



Filipino American Military Officers Association

FAMOS NEWSLETTER

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

ty. Like a "Hall of MVP" (Most Valuable Pilipinos).

It is imperative that we have the consensus of the Filipino community and the involvement and sanctions of the officials of San Diego County and surrounding cities if we expect to make this project a successful endeavor. We have communicated our plans to numerous leaders of Filipino American organizations who are not only motivated, but are willing to join the movement. However, we need a united Filipino community to achieve favorable commitments from county and city officials.

I believe that we can always stay united as long as we remain proud of our Filipino Heritage. We are the seedlings who became the trees of pride and glory, watered and nurtured by blood, sweat, and tears of our fore parents who inspired us by the magnificence of their heroic yesteryears from the bloody shores of Mactan to the hills and valleys of Tirad Pass, Palanan and many other places in our Motherland. All their sacrifices propelled us to our glorious tomorrow, which is now, our present.

Yes, now we are here in the land of freedom, still proud, productive and law-abiding citizens, pregnant

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At the outset, my most sincere congratulations to all 2023 FAMOS Awardees: Capt. Elsa P. Ang Military Spouse of the Year Award - Mrs. Remedios Liwag; CWO4 Oscar Sa. Garcia Lifetime Achievement Award - Col. Ceferina Ruiz, USA, Ret.; CWO4 Tony Pizarro Scholarship Awards - Scholarship recipients Matthew Fulinara and Keenan Mendoza; and Community Organization of the Year Award - United Pilipino International (UPI).

I am please to announce that FAMOS has embarked on a new and challenging, but more doable project. We are trying to spearhead a venture to erect a monument in a city within the County of San Diego that is willing to help us achieve our goal. The purpose of the proposed monument is to bestow recognition and honor to Filipino American Veterans, professionals, and those who have achieved distinct individual accomplishments that brought credit to themselves and the Filipino Communi-

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**Filipino American Military Officers Association
(FAMOS HISTORY)**

FAMOS was established by 12 Commissioned Filipino American Naval Officers in San Diego, California, U.S.A. in May 1990. The goal of the founders is to harness the vision of the Filipino American Military Officers into a united front. The logo was designed by CWO4 Oscar Sanchez Garcia. The twelve stars represent the twelve founders. The flag of the United States of America and the flag of the Republic of the Philippines represent the allegiance of the military officers and their Filipino heritage respectively. Striving for excellence inscribed on the shield upon which the American Eagle is perched is the ultimate aspiration of all the FAMOS officers, members and their families.

Capt. Elsa Ang , MC, USNR, RET.

Past FAMOS President

**FAMOS MEMBER
HIGHLIGHT OF THE QUARTER**



**TED J. CAMAISA
CAPT, DC, USN, RETIRED**

The son of a US Navy logistics officer, Captain Ted J. Camaisa, DC, USN (retired) grew up in Yokosuka, Japan, Patuxent River, Maryland, and Athens, Georgia, before his family settled in San Diego, California. After graduating from Bonita Vista High School, he attended San Diego State University as a computer science major. Realizing he wanted a more hands on profession, he decided to pursue career in dentistry. He traveled on medical and dental support missions to orphanages in Mexico while attending college. Captain Camaisa eventually earned a Bachelor of Science and Doctor of Dental Surgery degree from the University of California, San Francisco.

Following his father, CWO4 Rody Camaisa's, footsteps, Captain Camaisa joined the United States Navy and was first assigned to Naval Dental Center, Camp Pendleton, California where he served as clinic director, Edson Range Dental Clinic. He was reassigned to USS Cape Cod (AD-43) during Operation Desert Shield. He arrived in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia just in time to don gas masks as Iraqi scud

