



The Freedom Committee of Orange County
Neighborhood Community Center
1845 Park Ave., Costa Mesa, CA. 92627
Web Site <http://www.fc-oc.org>

Minutes of the Meeting of April 14, 2010

Pledge of Allegiance: Violet "Vi" Cowden, WASP, Congressional Gold Medal Recipient

Invocation: Frank Orzio, Sgt. USMC (Ret.)

Taps: Edward B. Kowal, AOM1c, USNR, and Teresa Guyer (wife of member Ronnie Guyer)

Guests Present: (12) Betty Bell, Frank Callahan, Kay Felix, Jenny Garnto, Wendell Garnto, Frank Granadino, Shirley Hanson, Jesse Lawson, Albert LoSchiavo, Al Rude, Judy Selling and Mike Tico.

Members Present: (54)

Bob Bankston, Kathy Bequette, Jack Cole, Robbie Conn, Bus Cornelius, Vi Cowden, Bob Cowley, Bobbie Cowley, Bob Dugan, Kirk Ferguson, Eddie Felix, Jack Ferris, Francis Flacks, George Grupe, Herbert Guinness, Ronnie Guyer, Sid Hallburn, Jack Hammett, Arnold Hanson, Dale Hanson, Dick Higgins, Ramona Hill, William Holiday, David Lester, Syd Lucas, Bill Mall, Frank Mannino, Charles Mitchell, Ted Marinos, Robert Meyer, Charles Mitchell, Richard O'Brien, Don Oldis, Frank Orzio, Sherrie Orzio, James Pinnix, Lou Possemato, Tim Richards, Larry Schnitzer, Harry Selling, Allan Thompson, John Skara, Martha Somers, Bob Sternfels, Bob Stoddard, Ted Tanner, Bob Thomas, Michael Trerotola, Dick Tyhurst, Philip Vinci, Gene Wallace, Fred Whitaker, Paul Wilder and Scott Williams.

Special Presentation

This meeting is dedicated to honoring members of the Freedom Committee of Orange County who have been awarded the Purple Heart Medal for wounds received in combat and are retelling their own experiences.





Bob Bankston, US Navy WWII. While aboard the USS California, a battleship moored in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, the Japanese launched their surprise air raid. Bob was in the engine room at the bottom level of the ship. Suddenly there was a loud noise and the ship shook. The lights went out and the whole area was pitch black. A second bomb exploded, throwing him off his feet. The rescue crew came through with flashlights and found him. He was pinned by loose machinery, which the rescuers were able to remove, freeing Bob. “And that’s how I got off the ship.”



Frances Flack, Army Air Corps, WWII, ETO. In July 1944, Frances was flying as top gunner in an A-20 bomber when German flak hit his plane. His turret was jammed and stopped turning. The flak wounded Frances. The pilot was just barely able to land the damaged bomber as the nose wheel was flat and the flaps wouldn’t lower. On the ground, they counted 184 flak holes.



Bob Dugan, US Marines, Korea. Bob was in the 1st Marine Division in December 1950 in North Korea as it “advanced in a different direction” from the Chosin Reservoir to the sea. His unit was providing a rear guard action clearing the Red Chinese from the surrounding mountains. Bob was firing a machine gun from the prone position when he was struck in the back. He was evacuated to an aid station where a nurse removed the protruding shrapnel. Then all the wounded were loaded aboard a C-47 cargo plane and flown to a hospital in Japan. Three years ago, Bob had some pain in the wound area. After looking at the x-rays, the doctor said, “You are still carrying small bits of shrapnel.”



Herb Guinness, Army Air Corps, WWII, ETO. Herb was a pilot in a B-24 bomber in June 1944, returning from a mission with two engines shot out. His plane barely was able to climb over the Alps Mountains on the remaining two engines. An American P-38 appeared to provide escort and cover from German fighters. When the third engine overheated and had to shut down, Herb asked the crew if they wanted to bail out. With two badly injured, the crew decided to remain with the plane. Realizing they would never reach Italy, Herb had to “ditch” the bomber in the Adriatic Sea. When the water struck the plane’s windshield, it shattered, wounding Herb in the face. The P-38 stayed and directed a British amphibious rescue plane to them. When all eight were in the plane, it was too heavy to lift off. So they “taxied” for two hours across the sea to safety in Italy.



