



The High Desert Bugle



The Mojave Desert Chapter of



PO Box 785, Victorville, CA 92393

Volume 39, Issue 1

January 2026

PRESIDENT: LTC Michael W. Moticha, USAR (Ret.)

TREASURER: Maj. Ronald Matsuda, USAF (Ret.)

VICE-PRESIDENT: MAJ Meera Maheswaran, USAR (Ret.) **MEMBERSHIP:** Lt. Col. Thomas J. Brown, USAF (Ret.)

HISTORIAN: Maj. David A. Meyer, USAF (Ret.)

VETERAN BENEFITS: MAJ James R. Skirvin, USA (Ret.)

BOARD MEMBER: LTC Donald Amador, USA (Ret.)

SECRETARY: Phyllis A. Skirvin, PhD

SURVIVING SPOUSE: Open **LEGISLATIVE:** Open **COMMUNITY PROJECTS:** Open **PROGRAMS:** Open

MISSION STATEMENT

The Mojave Desert Chapter of MOAA embraces *“Never Stop Serving”* our uniformed service retirees, veterans, those currently serving, their families and surviving spouses, through advocacy at the Federal and State levels on issues relating to the unique challenges of uniformed service.

Additionally, we are committed to volunteer engagement with the needs of the communities, jointly and individually.

You are cordially invited

to participate in our membership luncheon on Wednesday, **28 January 2026** at the **Bear Valley Country Club**, at 13299 Spring Valley Parkway, Victorville CA 92395.

The social hour will begin at **1100 hours** followed by lunch at **1200 hours**.

The “Michelin Star” meal will include a delicious entrée with vegetables, dessert, and a varied assortment of non-alcoholic beverages.

A vegan meal is also available upon request, but please make reservation for it by Thursday 22 January.

The cost is \$28.00 per person. Please make reservations by **Monday, 26 January** by contacting our President at michaelwmoticha@verizon.net or (760) 792-5004 (cell).



The guest speaker this month is our very own 1st Lt. Jack Barry. He has pulled together an enlightening and informative program titled *“Celebrities Who Have Served in the Military.”* You may very well be surprised to see who some of your favorite celebs served who you didn’t know they had.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

LTC Michael W. Moticha



Continuing the effort to promote our Chapter providing 54 years of service in our High Desert



Happy New Year to All:

I hope everyone had a wonderful time ringing in the New Year and are prepared for and are looking forward to 2026. The Chapter's *The High Desert Bugle* newsletter, compiled by your Board of Directors and edited/issued by Jack Barry, is driven by the actions of National MOAA, CALMOAA, and our own chapter activities. Last year's events and promotions were all published in the *The High Desert Bugle*. The best one of our monthly newsletters will be chosen by the editor and myself and submitted to compete with all other MOAA affiliated chapters for the *Colonel Marvin J. Harris Communication Award*. Each submission—be it printed or from a website—is judged on how well the Chapter communicates to its members and the local community. Additionally, this month, the Chapter's *2025 Level of Excellence Award (LOE)* submission will be forwarded to MOAA. In the past few years, our Chapter has received the highest level of achievement--a *Five Star Award*--for both submissions. As Chapter President, I take great pride in our Chapter's performance and look forward to additional *Five Star Awards*.

DECEMBER'S MEETING:

In December, the Chapter held its Annual Christmas Dinner at the Elks Lodge 1877 in Victorville. The evening's entertainment of Christmas songs and the history of tuba instruments was presented by the "*Tuba Force*" ensemble from Victor Valley College. They delighted our members with new and old tunes and also conducted a "Sing-along," in which the member audience participated. I and the attending Chapter Members and guests were most impressed with their performance. After a dinner of turkey, which was well prepared by the Elks Lodge kitchen staff, Dolores Payne introduced the slate of Chapter Members to be approved by the attending Chapter Members. With no additional members nominated from the floor, a motion was made, seconded and approved by the membership, to accept the slate of members as presented. Below are your Chapter Officers and Board of Director Members for 2026:



Applause for Lt. Col. Thomas Brown!



1. Michael W. Moticha, LTC USAR (Ret).....President
2. Meera Maheswaran, MAJ USAR (Ret)..... Vice-President
3. Thomas Brown, Lt Col USAF (Ret).....Membership Chairman
4. Ronald Matsuda, Maj USAF (Ret).....Treasurer
5. Donald Amador, LTC USA (Ret).....Board Member, At Large
6. Dave Meyer, Maj USAF (Ret).....Board Member, History/Public Relations Chairman
7. James Skirvin, MAJ USA (Ret).....Board Member, Personal Affairs/Veteran Benefits Chairman
8. Phyllis Skirvin, Spouse, PhD.....Secretary/Chaplin



The chapter is currently short four (4) Board Members. Those Chairmanship Positions are open for Legislation, Surviving Spouse Liaison, Community Projects and Programs. When you become interested in joining the team and participating as a Board Member, please contact a current member and make your desires known. Our Chapter needs your help. You are cordially invited to **JOIN OUR TEAM!** *Please Read On!*

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

(Continued)

 MARINE CORPS RESERVE

TOYS FOR TOTS



Be generous! Be smart! Start now in looking for bargains and/or using the old "layaway" concept to set funds aside for November!

