



# LIVING HISTORY

## PASSING THE TORCH OF LIBERTY ON TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER—VOL. 4 NO. 1

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*Voices of veterans who have served their country in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Cold War, 1st Gulf War, Iraq and Afghanistan*

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Many times I'm asked, "How is the Freedom Committee of Orange County doing?" This is usually followed up by a concern for our WWII members who are passing on. I admit that I have attended more masses, services, and celebrations of life than I signed up for. While attending these services, I have gained a greater respect for these veterans, as I had the opportunity to meet their families, friends, and neighbors, all of whom spoke fondly and highly about these veterans. As our founder Jack Hammett said to me while we were walking through the Harbor Lawn memorial park several years ago, before Memorial Day and reflecting upon the headstones, "It's the dash between dates that's important!...the life you lived."

Buck Wall, our FCOC Membership chairman, has just updated our roster of 89 veterans. They are identified by their numbers and theater of operation or era served.

**WWII.** 26 with 20 active, including 9 speakers;

**Korean War.** 14 active, including 6 speakers.

**Cold War.** 15 with 11 active, including 5 speakers;

**Vietnam.** 25 vets with 22 active, including 15 speakers;

**Gulf Operation Desert Shield.** 2 active, both speakers.

**Iraq & Afghanistan.** 3 vets, 2 active and both speakers.

**Stateside.** 4 vets with 3 active.

An active veteran is one who attends the monthly community meeting and participates in school activities. The speakers are those who have attended a school function in the past year, in our "Living History" program, as a speaker or interviewee. Thanks to this, we are experiencing a growing number of new applications to join our organization. Our school year promises to be successful again.

**Remembering our Korean War Veterans.** In August 2018, the North Koreans turned over 55 boxes containing the remains of American military personnel. They were flown to Hawaii to identify and reunite them with

their long-suffering families. Hopefully, It is a beginning of the end of the war.

How did we get there? Five years after the end of World War II, the (North) Korean People's Army crossed the 38th parallel into the Republic of Korea, beginning the Korean War. Our military was understaffed and ill equipped as we enjoyed our peace "dividend." President Harry Truman rushed American troops into Pusan. After some intense battles, the Americans pushed the communist troops all the way to the Chinese border. Then, hundreds of thousands of the Chinese Red Army invaded and pushed the South Korean and America armies back to Seoul. In 1953 the war ended in a tense armistice. More than 35,000 American soldiers were killed, with more than 100,000 wounded, and 7,600 American soldiers unaccounted for. Today, the Republic of (South) Korea is a model democracy. "Thank you" to the Korean War veterans!

The Freedom Committee of Orange County has applied to host "The Wall That Heals" in 2019, at a Costa Mesa site yet to be named. The Wall That Heals exhibit features a



a three-quarter scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. The replica is 375 feet in length and stands 7.5 feet high at its tallest point. Visitors experience the wall rising above them as they walk toward the apex, a key feature of the design of the wall in D.C. Visitors can do name rubbings of service member's names. The names are listed by day of casualty. Machine engraving of the more than 58,000 names, along with modern LED lighting, provide readability of the wall day and night. □



## DURING THE PAST SCHOOL YEAR

Veterans of the Freedom Committee met with faculty members to plan their presentations.



This group of eight veterans from the Freedom Committee is shown at Costa Mesa High School with Principal Jack Haley and Teacher Gary Gonzales.



Emphasis was placed on forming small groups of students. Here at Newport Harbor High School, the veterans told of their experiences, and then the students interviewed the veterans to learn more.



At this table, veteran Alan Harvard of the Freedom Committee talked about the Vietnam war and then responded to questions asked by the students.



At another table, veteran Douglas Milliken told of his experience in the Vietnam war and then was interviewed.



At this table, veteran James Grimm explains his experience as a helicopter pilot in the Vietnam War.



At Newport Harbor High School, Tom Gorla told of serving in the Navy during the Vietnam war.

Many students have written notes of appreciation to the veterans whom they interviewed. In the following pages are excerpts from letters that the veterans received from the students.