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missiles rained down on Riyadh and Dhahran. He caught up with his ship in Dubai, United Arab Emirates and remained in the Persian Gulf supporting coalition surface forces during Operation Desert Storm. While returning from the Persian Gulf, the USS Cape Cod sailed into Typhoon Yunya and the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines. A two-day fuel stop turned into a two-week rescue mission to help Subic Bay dig out of the volcanic ash. After an eventful deployment, Captain Camaisa was happy to return to San Diego, where he met his future wife, Rhiza Errasquin. Rhiza and her mother, Graziela, happened to attend a luncheon hosted by Ted's mother, Connie. An invite to the Navy Ball, movies and dinner dates led to marriage proposal. Captain Camaisa coordinated the "Partners in Education" program with local schools and was recognized by the United Way for his leadership in this program. After a fellowship at Naval Medical Center San Diego, he reported to US Naval Dental Center Far East as clinic director, Naval Computer and Telecommunications Station, Guam. While on Guam, he led humanitarian missions to Tinian Island in the Marianas to improve medical and dental care to island residents. His family moved to the high desert where he served as commander, 23rd Dental Company, Branch Dental Clinic Twenty-nine Palms. He deployed with the First Marine Expeditionary Force as Dental Officer in Charge and triage officer, Combat Service Support Company 151 at the height of combat operations during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He found himself again donning gas masks, scrambling into bunkers as his camp came under multiple missile attacks. Captain Camaisa was transferred to Port Hueneme and served as Force Dental Officer, Pacific Fleet Seabees and Dental Director, Naval Branch Health Clinic Port Hueneme. He reported to Naval Medical Center, San Diego and retired in 2012 after 23 years of active service. He received the University of California San Francisco Alumni Medal of Honor in April 2012. After his Naval service, Captain Camaisa practiced in La Jolla, California, transitioned into teaching and worked as a clinical professor at Concorde College. He spends time with his mom, Connie, his wife, Rhiza, and his children Teriza, Nina and Leah. At his Navy retirement, Captain Camaisa paraphrased General Douglas MacArthur, "Old sailors never die, they just sail away."

Quote of the Quarter

"Just one small positive thought in the morning can change your whole day"

Night Patrol, Saudi Arabia- Kuwait Border First Gulf War (Part 1)

(A short story based on real life events by Joy Gacuya, March 2023)

Deployed in Saudi Arabia during the first Gulf War, my US Navy Seabee unit, was stationed near the Saudi- Kuwait border. I was on the team the Seabees referred to as the Air Detachment. It was composed of select members of the construction battalion; we shipped out from California immediately after the Iraqi military rolled into Kuwait. We departed ahead of the main body or main battalion unit. We even left ahead of the advance party -- a skeleton crew. We were forward deployed in the combat zone in the desert from the very early stage of the conflict until the war was over.

Just a week before the Iraqi aggression, my unit completed a month-long military ground warfare training and we were bound to northern California for a military field exercise (FEX). The Navy leadership cancelled the FEX and shipped us off to the real war zone instead. I never dreamed of fighting in a war in my lifetime. My second child was born a couple of weeks before I deployed. I was 29 years old when I arrived in the combat zone.

It was scorching hot in the desert when we landed in August. The surrounding sand and sand dunes were all tan in color. There was nothing there except a small air strip. The closest town from our location was Al Jubail.

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with hopes and dreams and full of bright ideas; in abundance with persistence, diligence, and determination; rich with energy and willingness to work hard; give back to the community; contributing so much to the economic well being of this beautiful land of opportunity. Yes, we have given more than enough to leave an indelible mark and everlasting impression that without any shadow of doubt elevated the Filipinos to the "Pedestal of Recognition" nationwide. And what could be more worthy of pride and glory for our sons and daughters, their children, their children's children and to the future generations of Filipinos in this greatest and most powerful country on the face of the earth, the United States of America.

Further, let us not forget that our successes are all because of the opportunities accorded to us since we got to this great country. We were granted citizenship to level the fields and vineyards of human endeavor. Although we are Malayan by race, Filipino by blood and birth, we chose to be American citizens. It is therefore our solemn obligation and civic duties to register and vote, party affiliation and ideology notwithstanding, that is if we ever hope to be permanently recognized and be fully counted.

Furthermore, let us adhere to the idea of cooperation rather than competition; consistently helping and looking out for one another. Then and only then, that water of the so-called "regionalism" which comes from every which way, will enter into the pipe of familiarity, friendship, understanding and respect that will then flow ever so smoothly to one direction, our ultimate and unbreakable UNITY. Yes, the unity that will bring us all to a more honorable and well-respected component of the American Society.

At this juncture, I wish to respectfully ask our Senior Officers in the Filipino American military community to fully support the Filipino American Military Officers Association (FAMOS). Expert advice, direction and inherent influence of being Senior Officers are most helpful into making the Association more relevant and exceptionally effective. In addition, the invaluable support of our Senior Officers would be paramount and impactful to the achievement of the association's purposes and goal delineated in our Constitution and ByLaws.

