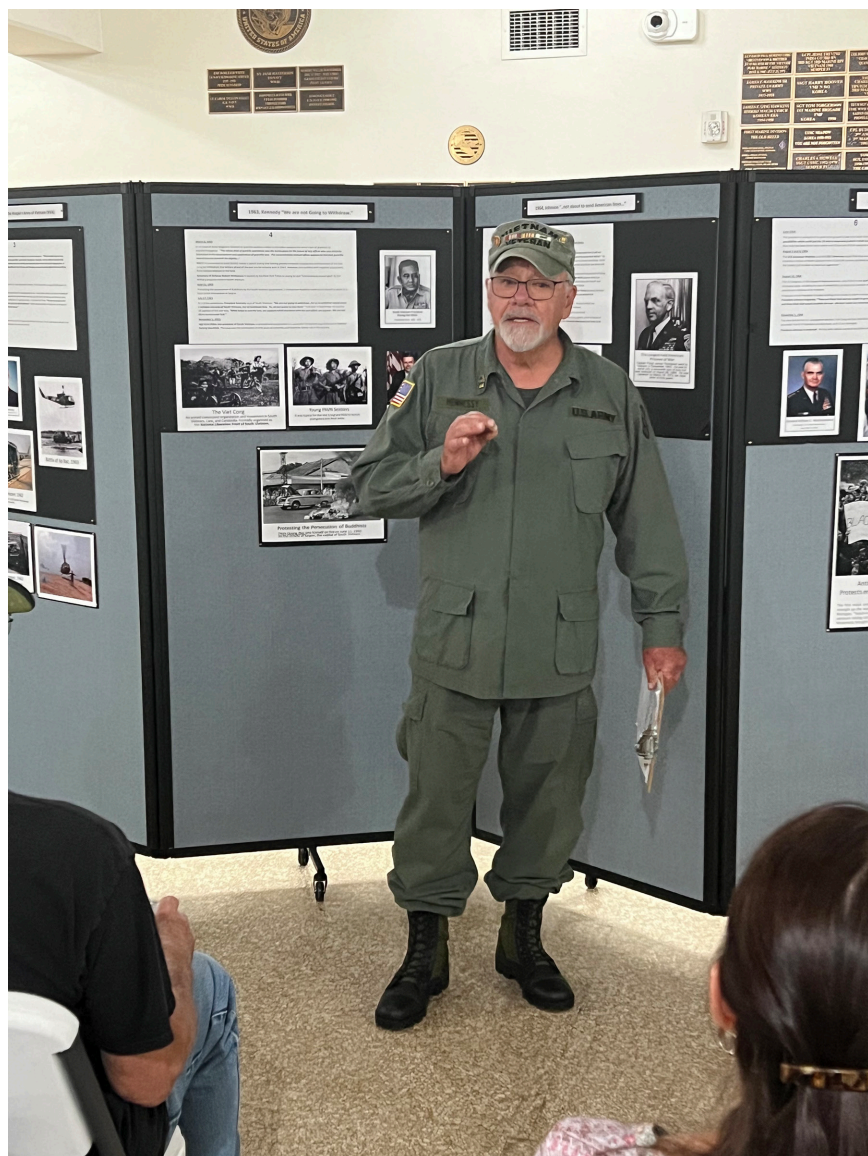


CHAPTER 982 GUADALUPE, CALIFORNIA



The year 2023 was an exceptional year of activity. The Wall That Heals came to San Luis Obispo for the second time. San Luis Obispo is the first city to have had the exhibit twice. The chapter was involved with the





planning for every facet of the event. On March 14th, in pouring rain, some members rode in the motorcycle escort. Several members were involved in the assembly and disassembly of the exhibit. While the exhibit was on display, members filled shifts as docents explaining the wall and helping visitors find names.

During the summer, memorial bricks were set at the City of Guadalupe Veterans Memorial Flagpole base. The bricks are sold, engraved, and set by Chapter members.

On September 17, 2023, the Chapter Color Guard led the Guadalupe 100th Anniversary Fiesta Parade.

On September 30, 2023, the Chapter was an entrant in the Arroyo Grande Harvest Festival Parade.

The 50th Year Commemoration of the Vietnam War was recognized in special events held at the Central Coast Veterans Memorial Museum on Veterans Day. As a co-curator, the Chapter constructed a Vietnam War exhibit in the museum, held oral presentations at the exhibit, and opened the ceremonies with a special presentation to honor local veterans.

The last mission for 2023 will be Wreaths Across America. This year, wreaths will be placed at the graves of veterans at the Santa Maria Cemetery

VVA CHAPTER 535

Membership holding steady at 86 Regular members and 6 associate members for a total of 93 members.

Chapter members participated in a Sept. 13, 2023 walk-by parade to honor Lou Contor on the occasion of his 102nd birthday. Lou is the last survivor of the sinking of the USS Arizona at Pearl Harbor.

Chapter 535 has been participating in a forum which seeks to improve communications with the seniors in the Grass Valley/Nevada City community.

The Chapter staffed a booth for five days at the Nevada County Fair.

One Chapter member attended the VVA National Convention as a delegate.

Chapter members had the opportunity to attend the Nevada County All Veterans Stand Down held October 13, 134, 2023 at the Nevada County Fairgrounds where the facility cost was \$4,800, largely offset with a \$4,000 anonymous donation.

The Chapter shared in paying the cost of plane tickets for a local Veteran to rescue her son from a bad circumstance in Colorado. Contribution was \$163.40 which was also matched by the VFW, the local American Legion Post and the Marine Corps League.

The Chapter also contributed \$500 to help offset the cost of returning the cremains of the son of a local veteran who could not afford to have his deceased son returned home from afar for funeral services.

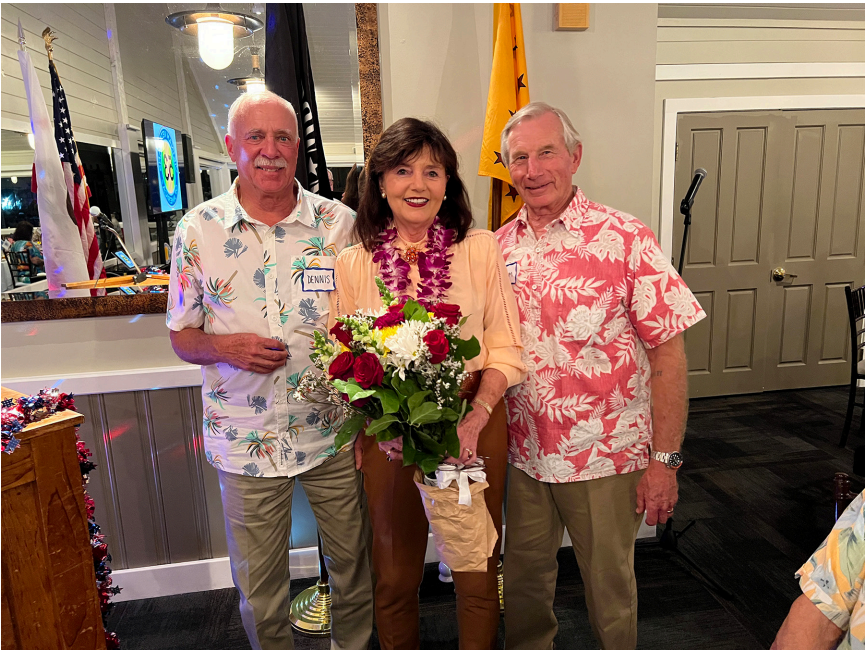
Chapter 535 has been soliciting brief presentations from the membership to tell their personal story of “Second Courage,” how they found their way following deployment to Vietnam.

Chapter 535 will be supported Wreaths Across America on December 16, 2023 with local activities coordinated by the DAR.