Marines' Toys-for-Tots Program:

Members attending the Christmas Dinner were asked to bring a new, unwrapped toy, so that the Chapter could share in the local community toy drive. As President, I had offered to take the donated toys to the Marine Logistic Base in Barstow the next day to add them to the Marines **Toys-for-Tots Program**. Well, sometimes things do not go the way you expect them to. I was disappointed in the volume of toys donated by our members and at the end of the evening, we had a total of four (4). When I checked with the Logistics Base the following morning, they had already completed their program for the year. I have made a decision for next year. We will ask for the toy donation at the **November luncheon**, so that we have ample time to participate in the **Toys-for-Tots Program** in December. We do have a head start on 2026 with the four (4) toys donated!

Chapter Dues:

If you have not sent in or paid your 2026 Chapter dues by now, you are already late for this year. Dues were required by 31 December 2025. Please check out Maj. Matsuda's column, our treasurer, to comply with the requirements. As previously mentioned, the dues are used to pay the Chapter's administrative costs, which include, but are not limited to: the Chapter's PO Box mailing address, the Chapter's dues payments to CALMOAA, the Chapter's printing and mailing costs for **The High Desert Bugle** to non-email members, the Chapter's luncheon costs to pay for meals not paid for by members who make reservations and fail to attend, the chapter's travel costs when approved, and new member name badges. There are other administrative costs, but these are the main ones. Thank you in advance for paying your dues today.

Please



Your payment and donations to our purpose-filled community projects keeps our Chapter alive and power-filled.

**Making
a
Difference
in the Lives
of Others**

"Beat the Bushes" and make a difference in the lives of others...as well as yourself!

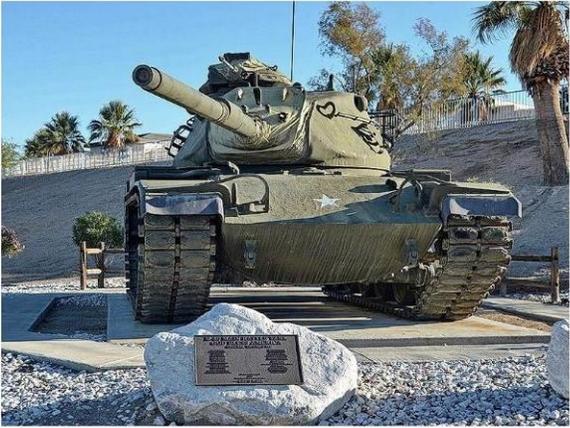
Membership:

As a Chapter, we had both gains and losses during 2025. MAJ Maheswaran and I recruited seven (7) new members. We had two (2) surviving spouses added to the roster. But we also lost 13 non-active, non-paying members, many at their request. The Chapter Membership is now about 54 members, down from 62. We need to embellish our membership. In this new year, I challenge each member to participate in the effort of finding and recruiting new members. Additional losses are going to happen during the next two months due to non-active members stepping down. We need to replace those losses not only for financial stability but for giving us more clout in Washington DC. Go out and **"Beat the Bushes"** for those hidden active, retired, and surviving spouses who could be new members. Thank you!

Please Read On!

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

(Continued)



CalVet's Barstow Veterans Home needs our vital support of resources: Time, financial and material donations and TLC!

Please keep this in mind: If you know of any businesses, organizations, or individuals in the High Desert who have the desire and funds to aid in our mission of **community support**, please let me know. As our Chapter Membership declines, so will our ability to help others. New members and funds rise together.



The Parade of Pianos Project provides instruments and scholarships to qualified students seeking careers in music.

"We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future."
~ Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Great Speeches*

The Flight Test Museum Foundation at Edwards Air Force Base is dedicated to preserving the amazing advances in flight technology

Community Projects:

This year, I plan to delegate some of my time and energy towards finding new means of donated funds for our Community Projects. As a Chapter, we are not able to fund and support the activities we have taken on as effectively as we ought to do. I have been disappointed in our having to not only reduce the value of the scholarships we awarded to the students in our **Annual Awards Ceremony** but not even being capable of helping other projects. The donations made by our members are appreciated and will definitely help out, but they will not last forever. We need new external donations. I will need to ask for help in this endeavor, and I may turn to 'you'—whoever has the time and desire to help in these **MOST** worthwhile projects.



Make a difference in the lives of our youths by contributing to our Annual Scholarships Awards Program.



The Apple Valley Legacy Museum and the Mohave Historical Society jointly share the mission of preserving the history of our Mojave Desert through researching, recording, teaching, and publishing the rich history of our people and communities.



Opportunities abound in serving our High Desert communities!

EDITOR'S REPORT

1st. Lt. Jack Barry



Welcome to



Fellow MOAAns, as we launch into 2026 with our hopes, dreams and goals filling our hearts and minds with anticipatory feelings, as military officers, might we take in inspiration from the following to be shining lights to our dark world around us:

You may have noticed my favorite mantra—something originating from Sanskrit meaning “tool of the mind—namely:

“Love and enjoy life! It has an expiration date this side of Heaven.”

That mantra evolved from two lessons I learned in July 1983 while attending a “*Time Management Seminar*” in San Francisco with 500 attendees: To fully live in the moment.

At the beginning of the seminar, our petite, Asian, young facilitator attired in her stunning brilliant red kimono sweetly strolled her way to center stage and compassionately asked, “Does anyone here have a time management problem?” Well, duh—that’s why we all were there! She scanned the crowd, did a 360 turn, and came to a halt. Then—in a deep baritone voice from out of nowhere—she dramatically exclaims, “Do you realize that every time you are late to an appointment, you are declaring to that person your time is far more valuable than theirs.”



