



Veteran Frank Tortorici Killed, p.4



Korean War Armistice Day, p.9

JOHN ALDRIDGE: A LIFETIME OF SERVICE CULMINATES IN ROLE AS COMMANDER

By caLegion HQ

Mark Clark, the National Chairman of the American Legion Riders, has announced an exciting new mission for the organization. After the 2023 National Convention in Charlotte, the American Legion Riders will focus their efforts on supporting

The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation, also known as A Foundation of Hope.

For the past 17 years, the American Legion Riders have dedicated themselves to a vital mission: ensuring that the children of fallen soldiers and Veterans with disabilities have the opportunity to pursue their dreams through educational opportunities with the Legacy Scholarship Fund. Mark Clark urges all American Legion Riders and supporters to continue raising funds for the Legacy Scholarship Fund this year, as the foundation still requires these resources. Every dollar raised will directly contribute to scholarships for the upcoming spring, providing children with the means to pursue their educational aspirations.

The American Legion Riders' goal is to reach a record-breaking \$1.5 million in donations for the Legacy Scholarship Fund. This year's fundraising efforts will set the bar for the foundation's future endeavors, which will commence in 2024.

By expanding their efforts beyond the Legacy Scholarship Fund, the



Commander John Aldridge being capped during the American Legion Department of California convention in Visalia, Calif., June 23-25. (Photo by Fred Shacklett)

American Legion Riders aspire to provide assistance to military personnel, Veterans, and their families experiencing unexpected financial challenges that threaten their homes' stability. These one-time grants cover housing, utilities, food, and other basic needs for families with minor children. The foundation also trains department and post-level accredited Veteran service

officers who assist Disabled Veterans and their families with benefits claims, free of charge.

The American Legion Riders' involvement in this new mission brings all the benefits that the American Legion offers its members into focus. By leading the way in supporting the Veterans & Children Foundation, the Riders contribute to the

well-being of Veterans and their families in multiple ways. From financial aid to training service officers, their efforts aim to ensure that Veterans receive the care and support they deserve.

Donations for The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation and for The American Legion Legacy Scholarship can be made at myLegion.org.

SUBSCRIBE

Your donation will help with production of the California Legionnaire in print and online.



Scan the code with your smartphone camera, or visit

caLegion.org/newsletter or Call HQ: 559-875-8387



HONORING THE FALLEN AND WOUNDED

By Christian Southards Associate Editor

962,403 — 137,023 — 200,740 — 615 — 36,412 — 22,499: the estimated number of fallen and wounded Service Members in each major U.S. conflict since World War II to have been awarded at least one

Purple Heart, based on casualty research conducted by both the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense.

Memorial Day honors the fallen, and Veterans Day honors those who have survived their service



— but many Americans are unaware of the ongoing struggle of surviving Veterans and Service Members who were wounded in action.

Purple Heart Day, held each August 7, acknowledges this gap by commemorating both

the fallen and those who have endeavored to go on after sustaining grievous injuries in combat. Though not recognized as a federal holiday, California and many cities recognize this day as a time to reflect and thank Veterans and Service Members for their service.

See PURPLE HEART page 5

**THE AMERICAN LEGION
DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA**

1601 7th St., Sanger, CA 93657-2801

☎ 559-875-8387 ✉ admin@caLegion.org

— LEADERSHIP —

Department Commander John Aldridge commander@caLegion.org	Department Adjutant Sam Flores adjutant@caLegion.org
--	---

California LEGIONNAIRE

— PRINT & DIGITAL —

Sr. Editor / Web Team Lead

Jared Morgan
editor@caLegion.org
310-750-9782

Web Team Member
Rick Pushies

Facebook Manager
Lillian Moss
facebook.com/caLegion

Associate Editor
Christian Southards

Staff Writer
Rikki Almanza

Photographer
Fred Shacklett

Communications Coordinator / Graphic Designer
Makenna Uriarte

PUBLICATION POLICY

The California Legionnaire (PP 167) is published 4 times a year in February, May, August, and November by:

Mid Valley Publishing Inc.
740 N. St., Sanger CA 93657-3114

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to:

The California Legionnaire
1601 7th St., Sanger, CA 93657-2801
559-875-8387

ISSN 2575-0976

SUBMISSIONS:

- Submissions can be made via email, online and mail
- Email print articles to: editor@caLegion.org with the words "California Legionnaire" in the subject line of your email so that it will not be overlooked
- Submissions to The California Legionnaire must be made by the 6th of the month prior to the issue month (Example: To submit material for the February issue, submissions must be received by Jan. 6)
- Submissions to the Department website can be made at any time by visiting caLegion.org/ugc (please email the editor to let them know you've submitted online)
- Photos should be sent at the highest resolution possible
- Do not embed photos in a Word.doc. Send photos as email attachments with photo captions either typed in a word document or in the email body. Images that are pulled off of websites will not reproduce well, if at all. PDFs must be saved as high resolution from their original document
- All submissions become the property of The American Legion Department of California. All submitted material is subject to edit, rework and omission. We are not responsible for lost items or misplaced material
- Please send "Change of Address" and "Deceased Notifications" to: admin@caLegion.org or mail to headquarters (See address above). To publish an obituary, please copy the editor on your email or mark letters "ATTN: California Legionnaire Editor - Obituary"



**Sign up for American Legion
Department of California
email updates:**

bit.ly/calegion-emails

U.S. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDALS PRESENTED TO WWII VETERANS NEXT OF KIN

By Nestor Aliga
Post 603

Recently, several next of kin of WWII Veterans were presented with U.S. Congressional Gold Medals (CGM) at the Vallejo JFK Library.

The video is posted at

<https://www.youtube.com/@nestoraliga7537/> videos.

The next CGM ceremony is on October 28, 1-3 p.m. at the Vallejo JFK Library and all WWII Veterans of the U.S. Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) are encouraged to apply

soonest.

Please go to <https://filvetrep.org/congressional-gold-medal/application/> for details.