CHAPTER 53

Chapter 53 held a 40th Anniversary Dinner on September 27th, 2023 at the Bluewater Grill, Redondo Beach, CA. The keynote speaker was Justice Eileen Moore, a former US Army nurse in Vietnam. Justice Moore is a great advocate for Veterans, having established the Judicial Council for Veterans in 2008. Read about her career here: <https://counciloncj.org/eileen-moore/>

Pictured with Justice Moore are Chapter 53 President Dennis Wild, and Chapter Treasurer Thomas Kaehler (Anniversary Dinner Chairman)..



CHAPTER 933

The Fresno area Valley Veterans parade laid claim this year to being the largest event of its kind in the U.S. The three-hour parade included hundreds of vehicles and showcased dozens of military and service organizations, bands, and patriotic displays by local businesses and civic groups. VVA Chapter 933 Chapter has participated in these parades for twenty-five years and this year featured a vintage Navy Jeep and several limousines.

Photo 1. Navy Jeep: Chapter President Alex Fabros, AVVA members Lorrain Fabros



Chapter 933 members John Sturdivant, Stan Shorey.

2. 933 member Don Hayhurst and grand-daughter Abigail met the drill team of the Sons of the Revolution waiting for the big parade to begin.

3. 933 Members r-l George Laborde, Alex Fabros, Paul Kaser, Joh Sturdivant join with County Sheriff's horse team at the parade assembly.

Members of VVA Chapter 933 joined fundraising efforts for the Heart of the Horse Therapy Ranch at its annual Cowboy Dinner Dance. 933 members, who serve as volunteers at the facility, have made this one of the Chapter's major projects. The event brings in over thirty thousand dollars annually to help the ranch serve veterans and medically fragile children throughout the year. Over four hundred of the project's supporters attended this year.

Photo: 1-r. Dinner/Dance-- Chapter 933 Members : Don Hayhurst, Dolores Hay-



hurst, Paul Kaser, Steve Hayhurst, Joann Hayhurst, and Heart of Horse Staff Member Teresa

On November 14, Rebecca Malmo, Regent of the Fresno-Yosemite Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and Carolyn Peterson Honorary Regent of the local DAR Chapter presented members of VVA and AVVA of Chapter 933 with pins and certificates honoring VVA and AVVA members for their service to veterans.

Photo 1-r AVVA Members Lorraine Fabros and Henrietta Sturdivant receive honors from DAR Regents Rebecca Malmo and Carolyn Peterson.



CHAPTER 1147
ESCONDIDO/NORTH COUNTY SAN DIEGO

As the newest VVA Chapter in California, we have been concentrating on building

up our membership, letting our communities know that we are here. We have received support from our other groups: American Legion Post 149. Disabled American Veterans Chapter, Veterans of Foreign War Post 1513 San Diego North County Blue Star Mothers Chapter CA 9, and so many others. We have been active in our communities, and learning as we go. We participated in the:



Grape Day Festival, Grape Day Park on September 9th, 2023
Pictured, are volunteers (Juan Furler, Peggy and George Prather)



Escondido Gran Ave. Festival on Sunday, October 15th, 2023. Pictured L-R
Mark Storsteen, Glenn Kemp, George Prather, John Gonzalez

The United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration, VVA Honorary Part-



ner Distinction,
November 9, 2023 on the USS Midway Museum
We did participate in many other events, including the Escondido Veterans Day, and
will participate in the upcoming Escondido Christmas Parade

CHAPTER 47

Chapter 47 along with sister
Chapter 1024 (Huey Helicopter)
were invited to and participated
in the City of Placentia "Welcome
Home Vietnam Veterans Pa-





rade" in October. The parade was a big success and the city was pleased to have us.

Chapter 47 recently awarded three \$1,000 dollar scholarships to recent high school grads, the scholarships were established to honor the memory of Elayne Mackey for her commitment and service to Chapter 47, service to the community of all veterans and their families.

She also was elected California AVVA president, served as Chapter 47 AVVA liaison for many years, and co-creator of the nationally recognized Secondary PTSD program.

Chapter 47 will participate in the City of Riverside Veterans Day parade on November 10th and participate in the City of Murrieta Veterans Day parade on November 11th.

The City of Murrieta will also have a dedication of a Vietnam Monument shortly after the parade in which chapter members will be in attendance.

Chapter 47 continues to support 5 veterans villages serving over 500 families, we supply weekly deliveries of milk and eggs, monthly boxes of food in partnership with Feeding America and personal care items in partnership with companies like Amazon.

The villages are located in Loma Linda, Beaumont, March AFB, Downtown Riverside, and Cathedral City.

Chapter 47 continues to have strong support with the Household Goods Program the chapter has averaged over 25 bags of donations over the last 4 months from chapter members and the community.

CHAPTER 201

- VVA 201 continues to meet monthly with a strong attendance from members and guests
- Robert J. Kadlec, a renowned and honored member of the Chapter passed away on September 30, 2023. The chapter will honor his legacy at his memorial on November 6, 2023.
- Maintaining a color guard, in conjunction with AVVA 201 for the Annual San Jose Veterans Day Parade on November 11, 2023.
- In conjunction with AVVA 201, held a special POW/MIA day event at the home of the AVVA President.
- Chapter 201 held their annual holiday meeting on 12/12 with a celebrated Vietnam Navy Pilot that survived being shot down after a bombing run and rescue off coast of North Vietnam.
- Donated and participated in Wreaths across America at Gate of Heaven cemetery in Cupertino.
- Annual Donation to the Trees for Troops program sponsored by the Battaglia Tree Farm in Gilroy.
- Participated in an annual gift distribution with AVVA 201 with visits to patients in VA Palo Alto and Menlo Park.

CHAPTER 1024

Despite health challenges to President Dennis Phelps and Vice-President Bob Harrison, VVA Chapter 1024 continues to serve the veteran community taking the helicopter to various veteran events throughout Southern California.

Thanks to members of VFW Post 3173 and chapter members who stepped up to drive the helicopter.

Recent events included: The Patriots and Paws Car Show (Patriots and Paws warehouse's yard is where the helicopter is parked. This organization offers any household goods to veterans at no charge.)

By invitation of the City of Westminster 3 days at its Fall Festival.

Surf City Car Show.

Marine Corps Golf Tournament.

American Legion Post 354 BBQ.

Placentia Police Night Out.

Great Park in Irvine heavy equipment display.

Patriots and Paws 4th of July fireworks stand -3 days.

Ontario 4th of July Parade.

This weekend is the Standdown for Veterans Event in Desert Hot Springs.

Please keep all our ailing veterans in your prayers.

CHAPTER 756

1. Donations to the Air Force Sargent Assoc. at LAX AFB Space Command for POW& MIA event at LAX AFB and Patriots 4 Pendleton (U.S. Marines) at Camp Pendleton.
2. Christmas Luncheon on December 7th at Los Alamitos joint Training Base.
3. Helping VVA #1024 with donations to keep "Life Saver" Huey Helicopter traveling as the VVA #1024 President and Vice President are ill currently. Conrad is in contact with #1024 and communicating Chapter concerns and responsibilities and attending January meeting 2024 meeting.
4. On the 1st Sunday of the month involved with "The Flag Salute" at Freedom Park, in Westminster supporting friendship with the Vietnamese Community and Conrad is invited to be interviewed on the Art Contest "Price of Freedom" on Westminster TV channel.
5. Also supporting the Gold Star Manor to help support the Gold Star Mothers and Fathers and Veterans that live there.
6. Working on Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans National Holiday event.