God bless,

Oscar Sa. Garcia

VA to Cover New Drug for Early Stage Alzheimer's Disease

March 15, 2023

Editor's note: This article by Patricia Kime originally appeared on [Military.com](#), a leading source of news for the military and veteran community.

The [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) has agreed to cover a new biologic treatment for some veteran patients with Alzheimer's disease, according to an announcement Monday from the manufacturer.

The VA will cover Leqembi, a monoclonal antibody therapy made by pharmaceutical companies Eisai and Biogen, for veterans in the disease's early stages, making the department the first and largest health program in the country to endorse the treatment.

The Food and Drug Administration granted accelerated approval for Leqembi, also known as lecanemab, in January after research showed that the medication, administered intravenously every two weeks, slowed physical and mental decline in some patients with early Alzheimer's by as much as 27%.

While research is ongoing on the treatment's effectiveness, the medication is among the first to demonstrate that it reduces beta amyloid -- the toxic protein that contributes to the development of Alzheimer's -- in the brain.

"This treatment option is the latest therapy to target and affect the underlying disease process of Alzheimer's, instead of only treating the symptoms of the disease," said Dr. Billy Dunn, director of the Office of Neuroscience in the FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, during the accelerated approval announcement.

The VA treats roughly 168,000 veterans with Alzheimer's, a portion of whom are in the early stages of the illness.

VA officials said Tuesday that its formulary committee made the decision to cover Leqembi because its members believed that there are patients in the VA system who could benefit from the drug.

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Leqembi has an estimated cost of \$26,500 a year. A two-milliliter dose at the VA will cost the department \$194.63, while a five-milliliter dose will cost \$486.57, according to the department's National Acquisition Center Contract Catalog.

It will be available only at the request of a provider to veterans who "most closely align with" patients who meet the selection criteria for clinical trials, according to VA Press Secretary Terrence Hayes, meaning that the VA patients must meet the same demographic and health history standards as those studied by the manufacturers.

"Each dose of the medication administered for each patient will be tracked and monitored for safety and appropriateness of use, in real time, by VA's Center for Medication Safety," Hayes said in an email to Military.com. "VA will continue to monitor the clinical evidence and safety data for this agent and adjust the criteria for use as appropriate. VA also has capabilities and safeguards in place that are very different from the private sector, such as the ability to conduct real-time medication-use evaluations that will allow for continued safe use of the medication."

Leqembi is approved for use only in patients with early Alzheimer's with a "confirmed presence," via a brain scan, of beta amyloid.

The VA's decision puts additional pressure on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, or CMS, since the agency decided last year it would not cover the cost of treatments that target beta amyloid outside of clinical trials.

The Alzheimer's Association has pressed Medicare to provide "full and unrestricted" coverage for FDA-approved Alzheimer's treatments.

"When it comes to these treatments, other private insurers tend to follow in Medicare's footsteps. If Medicare holds back, other private insurers tend to hold back, and we have to crack this issue," Alzheimer's Association Chief Public Policy Officer Robert Egge said in a video update Feb. 9 to members.

John Dwyer, president of the Global Alzheimer's Platform Foundation, a research organization based in Washington, D.C., said Tuesday that Medicare should "follow the lead of the VA" and cover the therapy.

"We applaud the VA for its decision to cover Leqembi for veterans in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. This is a much-deserved victory for the almost 168,000 veterans who have Alzheimer's and receive services through the VA," Dwyer said in a statement emailed to Military.com. "CMS must reverse course on its harmful national coverage decision immediately."

CMS did not respond to a request for comment by publication. Shortly after the FDA issued its decision in January, however, CMS Administrator Chiquita Brooks-LaSure said she understood the impact Alzheimer's has on patients and families.

But, she added, at CMS, "we will continue to expeditiously review the data on these products as they become available and are committed to timely access to treatments, including drugs, that improve clinically meaningful outcomes."

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Bipartisan Bill Would Repeal '180-Day Rule,' Allow DoD to Hire More Veterans

By: Mark Belinsky

February 15, 2023

While the [Pentagon's recruiting crisis](#) stands out in headlines, DoD faces a war for talent on another front – filling critical DoD civilian positions.

Highly skilled applicants with hard-to-find credentials who are leaving uniformed service don't qualify for openings via USA Jobs, frustrating DoD hiring officials. These transitioning servicemembers are coached to apply by their transition assistance adviser as a course requirement, only to find their application is screened out because of the infamous 180-day cooling off period required by law.