Pictured from left are: Nestor Aliga, The American Legion (TAL) Manuel L. Quezon Post 603 of Vallejo, Event Co-coordinator; Vallejo Vice-Mayor Rozzana Verder-Aliga, EmCee; US Army Brigadier General Steven Balitaan McLaughlin; Philippine Deputy Consul General Raquel Solano; Mayor Robert McConnell; Heather McLaughlin; and TAL Corregidor Post 510 Officers Rod dela Concepcion and Edward Tacdol. Not shown is US Representative John Garamendi who spoke and provided congressional certificates of appreciation.

SAVE PAPER.
SAVE POSTAGE.
SAVE TIME.



**QUICKLY AND EASILY RENEW ONLINE
MEMBERSHIP MATTERS**



3 ways to renew!

- Pay by check or money order to Post or Department
- Call Department at 559-875-8387 to renew with a credit or debit card
- Pay online with a credit or debit card at Renew (mylegion.org)

You can also scan the code above with your phone

Renewing your membership is as easy as pulling out your phone. Scan this QR code and you'll be taken to the national website to renew, where you'll be asked for your member number and last name. If you're reading this on your phone screen, click here to renew.



AMERICAN LEGION RIDERS TAKE ON A NEW MISSION OF SUPPORTING THE VETERANS AND CHILDREN FOUNDATION

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

Mark Clark, the National Chairman of the American Legion Riders, has announced an exciting new mission for the organization. After the 2023 National Convention in Charlotte, the American Legion Riders will focus their efforts on supporting The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation, also known as A Foundation of Hope.

For the past 17 years, the American Legion Riders have dedicated themselves

to a vital mission: ensuring that the children of fallen soldiers and Veterans with disabilities have the opportunity to pursue their dreams through educational opportunities with the Legacy Scholarship Fund. Mark Clark urges all American Legion Riders and supporters to continue raising funds for the Legacy Scholarship Fund this year, as the foundation still requires these resources. Every dollar raised will directly contribute to scholarships for the upcoming spring, providing children with the means to pursue their

educational aspirations. The American Legion Riders' goal is to reach a record-breaking \$1.5 million in donations for the Legacy Scholarship Fund. This year's fundraising efforts will set the bar for the foundation's future endeavors, which will commence in 2024.

By expanding their efforts beyond the Legacy Scholarship Fund, the American Legion Riders aspire to provide assistance to military personnel, Veterans, and their families experiencing unexpected financial challenges that

threaten their homes' stability. These one-time grants cover housing, utilities, food, and other basic needs for families with minor children. The foundation also trains department and post-level accredited Veteran service officers who assist Disabled Veterans and their families with benefits claims, free of charge.

The American Legion Riders' involvement in this new mission brings all the benefits that the American Legion offers its members into focus. By leading the way in supporting

the Veterans & Children Foundation, the Riders contribute to the well-being of Veterans and their families in multiple ways. From financial aid to training service officers, their efforts aim to ensure that Veterans receive the care and support they deserve.

Donations for The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation and for The American Legion Legacy Scholarship can be made online at myLegion.org.

Last Survivor of the WWII USS Indianapolis (CA-35) Honored with Bronze Statue

By Nestor Aliga
Post 603

Harold Bray, the last survivor of the historic World War II USS Indianapolis (CA-35), was honored with a seven foot tall bronze statue on July 7 by the Benicia Community Foundation. The American Legion Post 101 of Benicia also assisted in the event.

Bray was stationed at Mare Island in Vallejo then

served on the USS Indianapolis for its top-secret mission. After delivering atomic bomb components, the CA-35 was torpedoed. This led to the greatest single loss of life in US Navy history as out of 1,195 Sailors and Marines on board, only 316 survived.

Along with his unparalleled courage, resilience, and sacrifice, Bray was also praised for his Benicia

police service from 1959 to 1982, setting-up the Police Athletic League sports program, and for dedicating his time, talents, and treasures to uplift fellow Veterans and positively impacting the lives of countless individuals.

Video of the event is posted at <https://www.youtube.com/@nestoraliga7537>.





California Veteran Ian 'Frank' Tortorici has Been Killed by Russian Forces in Ukraine

By Christian Southards
Associate Editor

Jon Frank, the father of U.S. Marine Veteran Ian "Frank" Tortorici of Lake Forest, California, announced that his son was killed on June 27 by Russian forces while off duty.

Tortorici, 32, quietly joined Ukraine's International Legion soon after the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine last February. Engaged to a Ukrainian medic, and intent on defending her homeland from undue Russian aggression and corruption, Tortorici had been serving on the frontlines for 15 months before he was placed on leave sometime in June.

While dining at a restaurant somewhere removed from the front, a Russian collaborator reportedly called in a missile strike that took out the entire building, killing

Tortorici.

In a Facebook post honoring his son, Jon Frank said Ian "was not a mercenary but a contracted member of the Ukrainian Army with the International Legion and a U.S. Flag over his heart. He was a U.S. Marine, Park Service Ranger, and ICE agent; a son, a brother, and uncle. And he gave up a lucrative and comfortable life to prevent WWII.

"He was the most selfless, bravest, kindest, unassuming and off-center person on the planet and hated for anyone to know it. His name was Ian Frank Tortorici, my middle son."

Ian Tortorici joins a growing number of American Veterans who have sacrificed their lives or well-being to defend Ukraine against Russia's unjustified invasion.



Jon Frank
5d · 🌐

The worst news in my life was delivered today.

My son was killed fighting for Ukraine. He contacted me March 2022 and said he was in country to help. He would not let me tell anyone and said he will come home when it's over. He ended up in the International Legion and fought on all fronts for 15 months straight. He experienced a lifetime of death and horrors but choose to stay. He loved his team, his girlfriend and Ukraine.

He was not a Mercenary but a contracted member of the Ukrainian army with the International Legion and a U.S. Flag over his heart. He was a U.S. Marine, Park Service Ranger and ICE agent, a son, a brother and uncle and he gave up a lucrative and comfortable life to prevent WWII.

He was the most selfless, bravest, kindest, unassuming and off center person on the planet and hated for anyone to know it. His name was Ian Frank Tortorici, my middle son.

He asked that if anything was to happen not to make a fuss but I have to share who he was. I'm grateful he shared photos and some stories with me, I'll treasure these for the rest of my life.