CHAPTER 535

1. Membership is holding steady at 86 Regular members and 7 associate members for a total of 93 members.
2. Chapter 535 continues to participate in a forum which seeks to improve communications with the seniors and Veterans in the Grass Valley/Nevada City community.
3. The Chapter recently assisted a local Veteran with provision of emergency food supplies, hygiene supplies, and by request, provision of a blender so that fruit and vegetable products could be puréed and easily made into slurpies or stovetop soups.
4. Chapter 535 continues to solicit brief presentations from the membership to tell their personal story of "Second Courage," a reflection on how they found their way following deployment to Vietnam.
5. Chapter members attended local Veterans Day ceremonies which featured a presentation by a Beale Air Force Base U-2 pilot.
6. The Chapter recently purchased a memorial brick to honor a decedent who had served as Chapter President in past years.
7. On December 7th in lieu of it regular monthly meeting, the Chapter held a Christmas potluck dinner attended by nearly 40 members and significant others.
8. Chapter 535 supported Wreaths Across America with its purchase of wreaths and with wreath placements at a local cemetery on December 16, 2023.
9. Several Chapter members attended a 50th Anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War pinning ceremony staged December 22nd by our United States 3rd Congressional District Congressman, Kevin Kiley. Each Veteran received personal thanks for his service from Congressman Kiley.

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Ponce Gonzalez, Chair

The committee attendance was Good. The presentation consisted of 2 parts I showed some video examples of VVA members explaining why they joined the VVA. The examples were presented to show how easy it is to produce a video.

The second part were examples of a written PSA. Interested Parties were requested to send an email to me at "speedyftg2@gmail.com" for a new package kit that includes a new document "California State Council – Public Affairs Committee, "How to write a Public Service Announcement" (PSA) This is an all inclusive document that combines any of the elements of the previous PSA kit, but in a more formal and controlled through revision process with the CSC as owner.

POW/MIA COMMITTEE

Bob Chaney, Chair

Committee members present: Patrick Graham, Donald Barnard, Ale Fajpes, Bruce Millhennch, Kirk Gillett, Manul Sanchez

JANUAARY

Recovery notification of Marine Captian Ronald W. Forrester was accounted for December 4, 2023. Bringing the total still missing during the Vietnam War to 1577.

Watched a video by DPAA “A Day in the Life of a Field Team” and “Recovery and Identification”.

Where the teams are searching.

OCTOBER

The POW/MIA Pew at the Naval Academy, DPAA Update, DPAA budget, Metting between Vietnam and the DPAA (first time held in the US). The recoveries for 2023.

MARCHING FORWARD:

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA CHAPTER 53 MARKS THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF A TIMELESS BOND

by Robb Fulcher

Vietnam Veterans of America might look like any other service organization. As the local chapter, which covers the South Bay and Palos Verdes, turned 40 years old last month, the veterans can boast a long list of civic accomplishments, including:

- Handing out about \$100,000 in student scholarships,
- Promoting legislation to designate Highway 1 the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway and raising \$25,000 for new highway signs,
- Creating an iconic memorial of marble and tall flags, which stands at the municipal gateway to Hermosa Beach.

They are notably set apart by profound shared experiences that include firing machine guns from helicopters, and diving behind sandbags when the air whistles with potential death. But that’s not their focus. “We don’t sit around and tell war stories. We do things,” said Dennis Wild, a Redondo Beach chiropractor and the president of Chapter 53. “We try to mix it up, have a lot of fun, and do some good,” said Steve Crecy, a long-time member and former president. The group includes combat and non-combat veterans. Some who were drafted and others who enlisted. They range from frontline infantry to those who served during that era without going to Vietnam. ‘Kind of underground’ VVA was founded nationwide in 1978, when the experience of Vietnam veterans felt different than that of their older counterparts. Unlike other veterans, when Vietnam vets returned home in the ‘60s and ‘70s, many “faced scorn,” Crecy said. “Nobody wanted to be recognized as a veteran. You were just kind of underground on it,” he said. Even other veterans often saw them differently. “There was a time when some veterans thought the Vietnam War was just a police action,” Wild said, referring to a phrase then used to describe an undeclared conflict. “They weren’t going to accept that it was a war...People are dying around you. It’s a war.” Chapter 53 currently numbers about 170 members “on the books.” About 25 regularly attend the monthly meetings, and 15 or so form the backbone of the civic efforts. Diane Plaster sings the “National Anthem” during the 2021 Veterans Day celebration at the Hermosa Beach Veterans Memorial Sundial, which was built by VFW members in 1994. Photo by Kevin Cody From the frontline Wild was among those who joined up to serve in the war. Initially posted stateside, he insisted on being sent overseas, where he dodged artillery shells along the Demilitarized Zone. Eventually he drove over a land mine and went home, fortunately without a permanent injury. Wild’s family lineage is a military one. His father, a B-24 pilot, flew 30 bombing missions over Germany in World War II. Wild’s uncle served as a radioman on a B-24, and both grandfathers were World War I veterans. Wild graduated from high school in Michigan, and enlisted once he turned 18. “I joined the Marine Corps Oct. 28, 1965. Before that, both parents would have to sign. My dad would, but my mom wouldn’t,” he said. “I wasn’t going to college. I felt I wanted to join the Marine Corps. I felt it was an honorable thing to do,” he said. Wild was sent to the west coast for an abbreviated, two-month boot camp at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island. “They called us the Hollywood Marines because we were trained in California,” he said with a laugh. After infantry training at Camp Pendleton in San Diego County, Wild was ordered to receive additional training as a truck driver. ‘I want to go to Vietnam’ ‘I was stuck at Camp Pendleton working the motor pool there... I talked to my commander and said ‘I want out of here. I want to go to Vietnam,’” he said. “I told my dad, I never told my mom,” he said. “Some people think I was crazy, but I joined the Marine Corps, and it wasn’t to sit around in the states.” His first major battle came in 1966, and the next year the action was heavier. “It was getting very interesting,” he said. Wild served as part of a small motor pool supporting a howitzer battery. “I have to tell you, it was the best thing that happened to me. We were a family. They depended on me,” he said. He and his comrades were near the DMZ, where major battles were being fought. “We got hit all the time. Most of us were lucky,” Wild said. The camp at Dong Ha “got hit hard, it was May 15, I believe,” he said. “We lost three killed, seven or eight wounded.” An average day was frequently punctuated by incoming artillery shells. “It seemed like every day. It was close to it, but it wasn’t all day.” ‘A little unnerving’ From there, Wild was sent to Con Thien, famously the site of fierce fighting, and might have left Dong Ha just in time. “For two weeks they were telling us we’re going to Con Thien, we’re going to Con Thien,” he said. Finally, at 3 o’clock one afternoon the prophecy came true. Then, within about four hours, the bunker Wild had vacated, a sandbag-and-wood makeshift against incoming artillery fire, was destroyed by the enemy. “Our motor team bunker took a direct hit,” he said. “It was blown away. That was a little unnerving.” At Con Thien, the North Vietnamese army shelled the Marines from eight to 10 miles away, throughout the day, several days a week. If the shells seemed to hit a target, “they really started lobbing them in,” Wild said. “It got to be so much you kind of got used to it. It was a scary time. You’d hear it whistling in, and hope and pray that your bunker could withstand it,” he said. “Sometimes we would hear something go off, then you’d have seven or eight or nine seconds to head for the bunker.” Wild’s five-ton truck hauled up to 100 artillery rounds weighing 100 pounds apiece. “There were no detonated heads on them, so we could throw them around pretty good. Especially when we were unloading while we were being shot at,” he added with a laugh. “We were surprised how strong we were. We were picking them up like they were 20 pounds.” At some times Wild joined in the firing by “humping rounds,” handing them to a Marine