Arnold “Army” Hanson, US Army, WWII. SSGT Hanson was assigned to a “non-combat” 3rd Signal Corps on Okinawa. On April 21, 1944, Kadena Airfield requested repairs to the telephones and Army responded. As he was “sitting” on a 35 ft telephone pole with his cleats dug in and a safety belt around him, a Japanese kamikaze plane made a pass down the runway strafing the US planes. The Jap plane passed by at eye level and the next thing Army knew the pole had been shot apart and he was falling, safety belt still around the pole. As he hit the

ground, the pole landed on his legs and rolled up on his chest. He spent six weeks in the hospital. Dale, Army's Navy brother, learned he was on the hospital ship near where his ship was anchored. Dale's Captain also heard about the injured brother and allowed Dale to visit the hospital ship and Army.



Dave Lester, US Army, WWII, ETO. SGT Lester was assigned to a Combat Engineer unit whose mission was to clear the far shore (enemy held) of the Rhine River. Dave and two other men crossed over in a small assault boat to clear the banks of mines and barricades. Suddenly a German patrol began throwing hand grenades at a footbridge. Most grenades missed but one exploded close to Dave, wounding him in the leg. He refused evacuation and remained with the Engineers until all the bridges were completed before seeking aid.



Dick O'Brien, US Army, WWII, ETO. SGT O'Brien landed on Normandy D + 30 with the 35th Division and fought through France including the Battle of the Bulge. He was wounded once in the arm. Ninety days later a mortar shell exploded nearby, wounding him in the foot. At the first aid station, the doctor bandaged him and told Dick to keep his feet clean. Being a front line infantryman, clean was not in his vocabulary. Unexpectedly, his unit was able to rotate two men at a time back from the front to Nancy, France where the Army had hot-water showers and clean clothes for them.



Frank Orzio, USMC, Vietnam. Shortly after arriving in Vietnam in February 1968, Frank was wounded in the right elbow by an RPG. On September 5, 1968, 16 men were riding in a truck when it was ambushed and struck by an exploding land mine. The truck rolled over and caught fire. Frank returned fire with his rifle but was soon hit – thirteen times – and his leg was on fire. Finally the Viet Cong retreated and Frank was evacuated. Frank's cousin was in the truck and when he saw Frank wounded, he said, "Mother will be mad at you." He spent 27 months in hospitals recovering.



James Pinnix, USN, Vietnam. Jim was a Navy hospital corpsman assigned to a Marine infantry unit in 1966-1967. When the Marine squad went on patrol, a corpsman was the 14th man. The first Purple Heart was awarded when he was shot while on patrol. Next, a large Russian-built rocket hit a bunker Jim was in and rendered him unconscious for 14 days. That was Purple Heart number 2. The third Medal, with 2 oak leaf clusters, was awarded after he returned to his unit and was in a mortar attack. Sadly, Jim suffers from Agent Orange-related diseases, but Purple Hearts are not awarded for diseases.



Harry Selling, Army Air Corps, WWII, ETO. Lt Selling was a B-17 bomber pilot on his 7th combat mission to bomb Berlin. His plane was the last B-17 in the formation when another formation of B-17s "shuffled the

deck” by crossing through his, causing confusion. As Harry was watching “traffic,” a German FW-190 fighter began firing at his B-17. The instrument panel exploded, the cockpit caught fire, and the suddenly out-of-control plane began climbing almost vertically. Then it entered a hammerhead stall and began a 29,000 ft dive toward the ground. Miracles happened when Harry, half-conscious, rolled out of the plane and his backpack parachute opened. He landed in a tree. When he came to, some German children lead him back to their village. The German villagers began kicking him until an older German fired a rifle and ordered everyone back. Then the older German helped Harry to a German airfield where he received medical care and became a prisoner of war. Lt Selling was the only crewman to survive the crash.



