

Fort Sam Houston Memorial Services Detachment



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COMMANDER'S CORNER

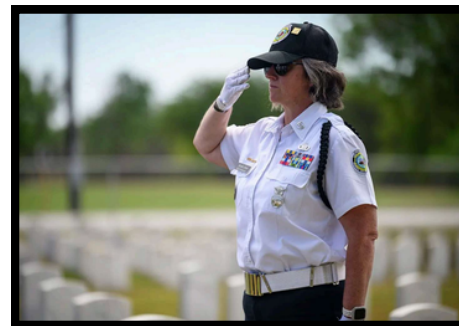
As we step into 2026, I want to take a moment to reflect on where we've been and, more importantly, where we're going as a Memorial Services Detachment. The start of a new year always brings a sense of renewed purpose, and I can confidently say that our mission remains as strong and meaningful as ever.

Over the past year, our detachment has continued to stand in solemn honor of those who have served, ensuring that no veteran is laid to rest without the dignity and respect they have earned. This work is not easy; it requires time, discipline, and emotional strength, but it is among the most important things we do. Each service we perform is a reminder of the legacy we uphold.

I am also proud to share some exciting news as this year unfolds. Our detachment was selected as one of only ten organizations nationwide to receive a \$2,500 uniform grant from Operation Honor Guard. In addition to this recognition, we were further honored by being voted the "Favorite Guard" by their board. These distinctions are a direct reflection of the professionalism, dedication, and heart that each of our volunteers brings to this mission every day.

COMMANDER'S CORNER

This year is already shaping up to be one of growth and transition. Operationally, we are focused on strengthening our readiness and expanding our capabilities. That includes continued training for our volunteers and ensuring we maintain the highest standards of professionalism. Our goal is not just to meet expectations, but to exceed them in every ceremony we perform.



Jackie Jones, MSD Commander, renders a salute during a Tuesday Squad supported funeral. This photo was featured as part of an article on MSD in the San Antonio Express News

We have also expanded our recruiting efforts and outreach to other veteran-supported organizations. Through these efforts, we have welcomed three new volunteers into our ranks and begun building strong partnerships with the San Antonio Coalition for Veterans and Families, local VFW posts, and American Legion organizations. These relationships are vital—not only for growing our team, but for strengthening the network of support available to veterans and their families throughout our community.

We are also honored to have an upcoming event hosted by the VA's Center for Development and Civic Engagement, where our volunteers will be recognized for their service and dedication. This recognition is well deserved and highlights the impact our team continues to make within the veteran community. This event would not be possible without the support from VFW Post 8541 and their willingness to share their space to make this event happen. All MSD Members are invited to attend May 6, 2026, from 1100-1300 at VFW Post 8541- 2222 Austin Highway.

I also want to highlight something that often goes unspoken—many of our volunteers give their time not only to this detachment, but to other organizations as well. That level of selfless service speaks volumes about the character of this team. It is something I am deeply proud of, and it reflects the spirit of service that defines our mission.

We are also looking toward the future in new ways. Bringing more of our operations into the digital space—whether through improved communication, outreach, or record-keeping—will help us stay connected, organized, and accessible. This is an important step in ensuring the long-term sustainability of our detachment.

None of this would be possible without the continued support of our volunteers and donors. Your time, effort, and generosity are what keep this mission moving forward. Simply put, we cannot do this without you.

As we move through 2026, I ask each of you to stay engaged, stay informed, and continue to uphold the values that make this organization what it is. Together, we will continue to honor our veterans with the respect and dignity they deserve.

Respectfully,
Commander, Memorial Services Detachment

MONDAY SQUAD

SPECIAL FORCES PERSONNEL REMEMBERED AT FORT SAM HOUSTON'S ANNUAL EVENT

Silver wings upon their chest - These are men, America's best



As Robert Ramirez's solo trumpet rendition of "Ballad of the Green Berets" filled the April air on this particular Saturday morning at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery last month, some of the lyrics in Sgt. Barry Sadler's chart-topping hit from the mid '60s also resurfaced in the minds of some present.

Somewhat effortlessly, too, likely because it seemed appropriate for the occasion, which was the annual honoring and remembrance of the nearly 100 U.S. Special Forces deceased personnel who are interred at the storied Fort Sam burial grounds. The solemn and reverent observance occurred this year on April 11, an overcast Saturday morning during which Mother Nature held off on any rainfall.

In all, the names of 137 deceased were read from the podium in the Assembly area of the cemetery, with a single ringing of a memorial bell by trustee Merrill Hall following the reading of each name. Besides those Special Forces personnel interred at Fort Sam, the event also memorialized certain other deceased members of the elite military service corps who are buried elsewhere. Also read were the names of a number of deceased spouses of Special Forces personnel.