who would drop them into the gun. The Marines’ position at Con Thien had been overrun shortly before Wild’s unit got there, and it was overrun again shortly after the unit returned to Dong Ha. Ticket home One day Wild sustained the wound that sent him home. “I was the lead truck, fully loaded... I drove over a land mine and fractured my leg,” he said. Wild didn’t know at first that his leg was broken. “It wasn’t blood and guts. I thought it was just a terrible, terrible sprained ankle.” The land mine “blew the road away,” and a helicopter carried Wild to Da Nang for treatment. It was there he learned from the doctors that his tour of duty was over. “They said ‘See you, you’re out of here.’ I said, ‘What are you talking about?’ “They had to pin it, and they couldn’t do that in Vietnam...They couldn’t just cast it. Three days later I was at Great Lakes Naval Hospital in Illinois,” Wild said. “I was not a happy camper,” he said. “I didn’t want to leave my guys.” Wild kept in touch with some of them through letters, and wound up seeing some at reunions in later years. Back stateside, Wild was well received. “I didn’t face what some fellows did coming home,” he said. Two years after coming home, Wild and Dick Cunningham, another veteran who would later join Chapter 53, took up off road motocross racing. “It was great to get the adrenaline up,” Wild said. “When you get out of the service you need something like that. It was an outlet.” He worked construction for eight years, then moved to California, where he bought a home in Hawthorne. “Dick and his wife moved out here two years before I did,” he said. Wild became a chiropractor, and has maintained a practice in Redondo Beach for the past four decades. He and his wife, Donna, have a grown daughter and a grown stepson. Dirt and sandwiches Wild, now 75, served as secretary of Chapter 53 for 10 years, before becoming president. When veterans get together, they often swap odd or funny stories from the old days, rather than recounting jungle combat. In Con Thien, Wild shared a bunker with another truck driver, from Montana, who had been saving up bread, peanut butter, and jelly to make a “gigantic” PB&J sandwich. He used to muse about the sandwich he would build. The two men slept above ground because the bunker “was hit too much,” and took shelter in the bunker when artillery fire came. “I was walking by when a round came in, and, without thinking I jumped into the hole,” Wild said. “I didn’t know he was already in there, and I landed on top of him.” The man ended up covered in dirt, along with the sandwiches he held in both hands. His face reflected all the pathos of a culinary dream turned to dust. “He looked like a Little Rascal,” Wild said. “I couldn’t stop laughing.” Asked about the Vietnam War in its broad geopolitical context, Wild said, “We were there for a very good reason. It didn’t work out well. We can get into the politics of the situation, but it wasn’t handled well.” He mentioned a visit he made to Hawaiian Gardens when the traveling version of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall made its way there. “There were several politicians who were Vietnamese, who thanked me from the bottom of their heart. That was worth its weight in gold. It made me so proud.” ‘I’m in the Army now’ John Masaki was drafted. He fired a machine gun from the side door of a gunship helicopter onto enemy ground troops to provide cover for infantrymen. Later, he had to come to grips with shooting a 12-year-old mistaken for a Viet Cong fighter, in the fog of guerilla warfare. Masaki, 76, was raised on a farm in Torrance, “back in the days when there was still some farmland in Torrance.” In 1965 his father died in a drowning accident, and Masaki found himself at loose ends. Out of high school, he worked on cars, helped out with the family business, and attended what was then called El Camino College. “I didn’t have a whole lot of direction,” he said. In 1967 he “stepped out of school for a semester, and it was like they were waiting on my doorstep. “All I knew was, I’m in the Army now.” Masaki’s experience growing up American had been distinctly Japanese-American. By this time he had learned his mother and father, both native-born US citizens, had been held in an internment camp in Arkansas during World War II. He recalled getting in elementary school fist fights with boys who called him “a Jap.” But when he was drafted, he said, “none of this meant a thing to me. I’m no different from them when we get drafted.” He was hustled off to Fort Ord, California for basic training, then to Fort Rucker, Alabama to learn how to maintain helicopters and shoot a machine gun from their doors. “We shot an M60 machine gun from a tower. It was a lot of fun.” He was sent to Fort Bragg, N.C. for further training, and thought he might not be sent overseas. Then in 1968, about halfway through his two-year stint, he got his orders, took his place in a Flying Tiger cargo plane and soon found himself at Base Bearcat, about 20 miles from Saigon. There, he was offered an extra \$65 a month – about double his pay – to add helicopter gunner to his maintenance duties. Another man mulling the same choice convinced Masaki to take the money. After all, he had no wife back home to worry about, and faced possible death by artillery even if he stayed at Bearcat. While other helicopters flew troops to the battle areas, Masaki flew on a gunship helicopter to provide cover. Positioned at an open side door, he fired on enemy ground troops with an M60 that hung from the ceiling of the fuselage by a strap “like a belt for your waist.” He also threw grenades that were near at hand. Strewn in the cabin nearby him were M 16 rifles, ammunition and grenades. “It was insane, if you think about it,” he said. “White phosphorus grenades. If those went up – It was dangerous as hell and we knew it. We just lived with it. “I was fearless. Why that was the case, I’m not sure.” In one sense, he said, “It was like an eight-hour day job. In the morning we would drop off the infantry, then we would park in a designated spot for a while, always in contact. “I felt so bad for the infantry guys,” he said. “They really took a beating. It was an ugly situation for those guys.” One day Masaki was providing air support from his gunship, on the way to a landing zone, when he spotted someone who appeared to be a Viet Cong fighter at the tree line below. “I yelled to the pilot, ‘There’s a target on the left side!’” Masaki said. The pilot relayed this to the colonel in charge, in a helicopter above, who answered over the radio, ‘Take him out,’” Masaki said. “Without waiting, I started firing. He was getting to the tree line, and he was going to reach the hooch – that’s what we called a house.” Masaki hit the target. “He went down in a pool of blood. I felt pretty good, we had one less Viet Cong we have to worry about,” Masaki said. “Then another individual came out of the hooch, probably his father, and he picks up the body, holds up the individual. A sampan hat came off. I could see he appeared to be a young kid,” Masaki said. “At that point I did not feel so good. It looked like I shot somebody quite young.” Masaki paused. “But Viet Cong come in all sizes.” Masaki’s pilot complained that Masaki fired without an order from him. Masaki responded with “yessir,” but added that he heard their colonel give the order. “All we heard all the time, wipe out the enemy. If you have the chance to take them out, shoot them,” he recalled. A US medevac unit picked up the person for treatment. “The report came back. He was a 12-year-old boy, he was a complete civilian, and that was his father,” Masaki said. “The boy died.” Masaki’s reaction to the event was complicated by the confusing nature of the guerilla war. “I kept thinking, Bullsh*t. That’s the story, he’s a civilian. How many civilians are civilians by day and Viet Cong at night.” His Army stint ended in 1969, and with input from his first wife, he did not talk about his experiences, he said. The advice he got was “Put it behind