He had just gotten off the front lines, off duty and killed eating in a Restaurant by a missile strike called in by a collaborator.

Please respect his family, his memory and his honor, we are beyond crushed.

I love my son more than my life itself. Ian Tortorici

PURPLE HEART DAY: HONORING OUR FALLEN AND THE WOUNDED VETERANS WHO ENDEAVOR BEYOND THEIR SERVICE

PURPLE HEART page 1

THE HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF THE PURPLE HEART

The Purple Heart is a relatively new award in United States history. Its origins are rooted in the American Revolutionary War, when General George Washington created the Badge of Military Merit to recognize exemplary service by soldiers of the Continental Army, much in the same vein as the Medal of Honor does today.

The award was ultimately phased out after the war because — in an attempt to preserve morale — it largely served as a consolation in place of promotions, which were frozen by a Continental Congress struggling to fund the rebellion against Britain.

The Badge of Military Merit would, however, serve as the inspiration for the Purple Heart commissioned by Army Chief of Staff (and notable World War II figure) Douglas MacArthur in 1932, on

the 200th anniversary of George Washington's birthday.

Initially, the award was meant to recognize the heroic actions of wounded Service Members who fought in the First World War. Nearly 10 years later, the advent of World War II and the horrific casualty numbers the war brought led President Franklin D. Roosevelt to drop the meritorious requirement while approving the expansion of the award's eligibility to fallen Service Members. From 1942 on, the Purple Heart would acknowledge any Service Member forced to sacrifice their physical well-being, or life, in combat.

ESTABLISHMENT OF PURPLE HEART DAY

While the Purple Heart has existed for nearly 100 years (and is actually the longest active award presented to American Service Members) it wasn't until Congress passed a resolution in 2014 officially recognizing National Purple Heart Day.

Many states, counties, and



Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond T. Odierno shaking the hand of Soldier who was awarded a Purple Heart for his service in Afghanistan. (Photo: U.S. Army)



cities across the United States, including many in California, honor Veterans and Service Members with an observed silence. The MLB honors local recipients during special in-game ceremonies. And organizations like The American Legion, the



Gen. Douglas MacArthur, 1945 (Photo: John Tewell)

National Purple Heart Honor Mission, and many more encourage communities to support their local

veterans through donations, events, and often, by simply listening to a story or two.

VA POLICE WILL BE REQUIRED TO WEAR BODY CAMERAS AND USE DASHBOARD CAMERAS

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has announced a significant step toward improving transparency and accountability in its police force.

Starting June 20, all VA police officers will be required to wear body cameras and use dashboard cameras on their vehicles. By the end of 2023, approximately 4,670 officers serving at department medical centers, cemeteries, and offices will be equipped with the cameras. This initiative aims

to foster trust, promote de-escalation, and ensure the safety of Veterans, their families, caregivers, survivors, visitors, and VA employees.

PROMOTING TRANSPARENCY AND SAFETY

The decision to implement body cameras follows calls from lawmakers and aligns with legislation passed by Congress last year, as well as federal law enforcement practices mandated by President Joe Biden. The cameras will automatically record video and audio whenever an officer draws a firearm or activates the

emergency lights in a police vehicle. They will also be manually activated during investigations and enforcement encounters, including traffic stops and responding to calls for service.

The cameras will help document statements, behaviors, and evidence, serving as useful tools for police investigations, court proceedings, and promoting professional conduct among officers and the public.

TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION
Both police officers and

privacy officers are undergoing extensive training to familiarize themselves with the cameras' usage, proper handling of recordings, and adherence to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) rules. This training emphasizes the importance of responsible and ethical use of the cameras while upholding the highest standards of privacy and confidentiality.

IMPACT ON VETERANS AND OFFICERS
VA Secretary Denis McDonough expressed his belief that the use of body cameras will foster



trust, transparency, and de-escalation within the VA police force. This measure aims to enhance the safety of Veterans and their interactions with VA officers. Senior Security Officer Troy Brown of the Veterans Health Administration also affirmed that these cameras will not only improve accountability but also ensure the well-being of both officers and the community they serve.

Mental Health Resources for Women Veterans Lacking

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

The increase in women seeking mental health support at Veterans Administration hospitals in recent years has shed light on the unique challenges Women Veterans face. Unfortunately, many healthcare providers are ill-prepared to address these needs due to a lack of infrastructure focused on women's health.

However, efforts are underway to address this and provide essential mental health resources to Women Veterans.

UNDERSTANDING THE MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Women Veterans experience a range of mental health challenges, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and eating disorders, at higher rates than their male counterparts. Factors such as combat-related stress and Military Sexual Trauma, or MST, contribute significantly to the development of mental health issues in Women Veterans.

MST, in particular, affects a significant number of Women Veterans, with rates exceeding those of their male counterparts.

OBSTACLES TO SEEKING HELP

Women Veterans tend to internalize their struggles, often waiting until they feel overwhelmed before seeking help. This behavior stems from their military training, where

independence and self-reliance are highly valued. Additionally, studies have shown that women tend to blame themselves when things go wrong, leading to detrimental thought patterns and self-perception. These factors contribute to increased rates of PTSD, depression, and other mental disorders among Women Veterans.

PTSD SYMPTOMS IN WOMEN VETERANS

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a significant concern for Women Veterans, with nearly 12% experiencing symptoms, almost double the rate of their male counterparts, according to the American Journal of Preventive Medicine.

PTSD symptoms in Women Veterans can manifest in various ways, including hyperarousal (anger, irritability, panic), re-experiencing traumatic events (flashbacks, intrusive memories), and emotional numbness (detachment, loss of interest). It is important to acknowledge and address these symptoms, as they can have severe effects on Women Veterans' lives.

IMPORTANCE OF GENDER-SPECIFIC CARE

Women Veterans face unique challenges that often go unnoticed, and finding appropriate mental health resources can be a difficult task. Recognizing the distinct challenges faced by Women Veterans is essential to provide gender-specific care and resources.



Studies have shown that PTSD in Women Veterans has different causes and effects compared to their male counterparts. A September 2022 report from the VA showed a decline in the age-adjusted suicide rate among Women Veterans, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and addressing their unique mental health challenges. To ensure effective treatment, it is important to understand the specific needs and experiences of women in the military.

AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Government resources such as Military OneSource, Center for Women Veterans, or CWV; and the National Resource Directory offer support to Women Veterans. Military OneSource provides transitioning peer support and financial counseling, while CWV offers counseling, healthcare, and a call center to help with available benefits. The

National Resource Directory connects women Veterans with local and state groups.

Non-government resources and online social media groups, like the Women's Veterans Alliance, provide additional support and opportunities for engagement. The Women's Veterans Alliance organizes conferences and hosts online communities to facilitate connections among women Veterans. The nonprofit organization, The Mission Continues, helps connect veterans nationwide, fostering a supportive network.

The American Legion can also help connect Women Veterans with support.

PROGRESS AND THE WAY FORWARD

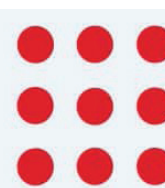
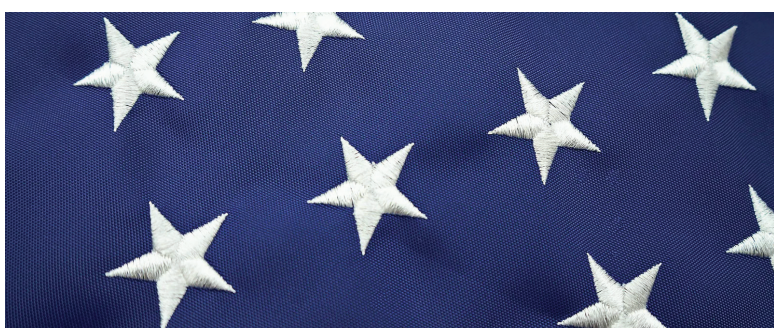
Efforts to address the mental health needs of Women Veterans have yielded positive results. Despite these advancements, more work is

needed to bridge the existing gaps. Increasing participation in VA studies and treatments, training healthcare providers to inquire about military service, and expanding gender-specific programs are important steps toward better mental health care for Women Veterans.

The mental health challenges faced by Women Veterans require targeted attention and specialized care. With higher rates of PTSD, depression, and eating disorders, Women Veterans need resources that address their unique experiences.

As the awareness of these challenges grows, efforts are underway to improve mental health care for Women Veterans.

By providing tailored resources and support, Veteran Women can navigate their post-military lives successfully and ensure their well-being is prioritized.



**Veterans
Crisis Line**

DIAL 988 then PRESS 1



RAMONA POST 332 HONORS ROBERT L CURRIER'S 60 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE AMERICAN LEGION

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

The Ramona American Legion Post 332 recently celebrated a remarkable milestone as they recognized one of its members, Robert L. Currier, for 60 years of continuous service. On March 28, the 90-year-old resident of Ramona was presented with a special certificate to acknowledge his unwavering commitment and dedication to The American Legion.

The ceremony was attended by Mike Thweatt, the former Commander of the Ramona Legion Post, and Ray Van Meter, the current Commander, who both expressed their pride in honoring Currier for his remarkable service.

Robert L. Currier's extraordinary dedication to The American Legion and his selfless service to his country and community have earned him the utmost

respect and admiration.

A LEGACY OF SERVICE

Currier's commitment to serving his country began when he joined the U.S. Navy immediately after graduating from high school in New Hampshire. Inspired by his father's service in the Navy during World War II, he felt a strong sense of duty to serve during the Korean War and, along with his friends, made the decision to enlist. During his four years of naval service from 1951 to 1955, Currier served in coding and communications, utilizing his skills as a Teleman as well as operating a 40 MM anti-aircraft gun.

LIFE AFTER THE MILITARY

Following his honorable discharge from the military, Currier joined the U.S. Forest Service in his home state of New Hampshire. Eventually, he was transferred to Dripping

Springs Campground in Aguanga, California. This led Currier to settle in Ramona, where he has resided for the past 46 years. Here, he served as the captain of the Goose Valley Station in Ramona Center, showcasing his leadership abilities and dedication to the community.

After a 33-year career, Currier retired from the US Forest Service.

A PROUD FAMILY TRADITION

Robert L. Currier's commitment to the American Legion is shared by his family, as his son Bob, a former US Army paratrooper, is also a member of the American Legion in New Hampshire. Currier's other son Jeff serves as a fire chief in New Hampshire. Alongside his sons, Currier's stepsons, Jim and Dan Bisher, are residents of Ramona, with Dan being the owner of Bischer's Quality Meats.

'VETERANS STRENGTHENING AMERICA' SWEEPSTAKES WINNERS

1st Prize: \$5,000
John G Riley
Post 318, San Jose

2nd Prize: \$1,000
Jerry Walters
Post 149, Escondido

3rd Prize: \$500
Santiago R Asencio
Post 804, San Jose

4th Prize: \$250
Daniel Parten
Post 785, Tulare

5th Prize: \$100
Loren Zimmerman
Post 777, San Bernardino

6th Prize: \$50
Steven Allgood
Post 11, Madera

7th Prize: \$50
Richard L Silverman
Post 249, Manteca

8th Prize: \$50
Robert L Jones
Post 149, Pine Valley



Air Force Members and Dixon Post 208 Help WWII Veteran Oakley Dexter Celebrate his 100th Birthday

By Nestor Aliga
Post 603

Oakley Dexter, a World War II US Army Air Corps Veteran, was given a hearty birthday party on June 24 at the Ye Olde Veterans Hall in Dixon.

Dexter, who turned 100 years old and wearing an American Legion Post 313 Larkspur hat, spoke lima-charlie (loud & clear) to dozens of well-wishers about his military experience after many dignitaries presented certificates of appreciation for his significant and long-term community contributions.

Dexter, a life-member of many veterans service organizations, was a volunteer firefighter for six decades, established and/

or led the local Chambers of Commerce, Lions Club, Sunday School Church, and was a successful business owner.

The party and a future cleanup of Dexter's home and yard are organized by US Air Force Service members Gabriel and Francis Perez and Nicholas and Liz Jaeger. The American Legion Post 208 of Dixon also assisted in the events.