## LETTERS OF GRATITUDE

Dear **Mr. Ruiz**, (First Lieutenant, Army Air Force)

*The greatest service one person can do for the country is to put their life in the way of those who would seek to do it harm. It takes a deep level of courage and devotion to one's country to risk making such a sacrifice for it. Ultimately, the people willing to put their life on the line – people like you – are the only thing protecting the rest of us from threats, both known and unknown. As a nation, we only take two days out of the year to give you our thanks and honor those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. For how necessary your sacrifices, both great and small, are to our country. It is frankly unacceptable how little we express our gratitude. So, here I will say it one more time. Thank you for everything you have done for this nation for putting your life on the line when few others would, for running headfirst into situations that could have easily ended your life, for expressing bravery, courage, and honor when anyone else would've been filled with nothing but fear. Your gifts to this country do not go unnoticed. It is because of people like you that we are able to have peace in this country.~ Timothy Shannon*



Dear **Mr. Tanner**, (Lieutenant Colonel, Army Air Force)

*I would first like to say that it was a pleasure talking with you. To most high school students such as I, the second world war is an event far removed from their lives. It is a thing we learn about in school – its causes, events, its lasting effects. But we learn only the war's effects on the world - how it affected the nations involved, what it did to their economics, their governments, how groups of people reacted to it. Talking with you taught me something that could never be learned in a classroom because it is far too personal, too emotional, to teach. It taught me how the war was seen by the individuals who took part in it. To zoom in on one person, one man who participated in the very events we learn about in class, is an insight that not many of us are fortunate enough to have. You said something during our talk that I have thought about ever since. You said that there were both good and bad people on both sides. To someone like yourself, who actually fought in the war, it seems to me to be so lousy to hate the man shooting at you and your friends, to despise him and see him and his comrades as evil. To tell, as you did, the younger generation that on both sides good and bad men fought and to tell the story of a Japanese pilot whom you respect alongside your own shows remarkable character..Thank you tremendously, both for your service in the United States military and for talking with me and my fellow students.~ Mark Brennan*



*...I thought it was so cool that you were able to create a makeshift camera stand to place on the tail end of the plane, so you and later more pilots could take pictures before and after bombs were dropped. Those pictures helped the stories become reality as we saw the destruction caused by the bombs. I also thought it was cool that you asked us to sign the map you brought. It not only gave us a visual of how far and where you traveled during the war, but also showed how many students were lucky enough to listen to your story. ~ Helen Coyne*

*... It was also fun to see how many people have signed your map and that I got to sign it too! ~Ella Donald*  
*... Having someone come and tell us their experience really helps make that connection and builds our understanding. You even inspired me to watch more documentaries on wars like World War II, because I want to get a better comprehension of what happened and what people went through. I'm also very thankful we had this opportunity to have you come in and talk to us, because I feel like it gives us a better understanding of the things we learned about in class. There is only so much that a textbook can teach us. Hearing about everything you experienced in the war in person helps to provide me with perspective. ~ Stephani Correa*

## MORE LETTERS OF GRATITUDE

Dear **Mr. Katz**, (Specialist 5th Grade, U. S. Army)

*I would like to gratefully thank you for sharing your story with us..Your biography was so interesting and had me engaged the whole time. You have experienced so much and gone through so much and I was blessed to have heard it all. My favorite part was definitely hearing how you got to travel all around the world. That was cool to hear because not everyone has a chance to do that. Having you speak to our group really opened my eyes and I'm lucky we got you as our veteran. ~ Bradley Schlom*

*....It really resonated with me when you talked about how we should enjoy our lives now and not worry about the little things..I admire your courage and your willingness to share your story with us. Coming from a military family I know how hard it can be to relive those memories no matter how long ago they were. ~ Jaidyn Gibson*

*... I can't thank you enough for sharing your wonderful life story with the group and myself, it was truly an eye opener and intrigued me enough to share my favorite parts of the interview with my family later that night at dinner. ~ Micah Look*

Dear **Mr. Tucker**, (Captain, U. S. Marine Corps)