Bob Thomas, US Navy, WWII, PTO. Stationed at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941 aboard the battleship USS Nevada, Lt.(jg) Thomas commanded the starboard antiaircraft batteries. When the Japanese surprise attack occurred, all the senior Navy officers were ashore. He ordered the locks on the ammo to be broken and the AA batteries began firing. The USS Nevada was able to get under way, headed out to sea. They passed the burning battleships. The USS Arizona had sunk. Then the second wave of Japanese dive-bombers targeted the USS Nevada. Two missed but the third bomb hit near Bob and pierced many decks before exploding. Wounded in the wrist, Bob tried to help a sailor on fire only to find he couldn't because his right leg was broken also. After calling for help with no one responding, he crawled down two ladders to be rescued. In addition to the Purple Heart Medal, ***CAPT Thomas was awarded the Navy Cross for Gallantry.***



Gene Wallace, Army Air Corps, WWII, PTO-Australia. In May 1942, Colonel Wallace flew as copilot in a B-26 bomber. His plane was hit by ground fire over Rabaul and they were forced to crash land in the ocean. Fortunately they located an island and crashed close to shore. Of the 8-man crew, two were killed in the crash. They spent the next ten months evading the Japanese patrols. Three more of the crew died of injuries or were captured by the Japanese and beheaded. In a daring night operation, an Australian Catalina flying boat landed close to shore and rescued the 3 remaining crew. In addition to the Purple Heart Medal, ***Col. Wallace was awarded the Silver Star Medal and the Soldiers Medal.*** Retiring after 30 years in the military, Gene entered the dangerous job of teaching school.



Fred Whitaker, US Army, WWII, ETO. Sgt Whitaker was in the 87th Division on December 24, 1944. His unit was pulled back from the front and received hot, Class B ration Christmas dinner. Infantrymen usually ate cold C rations in their foxholes. After eating, his unit loaded into trucks for a night movement. As the trucks drove with only small lights to see, a sharp-eyed German fighter pilot saw the trucks' lights and began strafing them. Fred was injured in the head and evacuated to an aid station. After bandaging him, the doctor returned with a turkey drumstick for Fred. Well enough to finish off the drumstick, Fred possibly was the only infantryman to receive two servings of turkey that Christmas.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bill Mall reviewed the Executive Committee Meeting held on March 31st. Job descriptions for each member were written. On May 29th, an audit of the FCOC funds was conducted and no irregularities were found. The Treasurer's duties were transferred from **Fred Whitaker** to **Larry Schnitzer**. *Thank you Fred, for a job well done.* It was discussed that future speakers could be selected by what they did after Military service.

Our **Chairman will be the Master of Ceremonies** at the Costa Mesa Memorial Day Ceremony on Monday, May 31st at the Harbor Lawn Memorial Park and Mt. Olive Cemetery on Gisler Ave. in Costa Mesa. The program will begin at 11:00 a.m. The **Chair** requested as many members as possible attend and help in making this a success as our Freedom Committee is helping to host this event. A "Fly Over" with "missing man" formation is planned, weather permitting. **General Bill Mall** will be the Master of Ceremonies for the 2011 program.

Larry Schnitzer read the Treasurer's report for the period January to March 2010.

Jack Hammett announced that the Pearl Harbor Survivors would be visiting Patriot High School in Riverside next week.

Scott Williams, a Vietnam veteran, was introduced as an ExComm member responsible for updating the list of Honorary Members of the Freedom Committee and assisting the Chairman in a myriad of duties.

Robbie Conn offered to assist any veteran who doesn't have enough money to buy a Freedom Committee cap. He will donate \$8 on a \$13 cap leaving only \$5 for the Vet.

The meeting then at 1:30 p.m. adjourned.

*Due to the size of our attendance at meetings, the next meeting on May 12th will be held in the Baker Room. (Minutes of the meeting prepared by **Tim Richards**)*

Respectfully submitted,



Chairman