2023-2024 DEPARTMENT OFFICERS



Department Commander
John Aldridge



Department Adjutant
Sam Flores



National Executive
Committeeman (NEC)
Robert Heinisch



Alternate NEC
Larry Leonardo



Judge Advocate
Amado Salinas, II



Chaplain
Kathy Cash



Historian
Lillian Moss



Sergeant-at-Arms
Jeff Jewel



Parliamentarian
Diane DeVries



Dept Service Officer
Vacant



Jr Past Commander
Jere Romano



Area 1 Vice Commander
Jack Schipper



Area 2 Vice Commander
Paul Rodriguez



Area 3 Vice Commander
Gene Hammill



Area 4 Vice Commander
James Wilson



Area 5 Vice Commander
David Brambila



Area 6 Vice Commander
Kevin Niles



District 1 Commander
Marcus Green



District 2 Commander
Lavern Sutton



District 3 Commander
Joshua Bowers



District 4 Commander
Danarae Doub-Reed



District 5 Commander
Ted Mar



District 6 Commander
Mark Rice



District 7 Commander
Dan McLain



District 8 Commander
Nelson Lum



District 9 Commander
Anthony Webb



District 10 Commander
William Danko



District 11 Commander
Vaughn Gates



District 12 Commander
Pete Samanigo



District 13 Commander
Larry Maggio



District 14 Commander
Chris Hoffman



District 15 Commander
Christopher Wenzinger



District 16 Commander
Kristy Grayson



District 17 Commander
Alex Herrera



District 18 Commander
Neil La Sala



District 19 Commander
Fernando Gallardo



District 20 Commander
Richard Hayes



District 21 Commander
Richard Chalupnik



District 22 Commander
Tracy Dalton



District 23 Commander
David Fuller



District 24 Commander
Roy Chamberlain



District 25 Commander
Kevin Stonestreet



District 26 Commander
Patricia Coons



District 27 Commander
Randolph Morehead



District 28 Commander
Lois Flint



District 29 Commander
James Eubanks



District 30 Commander
Martin Islas

Supreme Court Rejects Veterans Claim for Disability Benefits Related to 1966 Hydrogen Bomb Incident

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court denied an appeal made by a group of Veterans seeking disability compensation for exposure to radiation during the 1966 Palomares Hydrogen Bomb Accident.

The decision has left the Veterans, including 80-year-old Air Force Veteran Victor Skaar, without the support they were hoping for. Despite the justices offering no comment, this ruling upholds a previous decision by a federal appeals court, dealing a blow to the Veterans' quest for recognition and assistance.

THE PALOMARES HYDROGEN BOMB ACCIDENT

The incident at the center of this case occurred on January 17, 1966, when a U.S. B-52 bomber and a refueling plane collided above the village of Palomares in southern Spain. Miraculously, no

fatalities occurred on the ground, but the collision resulted in the release of four U.S. hydrogen bombs. Although none of the bombs detonated, two of them had plutonium-filled detonators that exploded, scattering approximately 7 pounds of highly radioactive plutonium 239 across the surrounding area. This event has been labeled as the most severe radiation accident in U.S. history.

THE VETERANS' STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION

Victor Skaar, along with others who were involved in the recovery and cleanup efforts following the Palomares incident, filed class-action claims seeking disability benefits. They asserted that their exposure to radiation during their service caused them to develop various illnesses and conditions. Skaar himself suffers from leukopenia, a condition potentially linked to radiation exposure, and has previously battled skin cancer. Despite their pleas,

a federal appeals court rejected their claims, and the Supreme Court's recent decision has upheld that ruling.

THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE

The Justice Department opposed the review of the case by the Supreme Court, pointing out that Congress had recently passed legislation expanding eligibility for benefits for many Palomares Veterans. However, it was acknowledged that Victor Skaar and his specific circumstances were not covered under the new legislation. This setback has left the Veterans and their legal team disappointed and frustrated, as they believe their sacrifice and the subsequent health issues resulting from the radiation exposure should warrant recognition and support.

THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS ON VETERANS

Approximately 1,600 servicemen were deployed



to Palomares to recover the weapons and decontaminate the area. These individuals faced daily exposure to dangerous levels of radiation for weeks or even months, leading to the development of various cancers, blood disorders, heart and lung problems, and other illnesses. Despite enduring these health issues directly related to their service, the Veterans have been met with significant barriers when seeking acknowledgment and assistance from the government.

The Supreme Court's decision to reject the appeal of

Veterans seeking disability benefits for their exposure to radiation during the 1966 Palomares Hydrogen Bomb Accident is a blow to those who have suffered the consequences of this nuclear disaster. Despite the passage of time, the impact on the Servicemen involved remains evident, with numerous health issues and conditions arising as a result. The lack of recognition and support from the government undermines the sacrifices made by these Veterans, highlighting the need for ongoing efforts to ensure their well-being and rightful compensation.



YOUR AD HERE

Advertise in The California Legionnaire newspaper and have your message reach more veterans in California. The California Legionnaire is the official publication of The American Legion Department of California, a 501(c)19 veterans nonprofit.

Email editor@caLegion.org to see your ad printed in the paper.

VETERANS TOXIC EXPOSURE INFORMATION

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

Veterans who served in the military may have been exposed to various toxic hazards during their time in service. Recognizing the potential health risks associated with toxic exposure, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is dedicated to providing support to veterans. The VA's commitment to screening, healthcare, and resources for veterans with toxic exposure concerns ensures that proactive health management and necessary benefits are accessible. The PACT Act aims to ensure that veterans receive the care and compensation they deserve in managing potential health risks associated with toxic exposure.

TYPES OF TOXIC EXPOSURE

Toxic exposure covers several potential hazards that veterans might have encountered during their military service. Common examples include open-air burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan, which emitted smoke, fumes, and other contaminants into the air. Additionally, veterans may have been exposed to airborne hazards, such as fine particulate matter, and experienced environmental hazards like pesticides and oil well fires during these conflicts.