*Thank you for sharing your story with us for our living history project. We all had an amazing time meeting you and we enjoyed hearing what you had to say. I really enjoyed this experience because it gave me a new perspective that I hadn't had before. I've learned about the experiences like the ones you had from school and movies, but it was different coming from someone who lived through it. I found it interesting learning about how you and other soldiers got along and interacted together, and hearing the nicknames that everyone had. The presentation that you had for us was put together very well and was very informative. I also found some of the titles funny. The artifacts you brought were really cool and gave a good visual as well as showed us real things from the war. The flight book was a really unique thing that I hadn't seen before. ~ Kaitie Lewis*

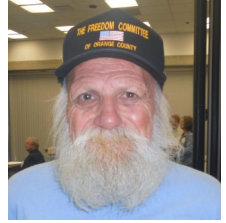
*... You are an excellent storyteller and it was so nice of you to share your stories with us. You giving your time wasn't unnoticed and is greatly appreciated. ~ Rayne Gunning*

Dear **Mr. Grabow**, (Colonel, U. S. Army)

*Thank you so much for taking the time out of your day to spread your knowledge and experiences. Also thank you for the preparation of the slides you had made ..They were very intriguing and knowledgeable. I appreciate the kindness you displayed and patience while we took notes. We couldn't have received a better person to write our report about. I learned lots about your time in the cold war, but what struck me the most was the schools you went to and taught at and talking about your parachuting because it made you happy. Having you visit opened my eyes towards applying for the army and fighting for our freedom..The world sleeps easier when we have people like you dedicating your time and life for the freedom of our country. ~ Kristin Fredrich*

Dear **Mr. Akesson**, (Chief Warrant Officer 4th Grade, U. S. Army)

*It was an honor to be able to meet a Vietnam veteran. Thank you for coming to our school and talking to us about your experience during the war. It seems as though the military wasn't all bad and you enjoyed being a pilot. It's incredible how you survived the incident where a plane near you got shot down by an enemy. It might have been quite difficult for you when your aircraft had been destroyed by the enemy. You must have felt quite fortunate to not get any serious injuries while being in the military. ~Viridiana Martinez*



## THE HOWARD BENDER STORY

As told by Tom Gorla

After graduating from Torrance High School, Howie Bender joined the Navy. That was on 2 February 1941. He was fully aware that the Japanese had been attacking innocent Asians on the other side of the world, in Manchuria and in Indo-China. Concurrently, it was apparent to all that, with the German army on the move in Europe and Africa as well, things were changing dramatically.

But it would be doubtful that he was prescient enough to consider that he would be swept into the conflicts so remote. He was joined in the feeling that he was lucky to be in a Navy that was considered by most Americans to be the best in the world.

After Navy Boot Camp training in San Diego, he became a "Boot" sailor, soon to be a Seaman Apprentice. He had settled into his billet in the Deck Department in the battleship USS Maryland, BB-46, with its eight massive 16 inch guns and twelve 5 inch guns. Everything he could see was armored, which gave him a feeling of invincibility. At 33,000 tons displacement, Maryland and those within her felt invincible.

Working in the Deck Department was monotonous and not so satisfying for the young sailor. The work load was often that of chipping old paint and applying new to seemingly endless equipment.

By chance, Howie was writing home one day, using a typewriter, where he had tested at 100 words per minute. That skill, not so common in those days, was noticed by a superior, resulting in his immediate career-changing transfer to duty at ship's office. It led to duty at General Quarters Battle Station as the Commanding Officer's Phone Talker, relaying his orders to the Gunnery Department during combat.

On December 7th, he was working in the ship's office when a massive explosion announced the first bombs falling on the ships in Pearl Harbor. The time of day was 0800, when there was always a ceremony of colors, during which the U.S. flag was raised and saluted. On Sundays, a Marine band played the National Anthem. On that day, Howie could hear it continue for a bit longer and, then, all hands were called to General Quarters for repelling the attack. Incredible devastation appeared out of the office window. USS Maryland was hit by two bombs, but stayed afloat.