me.” In 2010, he attended a seminar about veterans’ benefits, which led to meeting a re-adjustment counselor named Everett Wong. “PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] was something I had never heard of, but pretty soon I started realizing I had some of that,” Masaki said. “Especially when my son turned 12, I thought a lot about it...Now I could really relate to the person who was holding the body of the person I killed.” Masaki finally got to process deeply held feelings about the event. “I had to go back through my thought process,” he said. “This was all about war. I did what I was told to do.” Along the way, Masaki had three children, remarried, and enjoyed a career in sales with the American Automobile Association. In the 1990s Masaki met Jerry Yamamoto, then president of Chapter 53. Masaki took Yamamoto’s card and filed it away. Much later, in 2021, Masaki attended a reunion including his old helicopter group, and appreciated the camaraderie. When a fellow vet talked up Vietnam Veterans of America, Masaki recalled Yamamoto, and joined Chapter 53. Crecy recruited him onto the board of directors, and he served there as well. Vietnam Veterans of America “is something that is not going to last forever,” Masaki said. “We are all getting up there in years.” Diane Plaster sings the “National Anthem” during the 2021 Veterans Day celebration at the Hermosa Beach Veterans Memorial Sundial, which was built by VFW members in 1994. Photo by Kevin Cody ‘My time was coming’ Dick Cunningham volunteered. He was reticent to speak of his war experience, preferring to recount catching a Bob Hope USO show. When he returned home, he dealt with PTSD, and found a meaningful connection with other veterans. Cunningham was attending college in Michigan, and his student deferment from the draft was set to end. “My two brothers were already in the Army. I knew my time was coming... I volunteered, and in October 1967 I was inducted,” he said. He was sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky for basic training. Then he was sent for additional training as an infantry and mortar specialist at Fort Polk, Louisiana. He was sent to Vietnam in February 1968. Asked about his war experience, Cunningham grew quiet. “I was an infantryman,” he said hesitantly. “I was in combat.” After a pause he said, in a brighter voice, “I can tell you about a Bob Hope show, if you want to hear about that.” He was “selected, somehow” to sit among a massive outdoor audience at an Army base in Long Binh. He and a friend, who also was selected, had to make their own way from their forward operating base, where the mission was to secure Saigon. They caught a ride to the show, and afterward they hitchhiked back, Cunningham said. He recalled the dicey nature of moving throughout the region. “You’ve got to make sure you’re hitchhiking to the right place,” he said. Between trips, he watched Hope entertain the troops for a Christmas special that would be shown on TV. “I was in the nosebleed seats, but I didn’t care,” Cunningham said. Also appearing on the show was actress and singer Ann-Margaret. “On the way out, I passed close to her. I got to wave to her, anyway. She was very pretty.” Cunningham came home in 1969. “If you waited until you had less than 150 days left on your commitment, they would give you credit for your full two years,” he said. “I didn’t trust the Army. I came home with less than 150 days – I think it was 147 days – to make sure.” He was welcomed home. “I know California had a lot of issues, but I was welcomed back,” he said. He found a special camaraderie at a local VFW hall. “The difficulty came – in short, PTSD – in a couple of weeks. I got an industrial engineering job at a steel mill. I had been working for a week or two when a guy said ‘You want to go to lunch?’ I said ‘Sure,’ and he said ‘You know, you come in and you sit down with these huge IBM reports, and you never look up. You just keep doing your job.’ “I realized, I don’t talk to anyone, I don’t socialize. There was no one there I could talk to. What I had been through, there was no way I would tell them.” “More than anything, if you haven’t been in combat you can’t understand it, and there’s no way you can explain it,” Cunningham said. A turning point in reintegration came when Cunningham made friends with another veteran. “He was a friend of my brother’s, a Marine. He was in a truck that got blown up, but he survived. We ended up racing motorcycles.” His new friend was Dennis Wild. “We started our own dirt bike racing team, and it might sound silly, but that got everything going again for me. We’ve stayed best friends,” Cunningham said. California bound He visited California, where Wild had relocated, and when he returned to Detroit there was “six inches of new snow on top of the foot and-a-half that was there when we left, and it was about 9 degrees.” That settled it, he was California bound for good. He wound up settling in Torrance, where he lives with his second wife, “the most wonderful girl I have ever known in the world.” He also has two daughters and two grandsons. “Things are looking pretty good,” Cunningham said. Along the way he became chief industrial engineer at Murrieta Aluminum, and later retired as head of western regional risk management for Farmers Insurance. He is 79 years old. A common language His tenure with Chapter 53 has included a 10-year stint as treasurer. “It was such a high paying job, nobody wanted it,” he joked. On the special connection between veterans, Cunningham mentioned meeting another infantryman at a recent convention in Orlando. “He was an 11 Charlie like me [an infantryman and a mortar specialist] and right away we’re speaking the same language. I can sit down with another infantryman, and right away we understand each other,” Cunningham said. “It’s a different world, and if you haven’t been in it, you can’t understand it.” A slice of history David Jonta got drafted. He served stateside, joining in a sweeping study of the Army system of ranks and grades. He also had a ringside seat for what then was the largest ever antiwar rally, which actually breached the Pentagon. Jonta got his draft notice from the Army a couple of weeks before graduating from Marian College Indianapolis. He went to Fort Knox for basic training. The initial plan was to make him a company clerk, which would have kept him at Fort Knox, but his orders were changed. Jonta, whose degree was in sociology, was sent to Fort Myer, next to the Pentagon, in early 1967 to help with the rank-and-grade study. The study group was formed in response to morale problems. Specialists, who rank above private first class, “had very little command authority” compared to “hard stripers” such as corporals and sergeants, Jonta said. The study group traced the evolution of the rank and grade structure from the War for Independence to their present. Jonta remarked on the thoroughness of the study. It also looked at the grade structure of the Soviet army, which “tried to incorporate doing away with class distinctions.” “I worked on that study for most of 1967. After it was completed, the big outcome was that it gave more authority to specialists. It changed the grade and rank structure a little bit,” Jonta said. As an information specialist, he worked within the office of the deputy chief of staff for personnel at the Pentagon. “One of my jobs there was helping to put together an Army personnel letter that was distributed Army-wide, to keep people informed about current personnel policy,” he said. “It was kind of Kiplinger style,” he said, referring to the personal finance newsletter. In late 1967 Jonta had a ringside seat for a slice of Vietnam era history, the March on the Pentagon, at the time the largest antiwar rally ever held. As many as 100,000 protesters mobilized to pressure President Johnson to end the war. Author Norman Mailer was famously arrested, and later immortalized the protest in his Pulitzer Prize winning nonfiction novel “The

Armies of the Night.” “I was on hand for that,” Jonta said. “The Defense Department sent crack MP units – Texas comes to mind – and there were a pretty good number of federal troops on hand,” he said. “There was some concern that they would break into the Pentagon, which some did briefly near the Mall entrance, but they didn’t get far,” Jonta said. Jonta, who slept at night at Fort Myer, within walking distance of his Pentagon office, was called upon to pitch in. “I put on a uniform and did guard duty that night, checking the hallways. There were stacks of C-rations, and quite a few troops.” Jonta was able to gaze out at the mass protest from a high vantage – a window or rooftop, he couldn’t recall for sure. “One of the highlights, if you will, was seeing that demonstration,” he said. Upon his discharge from the Army, Jonta worked as a reporter, and editor for the Indianapolis Star newspaper. He visited California, found the weather nice and the atmosphere “pretty laid back,” and moved here. He worked for various LA area newspapers, took up technical writing, and editing in defense and aerospace, and retired from the Aerospace Corporation in El Segundo, where he lives. Jonta is 79 years old. “A few years ago a friend of mine told me about Chapter 53. He said I should join. I said, I don’t think I can. He told me all Vietnam era veterans are entitled to join,” Jonta said. “I thought I would check it out. I didn’t intend to join. I thought, I’ll go to a meeting.” “Even though I did not have the distinction of having served in combat, I was accepted as a member,” Jonta said. Through companionship with other veterans he was able to get his brother, a helicopter crew chief in Vietnam, together with another crew chief who had served nearby in a sister company. Jonta pitches in on Chapter 53 projects, and serves on its scholarship committee. He also serves in the chapter’s color guard, providing a dignified, ceremonial presence for events, including the annual Veterans Day candlelight commemoration in Hermosa Beach. “The color guard is special to me. The overall feeling of comradeship is special to me,” Jonta said. “As much as anything, it’s just feeling a part of that special period. Even though I didn’t go to Vietnam, this makes me feel more part of that group and that integral era.” An era in time “Military experience, it does shape you. It gives you exposure to something you probably won’t find anywhere else, and that gives you a special kinship with fellow service members,” he said. “It was a turbulent time. There was a lot going on. It was a controversial war, it was divisive. “We’re all born into different eras, I guess. It was a different time. Was the war legal or just? Well, it’s your duty to serve. If they call you, you go. “The country is probably a little more introspective now. “Personally, I feel the government didn’t make a good case for the war in Vietnam, but I didn’t have a political position about it.” Crecy, who was a major player in the creation of the iconic Hermosa memorial, sought to place war, in its larger sense, within his perception of the veteran experience. “Who likes war? It’s not a good thing. Sometimes, unfortunately, it’s necessary. We all thought we were doing what we needed to do,” Crecy said. “When we got home, I guess a lot of people thought it wasn’t handled well. There is an expression, ‘When I left, we were winning.’ “I think we were fighting more or less for the system, for democracy or freedom, versus an oppressive regime.” ER