They move on, frustrated with USA Jobs, and find a different opportunity in the civilian sector. The hiring official is often left with no choice but to accept an applicant who requires significant training and must acquire an expensive security clearance. It's a poor outcome for the job-seeker, the Pentagon, and the taxpayers.

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A bipartisan team of lawmakers recently reintroduced legislation removing the 180-day provision for all positions at the GS-13 level and below. The Retain Skilled Veterans Act – [H.R. 939](#), introduced by Reps. Blake Moore (R-Utah) and Derek Kilmer (D-Wash.), and [S. 334](#), introduced by Sens. James Lankford (R-Okla.) and Kyrsten Sinema (I-Ariz.) – would help combat a nationwide labor shortage, which has driven a greater sense of urgency to open up the competitive pool.

“Operating with the existing 180-day rule and current waiver process forces DoD to compete with one-hand tied behind their back,” said MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Brian T. Kelly, USAF (Ret). “We look forward to working with Congress to pass this overdue bipartisan and bicameral legislation.”

The act “greatly improves the competitive pool of applicants for GS-13 and below positions,” Kelly stated. “This provides DoD with expedited access to experienced candidates who often hold active security clearances or unique skills not easily replicated within other candidate pools; at the same time the GS-13 limit still provides opportunities for our important career civil servants to reach senior ranks and continues to guard against the potential for senior military leaders creating positions for themselves, one of the original intents. In a competition with China or any adversary, speed and access to talent matters.

Broad Support

MOAA and its partners in The Military Coalition (TMC) – a consortium of military and veterans’ groups representing nearly 5.5 million servicemembers, retirees, veterans, families, and survivors – have worked extensively to secure bipartisan support for this legislation.

“The 180-day waiting period has been bad for DoD and for retirees,” said TMC President CW4 Jack Du Teil, USA (Ret). “The waiting period has resulted in a talent management problem for hiring officials and an antiquated, cumbersome process for qualified candidates. Removing it helps federal hiring become more competitive with private industry and more navigable for the skilled technicians with security clearances who can support our weapons systems and national security priorities.”

5 Tax Tips for the Filing Season

January 31, 2023

(This article by Col. Curt Sheldon, USAF (Ret), CFP®, EA, originally appeared in the February 2023 issue of Military Officer, a magazine available to all MOAA Premium and Life members. Learn more about the magazine [here](#); learn more about joining MOAA [here](#).)

It’s that time of the year again. Time to sharpen your pencil, get out the calculator, or go online to settle your account with Uncle Sam. As you work on your tax return, here’s what to keep in mind.

1. Don’t Ignore Tax-Free Income When Itemizing

When you start your tax return, you’ll want to know how much you received in tax-free income, whether that is allowances, VA disability compensation, or combat pay. As you complete your tax return, if you itemize deductions, you can choose to deduct your state income tax or sales taxes paid. Since a lot of active-duty members are residents of states without an income tax and plenty of retirees migrate to those states, too, there is a pretty good chance the sales tax deduction will be the better option for you.

The sales tax deduction is calculated using your total income, and you can include any tax-free income you received when running the calculation.

2. Deduct the Correct Amount of Mortgage Interest

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) limited the amount of mortgage interest you can deduct. First, it limited the size of qualifying new mortgages. You can only deduct mortgage interest on up to \$750,000 of principal.

Under the TCJA, you can also only deduct interest on home acquisition debt to acquire or improve real estate — and that applies to home equity loans, too. If you use a

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home equity loan for other purposes, you can't deduct the interest.

Over the past few years, many people refinanced their mortgages, and in many cases, rolled closing costs into the mortgage amount. But the amount that your new loan exceeds the payoff of your old loan is not home acquisition debt, and the interest on it is not deductible.

So, you'll need to reduce the amount of interest reported on your Form 1098 to account for the amount that's not deductible. As you pay down the loan, the non-home acquisition debt is paid off first, so eventually you won't have to do this.

3. Check the Date of an Electric Vehicle Purchase

To encourage the purchase of electric vehicles, the government will give you a tax credit if you buy one. But note that the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which passed in 2022, changed the rules for the tax credit. In a strange move, Congress made one provision of the law effective on the date of enactment.

Under the new law, the final assembly of the electric vehicle must occur in North America to qualify for the credit. The IRA became law on Aug. 19, 2022. If you purchased or had a binding contract for the purchase of an electric vehicle prior to that date, the vehicle doesn't have to be assembled in North America to qualify for the credit.