Howie remembers the Captain telling him,

"Young man, there is no escape. Let's get to work." He was ordered to go below to help the men in the water. Some were dead. One man floated by and, as Bender grabbed his arm, the arm came off in his hand.



Amazingly, USS Maryland suffered only four men killed, while other ships suffered horrific losses: USS Arizona, 1,177 men lost; USS Oklahoma, 429; well over 3,000 had been killed or wounded.

Howie Bender advanced to Chief Yeoman, during the war, in various campaigns which included: Pearl Harbor; Guadalcanal, Bougainville, and the Solomon Islands. He served on the destroyers USS McCauley, and USS Crescent City, and an amphibious landing ship for Marine Corps attacks upon the enemy.

As the war was ending, Howie had met and married Geneva, who soon convinced him to leave active duty. Two daughters soon followed. Geneva was a teacher and Howie worked as a food broker and a chiropractor, and was a successful businessman.

A man of many talents, Howard was proficient with the violin and enjoyed performing his art with the Long Beach Symphony. In addition, he was an outstanding speaker. As a member of the Freedom Committee of Orange County, he told students about his wartime experiences. Howie welcomed any opportunity to speak of the value of freedom, love of country, and the necessity of eternal vigilance in protecting our country.

Howard Bender passed away at age 96 this past summer, and his wife Geneva died just a few weeks later. A great love affair had continued until the end of their lives.

Howard and Geneva had established a long and enjoyable relationship over the years with the National Park Service personnel when traveling to Hawaii. This winter, between Christmas and New Years, members and friends of the Bender family will travel to Pearl Harbor and commit the cremated remains of Geneva and Howard to the waters in the harbor at the exact spot where USS Maryland was berthed on December 7, 1941. The old sailor, Chief Petty Officer Howard Bender, will join his shipmates again, as was his wish. □



## DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS and into the new school year

When the schools were not in session, the Freedom Committee veterans stayed active at other events.



At the Fourth of July parade in Huntington Beach, Freedom Committee veterans Dave Hayward and Jack Linscott rode aboard the float of the Elks Lodge. They were joined by a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps.



World War II veteran Fred Whitaker described the Battle of the Bulge to members of PROBUS of the Rotary Club at the Alta Loma Country Club in Placentia.



On October 2, Board members and others of the Freedom Committee met at Corona del Mar High School for the annual State of the Schools Breakfast meeting. At the far right is Dr. Frederick Navarro, Superintendent of the Newport-Mesa Unified School District.



On October 6, WWII Veterans (L to R) Bob Ruiz, Dave Hayward and Jack Linscott, with their ladies, represented the Freedom Committee at a fund raiser for the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation at the Pelican Hill Resort in Newport Beach.



Our veterans made presentations to the students at Costa Mesa Middle School on Oct 24 and 25. School staff are Niva Gonzalez, Ray Triggs, Aaron Hale, Justin Taylor.

### FREEDOM COMMITTEE OF ORANGE COUNTY

President...John "Scott" Williams  
Executive Vice President...James Grimm  
Chief Financial Officer...Fred Whitaker  
Secretary...Tim Richards  
Treasurer...Robert McClain

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS:** John "Scott" Williams, James Baker, Sr., Frank Orzio, David K. Hayward, Tim Richards, James C. Grimm, Fred Whitaker, Maj. Gen. William J. Mall, Jr.

**WHEN AND WHERE WE MEET:** 2nd Wednesday of the month, 11:30 am to 1:30 pm, Presbyterian Church of the Covenant, 2850 Fairview Road, Costa Mesa.

**HOW TO REACH US:** WEBSITE: [www.fc-oc.org](http://www.fc-oc.org), PRESIDENT: Scott Williams, 3465 Santa Clara, Costa Mesa, CA 92626. Phone: 714-979-1049, Email: [swllmsca@gmail.com](mailto:swllmsca@gmail.com)

**NEWSLETTER STAFF:** Dave Hayward, Tim Richards, Kaaron Carver.

**SEND YOUR STORIES, LETTERS, PHOTOS AND COMMENTS TO DAVE HAYWARD AT**  
[Jeannedave@aol.com](mailto:Jeannedave@aol.com)