VETERANS POPULATION SHRINKING, AND LAST VIETNAM VETERAN IN SENATE TO RETIRE

There are more than 18 million veterans living in the United States, representing about 6 percent of the country's adult population. The share of the U.S. population with military experience has declined, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau. In 1980, about 18 percent of U.S. adults were veterans, but that share fell to 6 percent in 2022. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) projects that the number of living veterans will continue to decline over the next 25 years. The VA estimates that the number of veterans will drop from today’s 18.3 million to 12.1 million in 2048, a decrease of about 34 percent. By then, Gulf War-era veterans are projected to make up the majority of living veterans.

The last Vietnam veteran serving in the U.S. Senate, Tom Carper (Del.), will not seek re-election in 2024. Sen. Carper said in a Military.com interview that Vietnam veterans in Congress brought a different perspective to military and veteran’s issues than their predecessors from World War II and Korea as a result of how they were treated when they came home. "Coming back from Vietnam, we didn't get a warm welcome," Carper said. He and other Vietnam veterans pushed to help Americans distinguish between how they may feel about U.S. engagement in a war and the troops sent to fight it. "So, there's been a big change from how it was during Vietnam and now," Carper said, and the change has been for the better.

CALVET AGENTS CUT THROUGH RED TAPE TO CUT HOME LOAN DEAL FOR PARADISE VETERAN

by Jeff Jardine

By the spring of 2023, Navy veteran Sue Bone had given up hope on buying a new



home.

After her home in Paradise vanished in a wall of flames during the Camp Fire of 2018, she found herself up against another kind of wall—a wall of bureaucratic red tape—that caused endless delays in her efforts to close the deal on her next residence. No longer able to drive, Bone desperately needed the home because of its close proximity to stores and other amenities.

“The loan with the Town of Paradise fell through, leaving me in a tough situation after the construction of the new home was already in the process,” Bone said. “I thought everything was falling apart. My Camp Fire relief fund money was being postponed longer and longer.” She needed help, and fast. She found it by turning to CalVet Home Loans, where she connected with Associate Property Agent David Spalding and his loan origination team. “David was right there with me to help calm my nerves and reassured me it would all work out,” Bone said.

CalVet’s 102-year-old Home Loans Division has helped over 440,000 veterans and their families achieve the dream of home ownership. Formed in 1921 as the Farm and Home Loan Purchase Program, it has loaned more than \$8.4 billion without a dime of it coming from taxpayers.

Unlike typical mortgage lenders, CalVet Home Loans takes an active and highly personalized approach in assisting borrowers. They understand the needs of veterans and treat them like people, not a number. At CalVet Home Loans, veterans deal directly with team members, not a computer interface, throughout the home buying experience. They also offer unbeatable fire and hazard insurance at a time when some major insurance carriers refuse to write new policies in California.

The CalVet team helped Bone to navigate an extremely complex process.

“I had given up hope when everything was falling apart,” she said. “But because David was so optimistic, it kept me going. He even worked with the Town of Paradise to secure a Camp Fire loan for me.” Because CalVet Home Loans considered her unique circumstances, and provided personalized support throughout the process, Bone is now living in her new home.

“It’s so close to everything that she doesn’t have to rely on Uber or anyone else,” Spalding said. “I couldn’t have achieved my dreams without all of his help and encouragement. This house was perfect for me because I am visually impaired and disabled, and don’t drive. Thank you again for all you have done for me.”

SEVEN MINUTES FROM A SIX-YEAR POW

GARTH MEYER



Retired Air Force Col. Ken Hughey speaks to the gathered at Veterans Park Nov. 11.
Photo by Garth Meyer

Col. Kenneth Hughey, 91, walked to the podium and told of his four favorite veterans – four men from his hometown of Chic, Tennessee, one of which was his brother: Jack Hughey, Hollis Reager, John Fronabarger, and “Manboy” Boals.

“Can you imagine what Hollis Reager thought when he ran out of ammunition in the Hurtgen Forest?” Hughey said about one of a two-man team shooting a Browning automatic rifle in Germany. Hollis’ partner, the ammunition loader, was killed in action.

Hughey told of “Manboy,” whose unit stormed a beach in Italy, his body still there. He told of his two other favorite veterans.

He did not mention his own experience, as an F-4 Air Force pilot shot down in 1967, on his 105th mission over North Vietnam. His wife did not know if he was alive for 3 ½ years.

Hughey has four Purple Hearts – mostly shrapnel from bullets that entered the cockpit.

“Those four soldiers that I just described had a powerful effect on my entire life,” he said in his speech at Veterans Park. “Their willingness and capability.”

He retired from the Air Force as a colonel in 1979 and worked for 15 years as an engineer and project manager for Hughes Aircraft in Redondo Beach. Along the way, he went to law school and later worked as a criminal prosecutor in the Los Angeles City Attorney’s office, retiring in 2011.

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The morning he was shot down, Hughey’s plane led four groups of four F-4s in a raid.

“It was a big raid. Black puffballs all over the place,” Hughey told Easy Reader this week. “We dived right through a wall of flak to hit the target.”

Then he looked at his instruments.

“Engine firelight – both engines, it said fire with a big red light.”

Hughey’s co-pilot, Mel Pollack, called out that they were hit.

“94 Mach with two engines burning,” Hughey said. “In just a little over two minutes at 24,000 feet the right engine exploded.”

“I ejected. I didn’t know what Mel was doing because it’s every man for himself at that point.”

Suddenly Hughey was in the air, still in his seat.

“You’re just sitting there. Except you’re going down; vertical,” he said. “I saw Mel’s parachute pop. So I knew he was alive. I looked around, it was nice country. It was a beautiful day.”

When a pilot ejects, first it is with a “drogue” chute connected to the seat, then a regular single parachute. Hughey landed in a green thicket.

Villagers quickly surrounded him, they tied him with a rope, and made him undress to his underwear.

“They didn’t mistreat me in any way,” Hughey said. “That night I went to Hanoi in a truck. That’s about it.”

“They had a very skilled interrogation team,” he said.

They put him in a room.

“Here is not Geneva!” a Vietnamese man screamed in English. “Here is Vietnam!”

The man’s first question, after name, rank, date of birth and serial number was, “What is your base?”

Hughey did not answer, only giving his name, rank, date of birth and serial number – as designated by the Geneva Conventions.

“They tied my hands behind my back, pushed me in a corner, put in the biggest lamp in Hanoi, probably a 250-watt bulb, with a reflector. I woke up on the floor. I couldn’t move.”

When he could move again, the lead interrogator returned.

“Now, we will begin (once more),” he said.

“He put a pitcher of water on the table and poured himself a great big glass.”

“Da Nang,” Hughey answered this time. “And he gave me a glass of water.”

“I want you to name all of your squadron mates.” “Willie Fay Hamilton...” Hughey started.

It was the name of one of his classmates in first grade. The next name he gave was Cicero Jones, the son of a farmhand who had worked for Hughey’s father. All names – about 10 of them, Hughey said, he knew from childhood and would remember if he had to list them again.

“Cicero Jones was the best squirrel hunter contemporary with me in Chic, Tennessee,” Hughey said. “Maybe the best in history.”

“When I handed (the interrogator) that list, they left me alone. That was the only torture,” he said.