4. Get a Do-Over

As you may recall, the CARES Act allowed taxpayers to take a distribution in 2020 of up to \$100,000 from a retirement account and, if the funds were redeposited by the end of 2022, the distribution is treated as a rollover and is not taxable. Even if the funds are not redeposited, the 10% early-withdrawal penalty is waived. If you took a distribution and redeposited none, some, or all of the distribution, you have some options.

Let's say that because of COVID-19, your income in 2020 and 2021 was very low and you couldn't redeposit any funds. You included one-third of the distribution in your taxable income each year as that was the default election. In 2022, your income was a lot higher and you decided to

redeposit the full amount into a retirement account. You can amend your tax returns for 2020 and 2021 to remove the taxable distributions and get a refund for those years.

Or let's say you didn't make any repayments over the last three years. Like the above scenario, you included one-third of the amount in your taxable income each year. But your tax bracket in 2022 is much higher than in 2020. In fact, even if the full distribution is included in your 2020 income, your 2020 tax rate is lower than 2022.

It may make sense to amend your 2020 and 2021 tax returns. You can include the full distribution on your 2020 return and pay any taxes, interest, and penalties due. Your 2021 income will go down when you file an amended return for that tax year, and you'll get a refund. The total tax may be less than if you include one-third of the distribution on your 2022 return.

5. Don't Listen to Rumors

There has been a persistent rumor that if you have a VA disability rating, that same percentage of your military pension is tax free. For years, I've pushed back against that gouge. I'm no longer alone.

In an April 2022 decision (T.C. Memo 2022-42), the tax court made it clear that if you are receiving a military pension based on longevity, the taxable amount of the pension is not reduced based on the percentage of your VA disability rating.

If you were thinking about reducing the taxable portion of your pension based on this rumor, consider rethinking your decision. If you've done it in the past, consider amending your tax returns.

This tax court decision doesn't affect the Strickland Decision and IRR 78-161, which allow you to reduce the taxable portion of your military pension for the VA offset that should have been taken if your award is less than 50% and retroactive. It also doesn't affect tax calculations if you are receiving Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC).

Most people don't really enjoy dealing with taxes. But paying attention to the details not only helps make sure your return is accurate but could even save you some money.

Veterans: What's Taxed (and What's Not) on Your Federal and State Returns

February 28, 2023

Editor's note: This article by Amanda Miller originally appeared on [Military.com](#), a leading source of news for the military and veteran community.

Veterans who receive a variety of special pays thanks to military service could be shielded from big federal or state tax bills, depending on whether they served all the way to retirement, received education benefits, have a service-connected disability or live in a state with special rules.

Here's what to expect on your federal taxes when it comes to several types of compensation commonly received in relation to a veteran's service, according to the U.S. [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) (VA), [AARP](#) and the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS).

Many states follow the same tax rules as the federal government, but you'll need to consult your state's tax laws -- or [reach out](#) for [help](#) -- to be sure.

VA Disability Pay

Neither the federal government nor any states tax [disability payments](#) from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The same can't be said for Social Security disability, which the federal government and some states tax [above a certain income threshold](#). Eligibility for VA disability payments often qualifies veterans for full or partial discounts on their property taxes in their state.

Military Retirement Pay

The federal government taxes [military retirement](#) pay, but [many states](#) have exempted it partly or entirely. If you need to change your withholding amount, call the Defense Finance and Accounting Service at 800-321-1080.

Survivor Benefit Plan Premiums

While you were on active duty, [Survivor Benefit Plan](#) (SBP) coverage was free, but retirees who opt in pay

monthly contributions. The government generally deducts these premiums -- never more than 6.5% of your gross retirement pay -- from your gross retirement pay on a pre-tax basis, lowering your federal taxable income. After you're gone and when a beneficiary begins receiving their annuity -- lifetime payments -- those are usually treated the same way as military retirement income.

VA Education Benefits

Payments received under any [GI Bill](#) program are tax free for veterans or any dependents or survivors who may receive the benefits. These include payments for tuition, training, testing for licenses and certifications, tutoring, work study, books and housing.

Other [VA Benefits](#)

The federal government also doesn't tax a number of other income benefits veterans may receive from the VA, including:

- Combat-related special compensation
- VA grants to modify a home
- Interest from VA life insurance policies
- VA dependent-care assistance
- VA post-9/11 survivor benefits
- Income received in the VA Compensated Work Therapy program

Here's How Veterans Can Access Their VA Claims Decision Letter Online

By: Kevin Lilley

March 01, 2023

An update to VA.gov allows veterans to access their full disability benefit claim decision letters digitally, skipping the call to a VA representative and the wait for a paper copy to arrive in the mail.