OUCH! That struck me right between the eyes. You see, up to that point in my life, I had developed the habit of being 20 minutes late to anything—whether it was next door or 1,000 miles away. I literally shook in my seat, as **THAT** was not, in my heart, the message I wanted to deliver. Since then, I have intentionally have **NEVER** been late, but rather early. The timing of that lesson was perfect, because soon I became a professional chauffeur and could not afford to be late. AMEN!



At the end of the seminar, I learned lesson #2. In closing, our facilitator offered, “Have a nice day!” She paused and then abruptly stated, “**Hell no!** Have you ever envisioned that expression? Like, someone comes along with a ‘**NICE DAY**’ on a silver platter and says to you, ‘Have a nice day.’ That’ll never happen! Take responsibility for the quality of your day, of your life. **MAKE** it an amazing day to remember, despite all the chaos around you. So, now, **‘MAKE IT AN AMAZING DAY!’**”

Please ponder those two lessons and perhaps apply them to your life. You will not regret it.

PLEASE see “Personal Affairs Report” for more inspiration.



The High Desert BUGLE is published monthly by TMDC of MOAA, which is an affiliate of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) and is available to our membership in both email and postal mode. MOAA and its affiliates are non-partisan and non-profit.

Make 2026 your best year ever!



TREASURER'S REPORT

Maj. Ronald Matsuda

*Your Thank you in
advance for paying
your dues today!*



We began the month of December 2025 with \$8,523.31 in in our Chapter accounts. We had revenues of \$1,075.00 and expenses of \$964.00, resulting in an end of the year balance of \$8,634.31.

Our Youth Awards Fund has \$5,904.81, while the Barstow Veterans Home, the Apple Valley Legacy Museum, and the Flight Museum have \$133.00 each and the Parade of Pianos has \$158.00.

Approximately half of our Chapter members have paid their 2026 dues by the due date of December 31, 2025. Remember that your dues go exclusively for our Chapter's administrative costs. Please note that our administrative costs are comparatively low. Our dues are \$35.00 per year for Retirees and Former Officers and \$10.00 for Surviving Spouses and Active-duty Personnel. If you have a question as to whether or not you have already paid for 2026, please email me at rmatsuda@outlook.com and I will advise you on whether or not you have paid for 2026.



When sending dues payments or contributions, please make your check payable to TMDC-MOAA and send to:

TMDC-MOAA, P.O. Box 785, Victorville, CA 92393-0785.

If you don't use the *Renewal Membership Form*, please use the memo line on your check to designate "Dues," "Youth Awards," or any of the other charity projects we support.

Thank You!

One of the five worthy projects we support is the **Barstow Veterans Home** (shown below):

PROJECTS:

- Apple Valley Legacy Museum
- Barstow Veterans Home
- Flight Test Museum
- Parade of Pianos
- Youth Awards



Residents enjoying the Games Room.

be
KIND
TO OTHERS.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Lt Col Alfred B. "AB" BRAND

CPT Byron Ward (compiled from received narratives and documents)



One of the chapter's oldest members, Alfred B. "AB" Brand has led a long and distinguished life, as a decorated fighter pilot, as a dedicated family man, and as a committed public servant.

Born in Minnesota in 1933, AB grew up in the Farmington area, which was so rural that for a couple of years his formal education took place in a one-room schoolhouse with a single teacher who somehow taught grades 1-8.

After graduating from Farmington High School as salutatorian of his class, AB attended the College of Saint Thomas in Saint Paul and was active in ROTC. This eventually led to his joining the United States Air Force's Aviation Cadet Program, and in 1955 he pinned on the wings of a trained pilot and received a commission as a second lieutenant.

The following year, AB was stationed at Luke Air Force Base in Phoenix, where he met and married the love of his life, Roberta, known to many as Robi. Over the next five years he and Robi had three children, Bradley, Brenda, and Barry, while AB honed his military skills as a gunnery instructor, a fighter armament systems officer, and as an instructor pilot.

A move to Okinawa and promotion to captain followed in 1961. Two years later, AB and Robi had their fourth child, Brian, and in the fall of 1964 the family relocated back to the states, where AB was assigned as an F-100 pilot with the 614th Tactical Fighter Squadron, the "Lucky Devils," headquartered at England Air Force Base in Louisiana. From here, in 1965, AB had a temporary duty tour flying F-100s out of Japan and Korea, then the following year he was in the thick of the Vietnam War.

For 118 days, AB was assigned as a "Wild Weasel" pilot, flying F100 fighters (below photo) on missions to North Vietnam from Korat Air Base in Thailand. Wild Weasel was an Air Force code name for aircraft specially equipped to detect and destroy North Vietnamese air defenses by using a bold, extremely dangerous tactic. Unlike standard military aircraft, Wild Weasel jets were not equipped with devices that jammed enemy radar because the fighters' purpose was to "bait" anti-aircraft installations into revealing themselves when targeting radar was trained on them, allowing the revealed enemy guns to be destroyed before they could fire. Naturally, quick action and steady nerves were



MEMBERSHIP REPORT



called for, and AB was fully up to the task (AB and his team are shown in the group photo at left).

After flying Wild Weasel missions, AB moved to At Phan Rang Air Base in South Vietnam, where he flew air missions against enemy installations and emplacements. In one mission, he was decorated for leading a flight of F100s to support an actively engaged friendly ground unit. Operating under extremely adverse weather conditions, he accurately delivered his bombloads and “contributed to the ultimate victory of the friendly unit,”

AB racked up some very impressive flying statistics in Vietnam. He flew 226 combat missions, totaling 362 combat flight hours,

and earned three Distinguished Flying Crosses and three Air Medals for his wartime service.