Of his six years?

“That’s right. That’s right.”

So, Hughey’s speech on Saturday, was it by design that he never mentioned any of this?

“Yes, it was by design,” he said. “Whenever I have spoken, the audience wants to know about my experiences. This meeting is all about veterans. This is a (park) full of veterans. Those were my favorite four.”



Chaplain Brenda Threatt, major, California State Guard and director of El Camino College Veterans Center, salutes Col. Ken Hughey as she presents him the honorary flag at the Redondo Beach Veterans Day ceremony. The flag at Veterans Park is changed out at each Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies. Photo by Garth Meyer

Chic, Tennessee in the 1940s was not really a town, but a grid of farms with a house every mile and a half. As Hughey told the Veterans Park crowd during his speech, he was nine years old when he heard the news from Pearl Harbor on the radio.

He was an only child of a second marriage; of his eight half-siblings, the youngest were teenagers then. One was still in the house.

“During the war, me and a bunch of my buddies were enamored with fighter pilots,” he said.

Veteran Spotlight



Dennis Hennessy

Originally from San Francisco, I met my wife in 1961, during our Junior year of high school. Waiting until we were 21, we married in February 1966. Dropping some courses at SFSC to work full time meant the notice for a physical came shortly after.

In January 1967, curious about options, an Army recruiter looked at my course work and advised me to enlist as a Combat Engineer, 12B. After Basic Training at Fort Ord, and Engineer Advanced Training at Fort Leonard Wood Missouri, I had orders to report to Camp Rainier, Dau Tieng, Vietnam in July 1967 assigned to the engineer battalion in the 4th Infantry Division. The 4th Division came from Fort Lewis Washington and settled the camp, thus the name. In August there were some units reassigned in the 4th and 25th Divisions, and my unit became the 65th Combat Engineer Battalion, 25th Infantry Division.

I saw very little of base camp. My team members and I were on missions with the 2/22 (Triple Deuce) mechanized infantry clearing (see cont'd)

Spotlight Cont'd:

mines and improvised explosive devices, building expedient roads, and constructing bridges to keep the infantry and supply lines rolling. When not with the mechanized infantry, the assignment was with units of the 27th regiment (Wolfhounds) providing demolition support and jungle clearing. The photo is from December 1967 when my wife sent us an aluminum tree.

I knew very few in my unit, but a few of us were dispatched together as a team attached to the infantry most of the time. My three buddies were wounded and taken out of the field. I didn't know if they had made it home. After 50-55 years, we found each other through social media. We have had three reunions and the wives keep asking, "Where will we meet next year."

After Vietnam, August 1968, I was assigned to HHC, 3rd Engineer Battalion, 24th Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas. My position was Battalion Construction Foreman. This division had recently returned from Germany, with a commitment to train annually in Germany. In February 1969, operation Reforger 1 put us on planes to Germany where we spent two months training in the mountains in winter. My enlistment ended in January 1970

The Wall That Heals – Hilo, Hawaii

Coming to Hilo, Hawaii January 22-28, 2024. We have a group of us that are going to help out and support the folks of Hawaii. There were three of them here from Hawaii when we had TWTH in San Luis Obispo in March. The Kilauea Military Camp on the top of the volcano is available for lodging for active duty and Veterans. Their contact info can found at www.KilaueaMilitaryCamp.com The escort is on the 22nd and anyone that would like ride or drive are welcome. There are a couple of motorcycle and scooter rental places in the area. Here is the link for the TWTH in Hilo with all the info you will need. thewallthatheals-hawaiicounty.org

Any questions please give me a call 805-295-9139

They followed their exploits in the news; the aces vs. Japanese Zeroes and the German Luftwaffe.

"Richard Bong was our no. 1 fighter ace. We knew all of them."

When did Hughey know he wanted to be a fighter pilot?

"Ever since I can remember."

His mother would not sign the papers to let him enlist in 1949, the day after high school graduation. His father had died. He was still 17.

"I became such a deadbeat around the house that she finally relented," Hughey said.

He joined on July 6, later training to fly F-4s, the top-of-the-line fighter planes of the late 1950s and '60s.

"Let me tell you, John McCain was one tough son of a gun," Hughey said. "He couldn't do anything for himself (after he was shot down)... they needed a stretcher to move him. It's a miracle he lived. Five years later, I met John McCain. We were still prisoners."

At one point, Hughey, McCain and 20-30 guys lived in each room of a prison known as the Hanoi Hilton.

"These rooms were like drunk tanks," Hughey said. "That's the last place we were."

"I wish Hollis Reager was here to talk, too," Hughey said. "And Manboy. Nobody knew his name. Three months, it might've been closer to six, he was drafted, went through infantry training and hit that beachhead and was killed. The most dangerous weapon he'd ever seen before was a hoe cuttin' Johnson grass."

At the start of Hughey's seven-minute speech, first he corrected emcee Tom Lasser's introduction.

"My wife, we haven't been married 64 years. We've been married 70 years."

The first time he saw her – from a School Bus window – she wore overalls with a dress over the top, standing in a group of girls going to pick the commercial flower fields

outside Finley, Tennessee.

"I went home to drive a tractor all summer and thought about her everyday," Hughey said.

The next fall, they rode the same bus to high school. Her name was Sue Austin.

"One day, getting ready to get on the bus at the end of the school day, he said something to her.

"Hey there, sweetening."

"She dropped her books," he said.

Also at Saturday's ceremony in Redondo Beach, an Air Force band played "Taps" in honor of Joe Eskanazi, the local Pearl Harbor survivor who died earlier this year at age 105.

Mayor Bill Brand presented Lasser, a Vietnam helicopter pilot, a Key to the City for his work on the Redondo Beach Veterans Task Force, and acting as master of ceremonies for the local Veterans Day and Memorial Day events since 2006.

"I get the best seat in the house, and it's turned into a labor of love," Lasser said later.

Ernie O'Dell, another founding task force member, came to the aid of a hitched flag in this year's ceremony.

Lasser saw Hughey speak at an event earlier this year and invited him to come to Redondo Beach in November. Hughey lives in Hawthorne.

In the lead up to Veterans Day 2023, the U.S. Department of Affairs Veterans Day National Committee chose Redondo Beach as one of its regional sites in California.

"Once you got the tap code, if somebody had a common wall with you, you could tap," Hughey said of communication in prison.

Someone taught him the code early on – an American POW who had gone to survival school and learned it. POWs could sometimes talk for a few moments at a change of guard.

“Prisoner in the next cell, can you hear me?” said a voice. Hughey said he could. The man explained the code. “Take the alphabet, form a five-letter box. Omit the letter ‘K’. To tap a letter, tap down and then across.” “We all still know the tap code. We just don’t have to use it,” Hughey said. Mel Pollack, his co-pilot, arrived in Hanoi the same night Hughey did. “We came out exactly how we got there, he was right behind me,” Hughey said of their release in 1973. Pollack now lives in Florida. The state department arranged the POWs freedom in order of arrival. Hughey and the prisoners knew it was coming when, one day, they saw a U.S. Army brigadier general walk across the prison grounds in a pressed, sharp, clean suit. ER