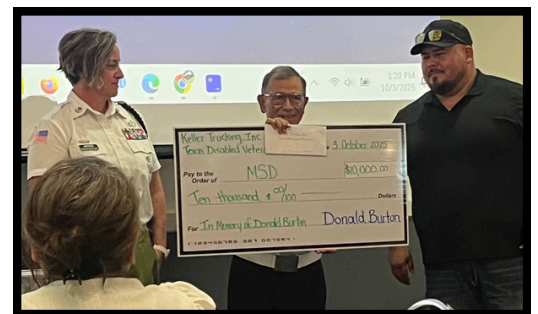
"What we are doing here today is honoring our own legacy," said John Armezzani, newly installed in January as president of the local Alamo Chapter of the nation's Special Forces Association. "This type of event is what helps keep our chapter moving forward."

The program included, besides a recording of the National Anthem, contributions by the Monday Squad of the cemetery-based 100-plus members Memorial Services Detachment which has conducted more than 47,500 memorial services at Fort Sam since the detachment was established in 1991. Monday Squad's rifle contingent delivered the guns salute, followed by a stirring rendition of Echo Taps by buglers John Hernandez and Ramirez, in addition to Robert's solo run on "Green Berets." Jacqueline Jones, the commander of the expansive MSD organization, joined the Monday shooters on this occasion.

"Why am I here today?" said Jones, an Air Force security forces veteran. "Because I want to be. My husband tells me I'm spreading myself too thin with my involvement. But it is important."

Monday Squad Leader Bill Neuiszer -- himself a retired sergeant major in Special Forces/Airborne -- directed his unit. Neuiszer's wife, Sherry, who passed away last year, was among those whose names were read.

The dramatic closing punch to the ceremony involved placing of a long-stemmed rose on each of 89 graves of those being commemorated on this solemn occasion. Indeed, it was a day deservingly anointed as "special" in several ways.



Jackie Jones (left), current MSD Commander, and Manny Mendoza (center), previous MSD Commander, received a donation from the local Alamo Chapter of the Special Forces Association in memory of Donald Burton, who served as a Green Beret and was a supporter of MSD.

MONDAY SQUAD

Special Forces -- those elite Army units, that include the iconic Green Berets -- are trained in unconventional warfare, counterterrorism, reconnaissance and specialized missions beyond the scope of regular troops. Trained to operate in complex, high-risk environments -- and conduct missions requiring precision, discretion and adaptability.

Hearing Ramirez's compelling treatment of the Green Berets ballad, conjured up memories of Sadler's success with the song, which he also wrote. As a so-called crossover hit, "Green Berets" held No. 1 on the Billboard pop music chart for five straight weeks in 1966.

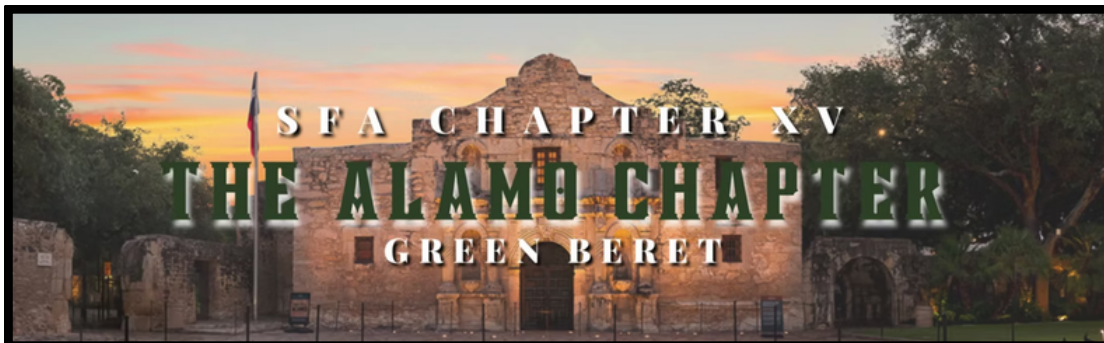


Sadler was a New Mexico native and a high-school dropout who died in 1989 (four days after his 49th birthday). He first served his country as a 1958-61 enlistee in the Air Force as a radar technician. Later in '61, Sadler joined the Army and applied for Airborne/Special Forces. After deciding to pursue qualification as a Green Beret medic, he served a six-month Vietnam War tour in 1964-65. His medic training before being shipped overseas included a stint at Fort Sam Houston. Sadler's in-country tour in Southeast Asia ended abruptly while on a jungle patrol in May '65. He suffered a severe leg injury from stepping on a feces-covered punji stick. Back stateside, he recovered fully and was honorably discharged in '67.

Nationally, the Special Forces Association was established in 1964. According to its web site, <https://www.sfa-xv.org>, the San Antonio chapter was founded 11 years later; and currently has more than 200 active members and former soldiers -- including four recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military decoration awarded for acts of valor above and beyond the call of duty. The site noted the local chapter offers a range of programs and initiatives -- including community service, educational programs, and veteran events.

"The Alamo Chapter is more than a name. It represents a beacon of resilience, bravery, and unwavering dedication to our nation and each other," said Armezzani in a web site statement that honors the chapter as a "vibrant community of warriors bound by a shared legacy."