While AB was completing his combat tour (as a newly-promoted major), Robi and the kids prepared for a move to England. Robi sold the house, packed up essential items, put some household goods in storage, and took care of dozens of other tasks that made the long move go as smoothly as possible.

The next few years took AB to England, Germany, Libya, and finally to Southern California, where he was Deputy Commander for Logistics at George Air Force Base. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel on New Year’s Day in 1972, and retired from the Air Force in 1974, receiving a Meritorious Service Medal as an end-of-service award.

Following his first retirement, AB and his family stayed in our area. He graduated from Cal Poly Pomona with a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration in 1976, then passed the CPA exam (first time!) and started working for the County of San Bernardino. In 1978 he graduated from Golden Gate University with a Master’s degree in Business Administration.

In the next thirty years, AB was a champion of local government, and was successful in cases involving the State Board of Control, something that benefitted all counties in the state. In 1997, he was promoted to Assistant Auditor Controller for the County of San Bernardino. Two years later, he retired from the County, but almost immediately he was recruited by the City of Hesperia as Interim Finance Director, and in that position assisted in the city’s financial stability. He retired completely in 2000.

Today, AB and Robi, now his wife of 69 years, spend their time traveling and visiting members of their large family, including their four children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, many of whom are shown in this photo at right taken at a family gathering.



VETERANS' BENEFITS REPORT

MAJ Jim Skirvin



Discover Your Benefits!



Health Care

As a veteran, you're entitled to health care through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This includes access to a variety of services, from routine checkups to specialized care for service-related conditions. To get started, you'll need to apply for VA health benefits through the VA's website or by visiting a VA facility.

Be prepared to provide your discharge papers (DD-214) and financial information, as eligibility can depend on factors like income and service history. Once approved, you'll have access to a network of doctors, specialists, and hospitals, often with little or no cost involved. For assistance, contact the VA directly at 1-800-827-1000 or visit your nearest VA Medical Center.



Disability Compensation

If you've been injured or developed a condition during your service, you might be eligible for disability compensation. Write it all down! This is a tax-free monetary benefit provided by the VA, designed to compensate for disabilities that are connected to your military service.

To apply, you'll need to file a claim with the VA, providing medical records, service records, and any supporting evidence showing the connection between your condition and your time in the military. You can apply online through the VA's eBenefits portal or visit a local VA office for assistance. Depending on the severity of your condition, the amount you receive will vary.



Education Benefits

Veterans have access to several education benefits, the most well-known being the GI Bill. This program provides financial support for tuition, housing, and books, whether you're attending a college, trade school, or pursuing technical training. To take advantage of the GI Bill, you must apply through the VA's website or the eBenefits portal. You'll need your DD-214 and proof of enrollment in an approved educational program. There are also other programs like the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program, which offer different levels of assistance. For help navigating your options, contact the VA at 1-888-GI-BILL-1 or visit your school's veterans' services office.



Home Loan Guaranty

Veterans can take advantage of the VA's Home Loan Guaranty Program, which helps you buy, refinance, or repair a home with little to no down payment. The VA guarantees a portion of your loan, making it easier to secure favorable terms and often eliminating the need for private mortgage insurance (PMI). To apply, you'll need to provide your DD-214 and proof of income. The lender will also require a Certificate of Eligibility (COE), which you can obtain through the VA's eBenefits portal or by contacting the VA at 1-800-827-1000. This program is a great benefit for veterans looking to achieve homeownership with fewer financial hurdles.



Burial Benefits

The VA provides burial benefits to honor veterans after they've passed, ensuring a respectful and dignified resting place. This includes financial assistance for funeral expenses, a gravesite in a national cemetery, and a headstone or marker. If eligible, you can receive a burial allowance to help cover costs, which is based on factors like whether the death was service-connected.

To access these benefits, family members or authorized representatives must submit an application, along with the veteran's death certificate and DD-214. Burial in a national cemetery is free, but certain conditions apply. For more details, contact the VA at 1-800-827-1000 or visit the National Cemetery Administration's website to learn more about eligibility and application steps.

From healthcare to education to housing, there's much to pursue!

HISTORY REPORT

Maj. David A. Meyer



The American Flag Used to Have 15 Stripes



Most Americans know the U.S. originally had 13 states, which are represented by the 13 red and white stripes on Old Glory. So, then, why did one of the early American flags — indeed the very version that inspired the national anthem, “The Star-Spangled Banner” — have *15* stripes?

The answer has to do with the country’s rapid expansion during the late 18th and 19th centuries. Following the Flag Act of 1794, which George Washington signed into law on January 13 of that year, the flag was changed to feature 15 stars and 15 stripes instead of 13 each, in honor of Vermont and Kentucky joining the nation as the 14th and 15th states, respectively.

When five more states were admitted over the next two decades, however, the logic behind this design revealed itself as faulty. The Flag Act of 1818 remedied this by adopting the modern convention of having stripes represent the original 13 states and stars represent the current number of states.

It was the 15-stripe version of the flag that inspired Francis Scott Key to write what later became the U.S. national anthem, after he witnessed the Stars and Stripes flying over Baltimore’s Fort McHenry during the War of 1812. The current version of the American flag was adopted on July 4, 1960, following the 1959 admission of Hawaii as the 50th U.S. state. In 2007, that design became the longest-lasting American flag; its predecessor, which was designed after Alaska became the 49th U.S. state (also in 1959), lasted only a year.