The new service took effect Jan. 17. Nearly 280,000 veterans had downloaded their decision letters as of [a Feb. 23 VA press release](#).

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Veterans already were able to access their disability rating and other claims information digitally, but access to the full decision letter provides more information that could be used to appeal VA rulings. To access the letter, veterans must log into their VA.gov account; full details on the process [are available at VA.gov](https://www.va.gov).

“VA disability benefits can also open the door to other federal and state benefits, so quick and easy access to a decision means quicker access to the additional benefits Veterans deserve,” VA Secretary Denis McDonough said in the press release.

The move also will free up VA call center representatives to address other veterans’ issues, according to the release.

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In 2021, the VA decided against adding an earlier Biogen Alzheimer's drug, Aduhelm, to its list of covered medications out of concerns for risk -- the infusion medication had been linked to brain bleeds and swelling -- and mixed results during clinical trials.

The FDA approved that drug, with an estimated cost of \$56,000 a year, on June 7, 2021. But the VA and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services -- the largest market for the therapy, with most of the estimated 6 million Americans with Alzheimer's eligible for Medicare -- opted to sharply limit coverage, even as the price was dropped to \$28,200.

Eisai, the Japanese company that paired with Biogen to develop and market Leqembi, said in a statement Monday that it is "proud of and humbled by the opportunity to support U.S. veterans as we strive to fulfill our human health care mission."

"The Veterans Health Administration's careful consideration and timely action to make Leqembi available approximately two months after the FDA approved Leqembi under the accelerated approval pathway shows its continued commitment to veterans living with Alzheimer's Disease," the company wrote in a release.

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Part of my duty as the camp power generator operator was to lead a night patrol made up of 13-men on foot. There was an evening when one of these patrols turned eventful. It happened just a few weeks after we had been boots on ground. The vast area of the desert where we were was still empty. The buildup of coalition forces, military from nations with alliance to the US, had barely started. There was a team of Navy SEALs, us Seabees and some US Marine element from the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force from Camp Pendleton, California in the area. A few months later we built a tent city in this part of the desert, and we expanded the adjacent air strip.

Each time before my patrols, I checked the fence lines during the day when there was plenty of daylight. I reviewed the locations of the gaps in the fences constructed from barb wires and razor-sharp concertina wires. These gaps were our ingress and egress in and out of the camp—the doors to the open desert “outside the wire” so to speak. So, I memorized where these entry points and exit points were. These barbed wires were set up like a giant labyrinth. If you were looking directly at the fences, you would not notice these openings. The wires overlapped but never touched creating a corridor between them. These corridors were narrow, only wide enough for one person to pass through one at a time. These fences were layered and were set up like a maze. I knew this because my unit laid them down.

I inspected my team before we started the patrol that eventful evening. I made sure everything was in good maintenance and repair and working properly. Most of my squad members were in their early 20’s. I was the most senior by rank and age. I checked their uniforms, boots, Kevlar helmets, 792 gear (aka web belt), flak jackets, rifles, ammos, gas masks, extra gas mask canisters, anti-nerve gas pills (pyridostigmine bromide); chemical, biological, radiological protection clothing aka MOPP gear; the one high frequency radio

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(PRC 77 HF military-grade radio) issued to us with encryption module (crypto), a night vision goggle, canteen, etc. At that time night vision goggles were rare, at least in the Seabee community. So, the unit only issued one to each patrol team. It looked like a regular binocular except when you look through it in darkness all you saw was green background. An object looked lighter green in color depending on how

much light reflected off of it. An image looked more like a white ghost if it reflected or had too much light. One could make out the objects due to the contrast of light green color objects against a darker green background. The field of view was flat meaning no depth between objects in the foreground and background. So walking as you peep through the goggles was not advisable—you would fall flat in your face on the ground. All canteens or military-issued water bottles must be completely full of water all the way to the top. Otherwise, the noise from the water slushing in them when walking in a quite environment could be heard from far away. We had to drink from and finish one canteen at a time and empty it out leaving no water inside. I also made sure everyone knew the passwords for the night—challenges and responses.