Agent Orange, a herbicide used in Vietnam, and radiation exposure from nuclear weapons are also potential risks. Veterans who served at Camp Lejeune between August 1, 1953, and December 31, 1987, may have also been exposed to contaminated drinking water.

More generally, service members are likely to have also been exposed to other potential toxic hazards



during their military service, highlighting the importance of proactive health management.

MANAGING YOUR HEALTH AS A VETERAN

By developing a long-term healthcare plan in collaboration with your care team, you can detect any related conditions early and effectively treat or manage complications arising from toxic exposure.

To discuss your exposure concerns, you can talk to a VA provider by calling 1-800-MyVA411 then press 8. Alternatively, you can send a secure message to your clinical care team through the My HealtheVet patient portal at: myhealth.va.gov, or My VA Health at: patientportal.myhealth.va.gov. Raise your concerns during your next VA appointment if you think you were exposed to toxic hazards during your time in the military.

Alternatively, Veterans can always contact The American Legion for help obtaining benefits.

ENROLLMENT IN VA CARE

Enrolling in VA care provides veterans with access

to healthcare services. Online enrollment is available at: va.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction, or you can call 877-222-VETS (ext. 8387) for assistance. If you prefer in-person enrollment, visit your nearest VA Medical Center (you can find that here: va.gov/find-locations).

REGISTRY HEALTH EXAMS

The VA offers no-cost, voluntary environmental exposure medical exams through registry health exams. These exams are designed to identify potential health issues associated with military service-related exposures.

The VA has established several health registries, such as Agent Orange, Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit, Gulf War (including Operations Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn), Ionizing Radiation, Depleted Uranium Follow-up Program, and Embedded Fragment Surveillance Center. Participating in these registries can help you stay informed about potential health problems related to your military service and assist the VA in better understanding and responding to these issues.

To schedule a registry exam, you can visit: publichealth.va.gov/exposure/coordinators, visit your local VA Medical Center, or contact 1-800-MyVA411, then press 8.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The VA provides various additional resources to support veterans with toxic exposure concerns. The VA Exposure Ed mobile app, available for download at mobile.va.gov/app/exposure-ed, offers information on military environmental exposures. Veterans can also visit va.gov/PACT or call 1-800-MyVA411 (press 8) for further assistance. Again, you can also contact The American Legion for help, too.

VA BENEFITS

For veterans affected by certain health conditions related to their military service, the VA offers disability benefits and compensation. To be eligible for these benefits, veterans must establish a service connection, proving that their condition is a result of their military service. However, some conditions are automatically presumed to be service-connected under new policies mandated by

the PACT Act.

If you have a presumptive condition, you do not need to prove that your service caused the condition, but you must meet the service requirement for the presumption benefits.

Surviving spouses, dependent children, and parents of deceased veterans may also be eligible for benefits such as dependency and indemnity compensation. Veterans who had their claims previously denied can file a supplemental claim for benefits. To file a claim, visit: va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim or access VA benefits through ebenefits.va.gov.

For assistance with filing a claim, you can call the VA benefits hotline at 1-800-827-1000 or connect with The American Legion.



Tell Your Story

Whether you've got an interesting military history or a fun story about why you joined The American Legion, we want to read it.

Share your story by:

uploading:
caLegion.org/ugc

emailing:
editor@caLegion.org

mailing:
Department
Headquarters:
1601 7th St.,
Sanger, CA 93657

***Don't forget photos!**



New RAND Corporation Study Finds Veterans are Less Likely to Support Extremist Groups

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

Since the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, concerns about the rise of extremist groups on both ends of the political spectrum have grown in the United States. There have been worries that former service members might be more vulnerable to radical ideologies. However, according to new research conducted by RAND Corporation, support for extremism is not growing at a faster rate among veterans compared to the general public. In fact, veterans are shown to be less likely to back these groups.

While the issue still requires attention, the study conducted by the RAND Epstein Family Veterans Policy Research Institute provides valuable insights into the prevalence of extremist ideologies within the

veteran community.

Policymakers and researchers have raised concerns about the potential radicalization of the veteran community, given their military training and skills. Extremist groups actively target veterans for recruitment due to their operational and leadership capabilities. Moreover, the experience of transitioning from military to civilian life has been hypothesized to make veterans vulnerable to recruitment.

STUDY REVEALS LOWER SUPPORT FOR EXTREMISM AMONG VETERANS

To better understand the prevalence of support for extremist groups and ideologies among veterans, nearly 1,000 veterans were surveyed. The study examined support for groups like Antifa, the Proud Boys, Black nationalists, and White supremacists, as well as beliefs associated

with these groups, such as support for political violence, the QAnon conspiracy, and the Great Replacement theory. The results showed that the overall support for these groups among veterans was lower than in previous surveys of the general population.

While veterans' support for the Great Replacement theory and political violence aligns with that of the general public, their backing for QAnon is lower. Notably, veterans of the U.S. Marine Corps exhibited the highest support for both extremist groups and beliefs when compared to other branches of the military. However, attributing this to organizational or cultural dynamics within the Marine Corps requires further empirical study. Similarly, reasons for the relatively high support for QAnon among Air Force veterans remain unclear.

It is worth noting that the majority of veterans who supported extremist groups did not endorse political violence.

NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

While it is reassuring that overall support for extremism is lower among veterans, the study highlights the vulnerability of those who express support for political violence. Approximately 18% of veterans expressed support for political violence, indicating a potential recruitment pool for emerging extremist groups. The findings emphasize the need for continued research to identify the underlying factors that drive veterans to endorse

extremist beliefs and join extremist causes.

The new research challenges the notion that support for extremism is growing among veterans in the United States. While there is still work to be done to prevent the recruitment of veterans by extremist groups, the findings suggest that veterans, on the whole, are less likely to back these groups compared to the general population. Ongoing research and understanding the factors that drive veteran radicalization are crucial in developing targeted prevention strategies and addressing the potential security threats posed by extremist ideologies among veterans.



Sign up for
American Legion
Department of California
email updates:
bit.ly/calegion-emails

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By Dana Nichol
Reeb Government Relations

STATE BUDGET

On June 27, the Governor signed SB 101, the Budget Act of 2023. In recent years, the legislature and governor have continued to hash out additional budget items even after the main budget bill has been signed. As of this writing, the Legislature passed AB 102, which seeks to make some amendments to the SB 101 Budget Act. This bill is now on the Governor's desk awaiting his decision.