Flag Act of 1818

The Flag Act of 1818 was a significant piece of legislation that established guidelines for the design and representation of the United States flag. Initially, the flag featured 13 red and white stripes and a corresponding number of stars, symbolizing the original colonies. However, as new states joined the Union, this design became impractical. The Act, signed by President James Monroe on April 4, 1818, reverted the flag to 13 stripes, representing the original states, while allowing for the addition of a star for each new state admitted, effective on the following Fourth of July. This approach aimed to create a flag that could adapt to the ongoing expansion of the United States. The design has evolved over time, with the most recent changes occurring in 1959, resulting in the current flag that features 50 stars, representing all states in the Union. The Flag Act of 1818 reflects the nation’s growth and the importance of symbols in representing unity and diversity.

*“Keep your eye on the grand old flag
and forever in peace may you wave.”*

SURVIVING SPOUSES REPORT

Jack Barry, 1st Lt. USAF



Six Things Surviving Spouses Need to Know About Social Security

Courtesy of: Justin D. Smith CAP®, CFA®, CFP®



Words of Wisdom for Surviving Spouses

Surviving spouses often face unique challenges and require special support. Here are some words of wisdom that can provide comfort and guidance during this difficult time:

"The pain you feel today is the strength you feel tomorrow."

~ Anonymous ~

"You are stronger than you know, and braver than you think."

~ Christopher Robin ~

"Grief never ends...but it changes. It's a passage, not a place to stay."

~ Hollye Jacobs ~

"Grief is the price we pay for love."

~ Queen Elizabeth II ~

"You have within you right now everything you need to cope with your loss."

~ Brian Tracy ~

These quotes can serve as a reminder that the pain of loss is often followed by strength and resilience. They can also be used to express feelings of love and support to those who are grieving. Remember, it's okay to seek help and to take care of yourself during this challenging period.

Please continue reading...

SURVIVING SPOUSES REPORT

(Continued)



Social Security's rules for collecting benefits are complicated. Benefits for widows are calculated differently than traditional retirement benefits, so there are a few key rules and strategies that you need to be aware of if you find yourself in that situation. Below are six things you need to know about Social Security survivor benefits.

1: Switching

You cannot combine your survivor benefits and regular retirement benefits, but you can switch between the two in order to maximize the total combined value you receive. Each benefit calculation works differently, which allows you to receive additional benefits by strategically switching at certain ages like 62, full retirement age, and 70. Survivor benefits are available as early as age 60 and reach their maximum value at full retirement age, which is between 66 and 67, depending on when you were born. Retirement benefits first become available at age 62 and reach their maximum at age 70. In general, it is best to first determine which of your benefits has the highest maximum monthly benefit; this is the benefit that should be deferred. The smaller of the two benefits should be claimed first.

2: Working

If you are still working and haven't reached full retirement age, which is between 66 and 67, Social Security's earnings test may temporarily reduce or eliminate your benefits. In 2025, you can earn up to \$23,400 annually free of restrictions, but benefits are phased out after that point. For every \$2 of earnings above the limit, \$1 of benefits are reduced. Only earned income is included in the earnings test; income from pensions, retirement accounts, dividends, interest, and other passive income do not come into play.

There is a more favorable earnings test calculation that comes into play in the year you reach full retirement age. The exempt amount is \$62,160, and \$1 of benefits are withheld for every \$3 of earnings over the exempt amount. For some, it may make sense to develop a plan to transition into part-time employment to avoid the earnings test limitations and maximize benefits.

3: Taxes

A complex formula determines how much, if any, of your Social Security income is taxable. Your state may tax your benefits as well. If Social Security is your only source of income, you won't owe any Federal income taxes. As your income increases, more of your benefits become taxable, up to a maximum of 85% taxability. At a minimum, 15% of your Social Security benefits will be tax-free.

4: Agents

A common frustration among surviving spouses is that they received little, if any, helpful guidance from agents at the Social Security office. Much of that frustration is because those agents are not equipped to provide a comprehensive strategy that will maximize lifetime benefits, which can often cause surviving spouses to miss out on lucrative switching strategies. Educating yourself on your options prior to meeting with a Social Security agent is the best way to ensure you maximize the value of the benefits you are entitled to.

5: Do-Over

Even if you have already claimed one of your benefits, there is usually an opportunity to alter your claiming strategy. This provides a mechanism to correct any mistakes. Generally, you can repeal your application for benefits within the first 12 months, provided you return any funds you've received. Often, surviving spouses will also have the opportunity to alter their claiming strategy beyond that 12-month point. This can allow you to defer a benefit until it reaches its maximum value. In certain circumstances, you may even be entitled to retroactive benefits.

6: Marriage

If you are thinking about getting remarried, it's important to understand how your various benefits may be impacted. While getting remarried may entitle you to new spousal benefits, it could also impact your preexisting survivor benefits. If you remarry before age 60, your survivor benefits will no longer be available. By waiting until after 60, you will preserve those survivor benefits for the rest of your life. You would also be eligible to claim spousal benefits as well.

Source: <http://ssa.gov>

This is intended for educational purposes only and should not be construed as personalized financial or investment advice. Please consult your financial and investment professional(s) regarding your unique situation.