I had a point man, a radio man, two fire teams and myself. I was the patrol leader. A member of one of the fire teams was also the night vision goggle operator. Most of us had been through a patrol training in Port Hueneme, California. Everyone knew what to do. My point man was the lowest ranking member of the squad. He was the youngest and cocky. Being the point man, he was the first to step out.

After I inspected the squad, we headed out outside the wire. It was around 2000 hours. All our weapons were “locked and loaded” with ammunition and safety on but ready to fire anytime. The night was pitched dark.

It was hard to walk on the desert sand. The sand was dry and loose like the texture of common table salt. Our boots were sinking in it. Every step was an effort. We had lived there for a few weeks already, so we got used to it. But running and walking in the desert sand was a workout.

About a mile outside the wire, we radioed our location to the command post—station Alfa. It was still and quiet. One could hear a soft whisper from a distance. As we continued down the path, I heard machine guns being loaded with ammos and being readied to fire. They were “locked and loaded”. I knew they were fifty caliber machine guns or M-50s. These guns used bullets that were as fat as your pointing finger and middle finger put together and twice the length of those fingers. These were considered crew-served weapons because they were operated by a team of four. These guns will tear up a human body into many pieces. There were M-50-gun emplacements scattered in the desert manned by US Marines. Then I heard a challenge, “Halt! Who goes there?” Then a pause. The Marine waited for our identification. My heart was pounding out of my chest. I recalled from training that these Marines could and would send us to kingdom come in a heartbeat if we failed to give the correct password. But my point man picked up the key words and responded correctly. “You are clear! Proceed!” was the voice I heard with a very US Marine-like commanding tenor. I let go a sigh of relief. Similar incidents happened a couple more times that evening.

At around midnight, we had to call into the Command Post (CP) to report our location using our HF radio PRC 77. This was the fourth time that night. But the assigned radio channel had changed at midnight or at 0000 hours. The radio man did not know the new frequency and was fumbling with the PRC 77. So, we had to stop. He just got out of the Radioman training

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in San Diego and the Navy sent him straight to the desert to our unit. This was his first patrol. He was evergreen. We were approximately 5 miles from the camp in the open desert. I had the frequencies written down on my Navy-issue squad leader notebook. So, I helped the radio man switched to the correct frequency. My eyes were already adjusted to the darkness, so I was able to make out the dial on the PRC 77 radio. We reported our location—station Delta.

At around this time, we heard sirens went off at a far distance. The sound was ominously terrifying. Immediately we received a call on the radio letting us know that there were inbound SCUD missiles. The Iraqi military had a big stockpile of these missiles in their inventory. They fired a few of them that night to our direction. These missiles were loaded with nerve gas. We were told to return to the camp as fast as we could and come into the command post. But we were a couple of miles away.

(The other half of this story will be continued in the next edition of the FAMOS newsletter.)

FAMOS ANSWERS CALL FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE ON VALENTINE’S DAY

By: Ernie Liwag

It all started when my wife, Remy, received a call from former Chula Vista Council Member Jill Galvez soliciting support from the Filipino American community to provide moral support and encouragement to a Chula Vista High School student of Filipino descent. Louise (last name withheld to maintain privacy) who had a life-threatening incident while waiting at a bus terminal on her way to school is feeling the effect of her traumatic experience. Her teacher, Ms. Maria Galleher, had deep concern about her well-being and sought the support of Ms. Jill Galvez.

The Filipino American Military Officers Association (FAMOS), San Diego Roaring Lions Club

(SDRLC), and Lim Catbagan answered the call and decided to visit the class on Valentine’s Day, February 14, 2023. The students were treated with a variety of Filipino cuisine. In addition, all students received a quilted book marker courtesy of Remy Liwag who laboriously made them by hand.

Most importantly, we were able to talk to Louise and offered our support and advice on how to cope with the adversity and focus on the future. FAMOS President, Oscar Garcia, encouraged her to apply for the organization’s scholarship award. Ms. Maria Galleher took advantage of the opportunity to show us the students’ horticulture project on school grounds as part of her class curriculum.

Education is the key to success. I see a bright future.



(Top Photo) Ms. Maria Gallaher’s Class of 2023.
(Middle Photo) Community Volunteers
(Bottom Photo) Quilted Book Markers

FILIPINO-AMERICAN MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION
Founded in May 1990
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

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Please mail your application with appropriate fees to:

FAMOS * 1232 Cima Del Rey * Chula Vista, CA 91910

For more information, visit our website at www.famosusa.org