In AB 102, there is \$10.8 million for support of Veteran Resource Centers in the Community Colleges, funding related to employee compensation for members of the National Guard, \$100,000 to the City of Fresno for improvements for the Veterans Memorial Museum, \$100,000 for the Elk Grove Regional Veterans Memorial Wall, and \$1,500,000 for the County of Trinity for the modernization of Veterans Memorial Hall.

CALVET SECRETARY

Dr. Vito Imbasciani retired as CalVet Secretary earlier this year after the Governor named him to be the Board Chair of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine. Governor Newsom recently nominated Lindsey Sin to be the new CalVet Secretary. Secretary Sin has served in several roles at CalVet since 2011, including Deputy Secretary of Communications and Deputy Secretary of Women Veterans Affairs. She is a Navy veteran. Her nomination must still be confirmed by the State Senate. The American Legion is supporting her confirmation.

HOW TO FIND MORE INFORMATION ON LEGISLATION

To find bill text, status, committee analyses, votes and other legislative information, go to: <https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billSearchClient.xhtml>

2023 LEGISLATIVE SESSION, KEY DATES

- June 15 – Legislature

must pass budget bill

- July 14 to August 14 – Legislature's Summer Recess (a great time to meet with your legislators in the district)
- September 5 to 14 – Committees are done hearing bills and all bills that still survive will be heard on the Floors this week.
- September 14 – Last day for legislature to pass bills and send to the Governor.
- October 14 – Last day for Governor to sign or veto bills.
- January 3, 2024 – Legislature reconvenes for second year of the 2023-24 legislative session.

CALIFORNIA VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL REPAIRS

Last year, Veterans Committee Chairs Senator Bob Archuleta (D-Pico Rivera) and Assemblyman James Ramos (D-San Bernardino) helped secure funding of \$110,000 for the repair of vandalism and basic upkeep of the California Vietnam Veterans

Memorial in Capitol Park from the State Budget. In 2023 and 2024, we will be monitoring the progress of that work. All active veterans organizations, including the Legion officially supported that effort.

MEET THE NEWEST VETERAN ELECTED TO THE STATE LEGISLATURE:



Senator Caroline Menjivar (D-Van Nuys)
Member, Senate Committee on Military and Veteran Affairs
U.S. Marine Corps Veteran

Senator Caroline Menjivar was elected in 2022 to represent the cities of Burbank and San Fernando and the communities of Arleta, Canoga Park, Lake Balboa, Lakeview Terrace, Mission

Hills, North Hills, North Hollywood, Northridge, Pacoima, Panorama City, Reseda, Sun Valley, Sunland-Tujunga, Sylmar, Van Nuys, Winnetka.

During high school, she enrolled in the Police Academy Magnet and the LA Fire Department Cadet Program. After high school, she began pursuing a degree in Fire Technology and her Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) license while working full-time. Due to a hiring freeze at the fire department, she searching for a new way to serve. She enlisted in the Marine Corps and served from 2009 – 2016.

After the Marine Corps, she returned to work as an EMT and attended school to study sociology, earning her Bachelor's degree, then she completed a Master's Degree at UCLA. She then served in the Los Angeles Mayor's office in various capacities.

Senator Menjivar is a member of the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs.

U.S. NAVY IMPLEMENTS THE BRANDON ACT, TRANSFORMING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

The U.S. Navy has taken a significant step forward in improving mental health support for its sailors with the implementation of the Brandon Act.

The act, named after Aviation Electrician's Mate Third Class Brandon Caserta, 21, who tragically died by suicide in 2018 while stationed at Naval Station Norfolk, aims to reduce stigma and provide greater confidentiality to Service Members seeking mental health care. This groundbreaking policy change will allow sailors to request mental health services through any commander or supervisor

without having to disclose the reasons behind their request.

Under the Brandon Act, the Navy will ensure that the confidentiality of Service Members seeking mental health support is protected to the greatest extent possible. Commanders and supervisors will be obligated to make referrals for mental health services promptly after Service Members self-report, enabling sailors to receive help more quickly. By removing barriers and facilitating easier access to care, the Navy aims to address the on-going issue of stigma and create an environment that promotes mental fitness and overall well-being.



Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro played a crucial role in the implementation of the Brandon Act and personally contacted Brandon Caserta's parents to express his commitment to mental health awareness and the well-being of Navy personnel.

Brandon Caserta's parents, Teri and Patrick Caserta, have been relentless advocates for the Brandon Act since their son's tragic death. In letters he wrote

before his death, Brandon described his command as toxic and expressed the belief that his depression would never go away due to his experiences in the Navy. His parents worked tirelessly to bring about policy changes, ensuring that no other Service Member experiences the same difficulties Brandon faced. They firmly believe that the act will bring about positive changes in the lives of Service Members and their families.

The Navy's implementation of the Brandon Act marks an important milestone in addressing mental health within the military. By normalizing mental health conversations, reducing stigma, and ensuring

confidentiality, the Navy is creating an environment that promotes overall well-being for its sailors. With suicide rates remaining a concern, the Brandon Act aims to create a culture that encourages seeking help and fosters an environment of trust and respect. The act sets an example for other service branches, such as the Army, Air Force, and Coast Guard, to follow.

As the Navy leads the way in implementing these mental health reforms, it is hoped that other branches of the military will soon follow, ultimately prioritizing the mental health of all Service Members.

NATIONAL KOREAN WAR VETERANS ARMISTICE DAY

By Chris Southards
Associate Editor

Korean War Veterans Armistice Day, commemorated on July 27, remembers the sacrifice of U.S. Service Members and Veterans who fought for the survival of South Korea. Over 1.7 million Americans served during the war. Nearly 37,000 would never return home.

PRELUDE TO THE KOREAN WAR

The Korean War marked the first major engagement of the Cold War but has its roots in the aftermath of World War II.