CHAPLAIN'S REPORT

Phyllis Skirvin, PhD



"A World without Borders"

In alignment with the unspoken theme of this edition of the *BUGLE*, may we discover more inspiration and hope in the following:



"A little while back, I was watching an interview with one of the astronauts from the Space Shuttle.

In this interview, he was describing his experiences while he was orbiting the planet. He was saying how beautiful Earth looks from above and that, much to his surprise, when he was going over Europe, he found that he was having a hard time telling the countries apart from each other.

He said the reason for that was the lines in the maps are not in the ground.

That makes a great point: these lines really don't exist.

They're made up completely and we perpetuate an illusion that, somehow, we're all different from each other.

I think the world would be a much better place if someday we stop pretending that these lines exist, and we concentrate in our similarities rather than in our differences. And I just want to remember one more thing:

that everything great that has ever happened to humanity since the beginning, has begun as a single thought in someone's mind. If anyone of us is capable of such a great thought, then all of us have the same capacity, capability, because we are all the same.

Sometimes we get caught up in our troubles and our problems and we let life slip away, but life is precious, all of life, and one must try to take in as much of it as possible."

~ Yanni ~

Greek Composer, Keyboardist, Pianist, and Musician

Life is precious. Try to take in as much of life as possible.

MOAA CHRISTMAS DINNER PRESENTATION

Victor Valley College "Tuba Force Ensemble"

Article contributed by Linda Amrein

A Delight-filled Force to Contend With!

The group that became known as **Tuba Force** got its start in January of 2012. During our winter break from Victor Valley College (VVC), four low brass friends got together and decided it would be fun to play quartets using just euphoniums and tubas. We immediately loved our low, warm sound and soon decided we should expand the quartet to a quintet and perhaps eventually play for nursing home residents! Our name Tuba Force was chosen because two of the original four players had served in the US Air Force.



Randy's unique double euphonium tuba.



We got right into the spirit of the season and sang along with the Tuba Force.



Fast forward to present day 2025. Tuba Force currently numbers around 20 players and is in its 14th year of providing music to community service organizations and others, as time allows. For at least 10 years, we also performed at most of the VVC concerts. We are all volunteers; many have jobs, college classes, families and other commitments, so we can't always accommodate everyone who asks.

Because the Tuba Force was so popular playing at the VVC concerts, it was decided in the Spring of 2024 to offer a Tuba Ensemble class. The VVC Tuba Ensemble is comprised of at least 75% of Tuba Force's members. The difference between the two groups is that the VVC Tuba Ensemble is an actual class (credit or non-credit) that has a director (Dr. Joshua Phillips) and is required to perform at all the VVC concerts. The group Tuba Force no longer performs at VVC but has continued on in all other respects.



Led by Randy (rt) the joy-filled faces went right along with joyful music!



Making music of a different sort!



MOAA CHRISTMAS DINNER GALLERY



We thank the volunteer help of the Elks Lodge who did a magnificent job of decorating.



Our festive event was held at the Elks Lodge thanks to Don Amador.



LTC Michael Moticha got into the spirit of the holiday season.



LTC Ben and Pat Shelby flew in from Colorado to join LTC Michael Moticha and the rest of us to celebrate the culmination of another productive year.



Lt. Col. Tom and Carol Brown made the long trek to share in the festivities.



Suzanne Bughman and Roseanne Smith support Toys for Tots program.

MOAA CHRISTMAS DINNER GALLERY



Take responsibility for the quality of your life and choose to MAKE it a great year ahead!



CWO 4 Bill Lundelius and Dolores Payne.



Mark Hotchkiss and wife Judy.



The Elks Lodge volunteer kitchen staff prepared and the God's Hand Extended served a scrumptious meal.



Dolores Payne led us in the voting for our new Board of Directors.



Winner Byron Wade

Great camaraderie is priceless! Come join



The opportunity drawings table overflowed with wonderful items to win.



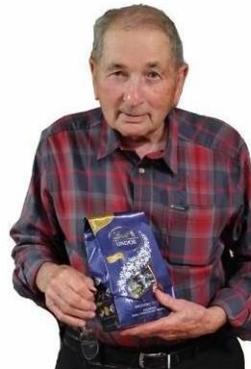
Winner Meera Maheswaran



Winner Pat Hagler



Winner Judy Hotchkiss



Winner Don Amador



Winner Mark Hotchkiss

THE MOST HIGHLY DECORATED U.S. SERVICEMEMBERS

CPT Byron Ward

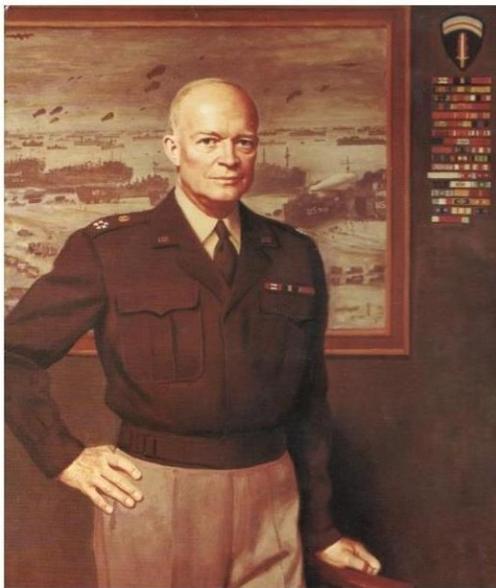
This involved project started when I discovered an online article titled “Audie Murphy, the Most Decorated American Soldier in U.S. History.” Having studied military history for the past half-century, I was skeptical of that claim, and that motivated me to embark on a two-year quest to identify other very highly decorated United States Armed



Forces personnel and compare them to Murphy, one of the nation’s most well-known heroes.