VIETNAM BROADCAST HELPED HOMESICK TROOPS — AND INSPIRED ROBIN WILLIAMS
By Eric Spitznagel

“Gooooood morning, Vietnam!” The memorable greeting, immortalized by Robin Williams in the 1987 film of the same name, wasn’t a creation of Hollywood. It was inspired by the true story of DJ and Air Force Sgt. Adrian Cronauer, who hosted a morning radio show on the American Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN) in Saigon during the Vietnam War. Cronauer, who died in 2018, originated the phrase, but there were at least 17 other military DJs who hosted that the radio network’s morning program — “The Dawnbuster” — between 1965 and 1973, including “Wheel of Fortune” legend Pat Sajak. “Whether the catchphrase was required or not, I can’t really say,” said Rick Fredericksen, a onetime newsman at AFVN Saigon and the co-author, along with military journalist Marc Phillip Yablonka, of the new book “Hot Mics and TV Lights: The American Forces Vietnam Network” (Double Dagger Books). “It was just a well-established and catchy phrase to start a morning show,” he told The Post. “Imagine the troops groaning when they were greeted with ‘Gooooood morning, Vietnam.’ ” The legacy of AFVN is far bigger than what was captured in one Hollywood movie. The original station was founded in 1962 by Chief Petty Officer Bryant Arbuckle, often called the “Father of Armed Forces Radio in Vietnam,” who ran the operation alone

for three months before being granted a small staff. It soon expanded “into a sprawling network of nationwide radio and television stations,” the book notes. Its mission wasn’t just to entertain but to give the more 500,000 enlisted listeners a reason to feel hopeful. Before he died, Cronauer told the authors he thought the radio station’s mission was to be an “antidote to homesickness.” And the best way to do that, according to the now 77-year-old Sajak, was to “program it like a stateside radio station.” “We played Top 40 music,” Sajak says in the book. “We didn’t have commercials, but we did have snappy PSAs: ‘Be sure to keep your M-16 cleaned.’ That kind of stuff. We produced our own jingles and ran tight shows.” They also had a captive audience. “AFVN was the only game in town,” Yablonka recalls. Listening to the radio was a shared experience, one that made every enlisted officer feel a little less isolated from the outside world. It also reached “a vast Vietnamese shadow audience,” says Yablonka. Anybody who could pick up the signal, and that included enemy combatants, could tune in and hear every broadcast.

“I think there was something about the American way of life that the Vietnamese caught on to through the music that the AFVN deejays played,” Yablonka tells The Post. The “Good Morning Vietnam” movie got a few details wrong but accurately depicted how dangerous Saigon could be during the war, even for an unarmed military deejay. Yablonka recalls a taxi full of explosives blowing up outside the AFVN studios, “causing major damage while the station was on the air.” Rick Bednar, another AFVN radio personality, still has vivid memories of showing up for his first day at the studio just after the blast. “I remember walking into the lobby and seeing large pieces of glass embedded in the wall opposite where the front windows had been,” he says in the book. “It was an instant reminder that I was in a war zone. Everyone was on edge.” Despite the constant threat of danger, Sajak insists he never felt in harm’s way during his tour as an AFVN morning man in Saigon. “It was funny and strange,” he remembers. “There was a war going on. Barbed wire was everywhere, and I was playing records and going to restaurants every night. It was a fairly normal life. And given the circumstances, mine was a pretty lucky duty.” These DJs entertained soldiers not just with music, but reminders of home. They recreated “live” baseball games, improvising the play-by-play based on teletype updates on each batter that came in over shortwave,” the authors write. They even performed a “blow-by-blow” broadcast of a 1963 boxing match between Sonny Liston and Floyd Patterson, which was so realistic that “many GIs asked how we got to go to Las Vegas for a prize fight,” according to Air Force Lieutenant (and AFRS’s first officer in charge) Donald Kirtley.

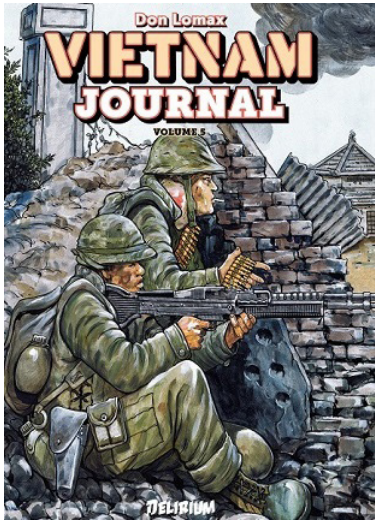
It wasn’t all victories for the AFRS deejays. When President Richard Nixon delivered a Christmas television address to the nation in 1969, which (due to the time difference) was simulcast during the “Dawnbuster” morning show, Sajak — who was hosting at the time — accidentally cut away to music before Nixon gave a special Christmas message to the troops in Vietnam. “I could have admitted my mistake and gone back to the speech, but I figured there was no point in doing that because I was the only one in the world who knew that Richard Nixon was directing his comments to only one soldier: me!” Sajak says. “So, if you were in Vietnam at Christmastime in 1969, allow me to wish you a belated merry Christmas from Richard M. Nixon!”

https://www.amazon.com/Hot-Mics-TV-Lights-American/dp/B0CHL3RWSZ/ref=sr_1_1?crid=1DVL4BAPAQ3I0&keywords=hot+mics+and+tv+lights+the+american+forces+vietnam+network&qid=1699888126&s=books&sprefix=hot+mics%2Cstripbooks%2C169&sr=1-1

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Caliber Comics has teamed with French publisher Delirium to release Don Lomax's acclaimed Vietnam Journal series in France. The first 6 volumes are now available with several more to come. <http://labeldelirium.com/book-categories/vietnam-journal/>



HOT MICS AND TV LIGHTS



MARC PHILLIP YABLONKA with RICK FREDERICKSEN



The California State Council meeting October 2023

The weekend started off with the CSC Board meeting at the Wyndham Visalia on October 27 at 5:00 p.m. in the Laurel room. The agenda covered discussions on items that covered all phases of CSC business. The meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

The Full State Council meeting was called to order on Saturday the 28th at 9:00 a.m. in the Oak room. Coffee and lemonade was available along with the meeting packets for the chapter reps. 21 chapters answered the roll call and a majority of the chapters had another chapter member with them.

The opening ceremonies were held followed by the Officers and Directors activity reports. Then it was time for the chapter reports that are now given from the podium. 21 chapters reported on their various activities. Some of the chapter reports will show up in the next Zephyr. The full State Council was then recessed and, after a 15 minute break, the 3 Districts held their meetings. At Noon, it was time for lunch.

In the afternoon, the committee meetings were held. The committees included Membership Affairs, POW/MIA, Public Affairs, PTSD, West LA, and Agent Orange. AVVA held their meeting in the afternoon. There was also a break out session on PTSD2. Government Affairs was the last committee meeting of the day and attended by all of the committee chairs.

A Good Old Fashioned Barbecue was the dinner meal for all of the attendees at the meeting in the Plaza room. Some 60 folks attended. This dinner meal is one of the perks for making the meeting weekend and is paid for by the CSC. BBQ Ribs and BBQ chicken were the main parts of the meal. All of the side dishes were delicious and no one went away hungry.

Sunday morning at 8:00 a.m., found us in the Plaza room once again for the breakfast buffet. Crepes and plenty of them along with the usual bacon, sausage and French toast and, of course, scrambled eggs. This breakfast is one of the perks for attending the weekend and the CSC covers the cost. Some 60 folks attended.

At 9:00 a.m. the Full State Council was called to order in the Oak room. After the opening events, we heard the rest of the chapter reports, the Treasurers report and committee reports. The AVVA President and the Region 9 Director gave their reports.

After the closing remarks the Meeting was adjourned at 10:10 a.m.

The next CSC meeting will be held January 5-7, 2024 at the Wyndham Visalia.



VVA CA State Council (contact info inside - page 2)
P.O. Box 2812
Castro Valley, CA 94546



To:

In this issue:

- Chapter/Council Activities-Events/Photos
- Council Officer/Committee Reports
- Legislative News
- Veteran Info
- And more...

CSC Meeting Dates & Events

- Full Council Meeting - January 5-7, 2024
- Full Council Meeting - April 5-7, 2024
- Full Council Meeting - June 7-9, 2024
- Full Council Meeting - October 4-6, 2024

**Zephyr deadline E-mail reminders will be sent out
Next: April 26, 2024**