AUGUST 15, 1945–JULY 25, 1950: IMPERIAL JAPAN IS DEFEATED AND CONTROL OF KOREA IS SPLIT BETWEEN U.S. AND SOVIET-CONTROLLED TERRITORIES

When Imperial Japan unconditionally surrendered to the Allies in 1945, Korea was split — much like Nazi Germany — between the East and West. The United States took command of South Korea, and the Soviet Union controlled the North.

Almost immediately after the 38th parallel was established, the two Koreas erupted into chaos. Border skirmishes, insurgencies, and the broader conflict of the emerging Cold War all worked to increase tension to a fever pitch. By 1949, both superpowers had relinquished control to their respective sides; however, Mao Zedong's victory in the Chinese Civil War further inflamed tensions while the West looked to contain Stalinist regimes.

Ultimately, five years of perpetual border clashes proved prophetic of the conflict to come.

THE KOREAN WAR BEGINS

Historians now debate who

fired the first shots of the Korean War, but it remains undisputed that the North Korean People's Army, or KPA, was the first to engage in a major military campaign. The nascent United Nations was put to the test, ultimately declaring that military force should be used to repel the invasion.

JUNE 25–AUG. 1, 1950: THE KPA NEARLY CONQUERS SOUTH KOREA

A token U.S. force and a dramatically underdeveloped South Korean military were completely unprepared to fight the KPA, which was largely composed of battle-tested Koreans fighting on behalf of Mao's China in the recent civil war.



Initially, the KPA was able to conquer all but about 10 percent of South Korea. However, overextended supply lines and the increasingly effective presence of U.S. air power flatlined the KPA's advance.

SEPT. 16–OCT. 19, 1950: U.S.-LED FORCES PUSH THE KPA TO THE YALU RIVER

Not long after the KPA was forced to abandon its forward positions, a U.S.-led coalition of U.N. forces quickly recaptured South Korea before — despite apprehension from America's political leadership — eventually moving beyond the 38th Parallel deep into enemy territory.



Barely a month after North Korea had nearly secured victory, it was now looking at its own defeat. U.S. forces occupied North Korea's capital city of

FORCES BACK TO THE 38TH PARALLEL

With U.S. and Coalition forces on the brink of destroying the KPA, China launched a surprise attack across multiple fronts. Once again, the tide changed, and U.S.-led forces were pushed back below the 38th Parallel.

The gains of yet another invading force were short-lived, though. After Chinese forces found initial success, failed logistics and U.S. air power became insurmountable obstacles for a second time.

JULY 1951–JULY 1953: STALEMATE AND ARMISTICE

By July 1951, the back-and-forth fighting that dominated the first year of the Korean War transitioned to a war of attrition. Through the remainder of the war, both sides would mostly resort to a defensive strategy while political leaders worked to find a face-saving, diplomatic solution.

Two years and two regime changes later, diplomacy ended what military action could not. In early 1953, Dwight D. Eisenhower replaced Harry S. Truman as President of the United States, and only a few weeks later, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin died. Both successors renounced

their support for the war, while China was forced to abandon its stance without Soviet support.

On July 27, the United States, South Korea, North Korea, and China signed a peace agreement, unofficially ending the Korean War.

LEGACY OF THE KOREAN WAR IN AMERICA



The war had a devastating effect on the Korean Peninsula, but limited attention at home led many historians to dub the conflict, "the Forgotten War." Korean War Veterans Armistice Day was not established until 2019, decades after the agreement was signed.

Per the last U.S. Census in 2019, over a million Korean War Veterans live in the United States. Yet, an official end to the war still proves elusive. North Korea has become one of the most isolated countries in the world under the Kim dynasty, with each new leader resisting any notion of peaceful reunification for this lasting Cold War reminder.



lined with signs honoring service members. The signs were purchased as a fundraiser by tournament participants to honor family members who once served in the armed forces. In addition to veterans support, SAL 291 has also helped build community events.

SAL 291 Hosts Third Annual Fairways of Honor Golf Tournament

By **Ted Apodaca**
Contributing Writer

They were stacking up extra teams on the tee boxes for a shotgun start. The tournament had 152 entries for 144 spots, so they needed to wedge in some groups somewhere. But these were good problems to have for the 3rd Annual Fairways of Honor Golf Tournament, hosted by the Sons of the American Legion Post 291 in Newport Beach.

The event serves as a fundraiser for the community support programs the post contributes to or organizes. SAL 291 Commander Tim Sullivan said that the group is able to give out approximately \$100,000 each year to community and

veterans groups and that they were estimating that this year's golf tournament would raise approximately \$40,000, about double what it raised in its first year.

The tournament itself is a scramble, meaning that groups play for a team score, which levels the playing field a bit. There are extra prizes for individual play, including a Ford Bronco for anyone who happens to hit a hole-in-one on a designated hole. After the event there is a dinner, live band and prize giveaway party.

"It's about drinking and eating and raising money for veterans and that's it really, it's just having fun," Sullivan said.

Before the noon shotgun start (all groups tee off simultaneously from different tees) there was a putting contest that offered a \$5,000 prize for making a 60-foot putt as well as info booths and a 50/50 raffle run by the local Newport Harbor High cheerleaders. One of the groups that was supported by SAL 291 was Veterans Resource Fund, a group that offers paddleboard excursions for veterans in wheelchairs. The wheelchairs are strapped to the board, which is a heavy-duty pontoon style and almost impossible to tip over. SAL 291 donated \$5,000 to them to help their program, Sullivan said.

"So yeah, that's one of

our favorite things so we invited them out here," Sullivan said.

Among the pre-tournament exhibits is a banner with the names of all service members lost in Iraq and Afghanistan. There was also a plaque and 13 flags honoring the last 13 service members lost in Afghanistan in August of 2021.

The ninth fairway was



"We've created two holidays in the park for Newport Beach, Flag Day and 9/11 Patriot Day, as a public giveaway," Sullivan said.

The Saturday tournament kicked off the Memorial Day weekend. On Monday, SAL 291 and American Legion Post 291, like many others, honored those who gave all and then celebrated them with a family BBQ event, because we must never forget.

DEPARTMENT CONVENTION, JUNE 23-25, 2023

Photos by Fred Shacklett, Historian, 2020-2023