In the scope of this project, a “decorated” servicemember is someone who has received one or more of the 40 personal military decorations of the United States, from the Medal of Honor to awards such as the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, and a litany of commendation and achievement medals. Unit awards, service medals, campaign medals, and foreign awards are not considered. The importance of U.S. personal military decorations is illustrated by a portrait of Dwight Eisenhower at West Point. In the upper right corner of the painting there’s a 17-row ribbon rack, consisting mostly of service medals and foreign awards presented to the general, yet on his uniform, he’s wearing just his U.S. decorations (Army and Navy Distinguished Service Medals and the Legion of Merit).

With “decorated servicemember” defined, I then turned to the problem of comparing the relative merit of awards via a points system to give each decoration a value, based largely on the official precedence of the awards. I rated the highest decoration (the Medal of Honor) at 300 points, and the lowest awards (four achievement medals of the various branches) at one point each. Other awards received point values in between. Strong emphasis was placed on the higher decorations, particularly those for valor. Granted, there is quite a bit of opinion involved in assigning values to decorations, but I believe that my effort stands up well when compared with other rating systems that I found online.



With the decorations identified and the points system in place, the real work began. I spent months scouring books, articles, and the internet to identify hundreds of very highly decorated personnel, some very famous, others relatively obscure. I entered these personnel onto a spreadsheet that calculated a valuation based on earned decorations. The end result was a list of the nation’s 100 most highly decorated servicemembers.

In this year’s newsletters, I’m planning to highlight the top eleven, one per month, starting in February with a profile of #11, Admiral Richard O’Kane, a noted submarine commander in World War II, and ending in December with #1, the most highly decorated U.S. servicemember in history.

Concerning that “Most Decorated American Soldier” story I mentioned at the beginning of this article, one person who will *not* be featured on these pages this year is Audie Mur-

phy, who is #59 on the list (among servicemembers of all branches; among Army soldiers, he’s #30). To me, this does not detract from Murphy’s incredible heroism, it indicates that there are many others who deserve to be better known. Throughout the history of our nation, over forty million Americans have served in our armed forces. No matter what their ranking, every person on the list is the top of the top of the top, superior heroes all.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Our MOAA Chapter members are encouraged to support this project with their resources of time, energy and materials.

Opened in May 1996, the Veterans Home of California–Barstow is the second-oldest Veterans Home in California. The Home is a licensed 220-bed care facility and a proud staple in the stunning Mojave Desert region of Southern California.

RESIDENT ACTIVITIES:

The activities offered at our Home support residents' well-being.

There is a wide variety to choose from for the individual or in a group, indoors and out, including:

- Arts and crafts.
- Book club.
- Birthdays.
- Holidays.
- Games like bingo and lively billiards tournaments.
- Excursions to cultural and sporting venues.
- Karaoke and live music events.
- Military branch anniversaries and events.
- Shopping.
- Stretching and exercise classes.

RESIDENTS' ROOMS:

We are accepting applications for the Skilled Nursing Facility, where residents receive round-the-clock care from licensed nursing staff. Skilled nursing rooms:

- Are accessible to people with disabilities.
- Are semi-private and shared between two residents with a moveable divider and a shared bathroom between the double units.
- Can be personalized with your favorite pictures, books, and more.
- Have a large window that allows for a generous amount of sunshine.
- Have storage space and a TV.
- Support residents' medical and equipment needs.

SERVICES:

Premier healthcare services are delivered by a dedicated team of clinical professionals.

24-hour personal assistance with bathing, dressing, and grooming as needed.

- Medication assistance as needed.
- Bedside care and tray service for surgery recovery and minor, temporary illnesses.
- Onsite medical clinic for primary care.
- Transportation to offsite medical appointments and recreational activities.
- Rehabilitation, Occupational, and Speech Therapies are available.
- Dental clinic.
- Daily housekeeping and laundry.
- 24-hour security for the campus.
- Emergency alert and response system.
- Three nutritious meals a day and snacks are provided, with support services for specialty diets.
- Maintenance or supervision of resident cash resources.
- Income-based resident fees, guaranteeing affordable care, room, and board.
- Nationally-recognized infection control protocols.

AMENITIES:

- Engaging activities, that include; arts and crafts, karaoke, books club, and other group activities.
- Cable television and internet access in every room.
- Social areas with table tennis, arcade games, and a piano.
- Community activity center and gym.
- Library.
- Gardens and outdoor courtyards.
- Barbershop, banking, and a general store.



Our campus provides indoor and outdoor spaces to enjoy a delight-filled life.



COMMUNITY PROJECTS BARSTOW VETERANS HOME



It's more blessed to give

Residents' Needs/Wish List 2026 ***ACCEPTABLE DONATED ITEMS*** ***MUST BE NEW UNOPENED & SEALED***

WE CAN ACCEPT:

- Water bottles and non-alcoholic beverages
- Happy hour snacks: chips or crackers, snacks individually wrapped granola bars, jerky sticks
- Kindle fire or other digital newspaper readers for news subscriptions
- Sun hats
- Handheld LED Magnifiers (for reading)
- **Gift Cards:** Amazon, Walmart, VISA, McDonalds, In-n-Out, Starbucks, Panda Express, Domino's Pizza
- Gardening Club supplies: Gloves, small tools
- New Clothing: Sweat Pants, shirts, pants, pajamas, pull-on shorts (ALL SIZES!)
- PoliGrip Denture Crème (Pink)
- New Clothing: Men's shirts and T-shirts (button-up)
- Men's Hanes Underwear (L, XL, 1X, 2X)
- Axe or Dove body wash
- Hair Shampoo: Pantene, Herbal Essence, Selsun Blue
- Men's Deodorant (non-aerosol)
- Hand Lotions (non-allergenic): CeraVe Moisturizing Crème, Cetaphil, Lubriderm
- Shaving Crème
- Toothpaste (large)
- Electric razors
- "Reacher/Grabber" tools
- Laundry soap, fabric softener and fabric dryer sheets
- Sleep Sound Machines (Amazon)
- Hosted Social Events

We are not in need of any blankets, socks or bar soaps at this time.

WE CANNOT ACCEPT:

- Furniture: Due to storage constraints, we must limit furniture donations.
- Used Clothing Due to storage and pandemic constraints, we cannot accept used clothing.
- Medical Supplies: This includes but is not limited to canes, scooters, walkers, hospital beds, etc.

Thank you for your continued support!

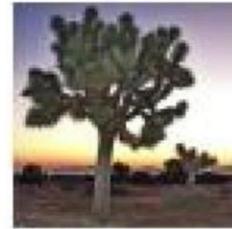
CONTACT: Laura Moraco, Public Information Officer/Donations Coordinator 760-252-6222
or at Laura.Moraco@calvet.ca.gov

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please bring your generous, kindhearted donations to our meetings and we will ensure that they are delivered to the Barstow Veterans Home. Let's prove to the world that kindness still exists! Thank you in advance.

Let's bring joy to their world!

THE HIGH DESERT CHAPTER

P. O. BOX 785 ~ VICTORVILLE CA 92393



RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP FORM FOR THE NEW YEAR

REMINDER!

Our Dues Year is Calendar: January through December.

Please make check payable to TMDC/MOAA.

Your prompt renewal will help ensure that our Chapter will have the funds to meet our expenses and plans for upcoming functions, activities and projects.

LAST NAME: _____ FIRST: _____ DATE: _____

RANK: _____ BRANCH OF SERVICE: _____

___ RETIRED AND FORMER OFFICER \$35.00 \$ _____

___ ACTIVE DUTY: \$10.00 \$ _____

___ SURVIVING SPOUSE: \$10.00 \$ _____

At this time, you may also make donations to our various Community Projects supported by our Chapter, as listed below.

The funds collected for these activities go directly for their support and are not used for any other expenditures.

___ YOUTH FUND FOR JROTC, YOUNG MARINES, CALIFORNIA CADET CORPS: \$ _____

___ APPLE VALLEY LEGACY MUSEUM/VICTOR VALLEY LEGACY MUSEUM: \$ _____

___ PARADE OF PIANOS (POP): \$ _____

___ BARSTOW VETERANS HOME: \$ _____

___ FLIGHT MUSEUM (EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE): \$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED: \$ _____

NOTE: Chapter members may pay up to three years in advance: 2026-2027-2028.

Accordingly, let us know by multiplying your dues by one, two, or three.

PLEASE NOTE ANY CHANGES TO YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION BELOW

MAILING ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

TELEPHONE: (_____) _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

2026



THE LARGER OUR NUMBERS THE GREATER YOUR VOICE.

WHY MOAA CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP MATTERS



MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT FORM FOR MOAA NATIONAL & THE MOJAVE DESERT CHAPTER

FULL NAME _____

RANK _____ BRANCH OF SERVICE _____

___ ACTIVE ___ RETIRED ___ RESERVE ___ FORMER ___ NATIONAL GUARD ___ SURVIVING SPOUSE

SPOUSE'S NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

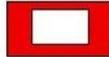
DATE OF BIRTH _____ TELEPHONE _____

EMAIL ADDRESS _____

TO ENSURE THE DELIVERABILITY OF MOAA COMMUNICATIONS,
PLEASE PROVIDE A PERSONAL EMAIL

ARE YOU A MEMBER OF MOAA? ___ YES ___ NO ___ UNKNOWN

NOT A MOAA NATIONAL MEMBER YET? CHECK HERE
TO RECEIVE A BASIC MEMBERSHIP AT NO COST TO YOU.



And, for only \$4.00 per month, you can upgrade to **PREMIUM** membership, giving you immediate access to a full spectrum of career and financial resources, exclusive publications, college scholarships for dependents, and countless discounts on products and travel.

Visit: **MOAA.Org/Join** to learn more.

How did you hear about MOAA chapter involvement? _____

Are you a member of any other MOAA Chapter? ___ YES ___ NO

If YES, which one(s)? _____

TO COMPLETE YOUR ENROLLMENT: Fill in this form, scan and email it to:
michaelwmoticha@verizon.net as an attachment. Or, print it out, fill in by hand, and
with a check payable to **TMDC-MOAA**, mail to:
PO Box 785, Victorville CA 92393-0785.

Do not include credit card information. We will contact you to finalize payment.

CHAPTER
MEMBERSHIP DUES
& INFORMATION:

Dues Year is January
through December

ANNUAL FEES:

**Retirees and former
Officers: \$35.00**

**Surviving Spouse
and Active Duty
\$10.00**