"Our members, as veterans of the Green Berets, embody the highest ideals of service and sacrifice. Together, we continue the proud traditions of the Special Forces, supporting our members, their families and our community. Our heritage, symbolized by the legacy of The Alamo, inspires us to face challenges with courage. And to make a meaningful impact every day. We honor our past while forging ahead into the future, committed to the principles of freedom and excellence."



MONDAY SQUAD

MONDAY SQUAD BUGLERS OFFER 'STRENGTH IN NUMBERS'

In a contrived sort of way, military buglers are like brain surgeons.

They pretty much have no margin for error.

Moreover, it would seem to apply especially on those occasions when a bugler is blowing "Taps," the musically simplistic 24-notes final call considered unique to the U. S. military. Taps is played for events that include wreath-layings, memorial services, at evening colors and probably most notably at funeral services. Considering all that, Taps needs to be performed with a rigid crispness and impeccable precision.

And no errors.

Perhaps, too, it is more challenging for that small cadre of "older" buglers who serve in the ranks of Fort Sam Houston Cemetery's Memorial Services Detachment. Yet, bigger challenge or not, they also "better always get it right" because of the audience for whom they're playing at this final earthly sendoff -- family members and friends who have lost a loved one.

Adding all that up, it suggests MSD's Monday Squad is uncommonly blessed to have three seasoned buglers on its active roster in Robert Ramirez, Porfirio "Monty" Montellano and John Hernandez. Here's a cursory glance at their resumes...

ROBERT RAMIREZ

A lifelong San Antonian, Robert got his introduction to the U.S. armed forces many, many years ago, as a 19-year-old draftee who had been involuntarily "invited" to suit up and join Uncle Sam's Army for two years beginning in summer 1969. Perhaps surprisingly, it was to prove both eventful and life-changing.

All of which lends perspective for Robert, now that it's 2026 because he still is serving his country -- as Monday Squad's second-longest serving member with 15 years and four months. (Only Steve Shaffer with 20 years and three months has served longer.)



Besides his current double-hatted duties of assistant squad leader and bugler, Ramirez previously was squad leader during 2018-22, before heart problems forced him into inactive status for nearly two years. Ramirez eventually had to fully recover from an aorta valve being replaced and in 2024 finally received medical clearance to rejoin the squad as top assistant to Bill Neuiszer (who had replaced Robert as squad leader in 2022).

As for his draftee experience of many years earlier, Ramirez says he remembers it as being somewhat typical for an American lad who got sent to Southeast Asia for his post-senior trip. Subsequently graduating from boot camp and then advanced training in armament repair, he then was shipped overseas for the standard 12-month, all-expenses-paid "visit" to the Vietnam War theatre. Robert's orders dispatched him to the Army's somewhat storied First Infantry Division; more specifically to the division's outfit quartered at Lai Khe Base in Binh Dong Province of the war zone.

MONDAY SQUAD



Robert Ramirez (right) with former MSD bugler Mike Kinkade (left), played Echo Taps at the 2022 Memorial Day ceremony at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery.

After reporting on board, Ramirez soon after was offered a special challenge, a tryout to be a door gunner on one of the unit's four-man-crew Charlie model Huey helicopters. Door gunner sounded like a four-letter word in all capital letters. Having said "yes" a bit tentatively, the new guy surprised even himself in casting off reluctance, replaced by a twisted addiction to this new role of manning an M-60 machine gun mounted in the Huey's open right-side door. Spewing hundreds of rounds at the Victor Charlie bad guys scurrying around below ... it became an instant "high."

"I originally was talked into trying it," remembers Ramirez. "But I thrived ... because there was such an adrenalin rush." A good fit, indeed. Door gunner was to be Ramirez' primary duty during his tour in 'Nam, before rotating back to the USA for discharge in late 1970.

His subsequent return to civilization began with employment briefly for a finance company, followed by a prolonged career in the auto parts industry.

By comparison, Robert notes his trumpet/bugle playing can be traced to beginnings in middle school years ago, then as a member of the class of '67 at Edgewood High School. In admitting his musical talents aren't necessarily natural, considerable practice and diligence has been required to maintain proficiency. Returning after the cardiovascular procedure was more challenging, largely because of bugling's demands on the respiratory system. Daily practice sessions were required.

"In serving with the honor guard, it's about giving back," says Robert. "It's about giving something back, payback for what helped me get where I got. Helping other veterans. Helping the squad and the whole detachment. You do get a great amount of satisfaction."

Asked how he learned of MSD's existence, Robert said a friend from his local VFW post, Victor Pena, made a recruiting pitch -- which morphed into an easy sell. "I came with Victor for a Monday visit that was even better than expected," he explains. "A lot of good people who were highly patriotic. And they all seemed to have a healthy sense of humor. Overall, there was really good morale."

Given all that, with nearly 16 years of logged service, has a retirement date been considered? Robert shrugged off any such notion: "I want to keep on going at this as long as possible. Until I can't do it anymore."

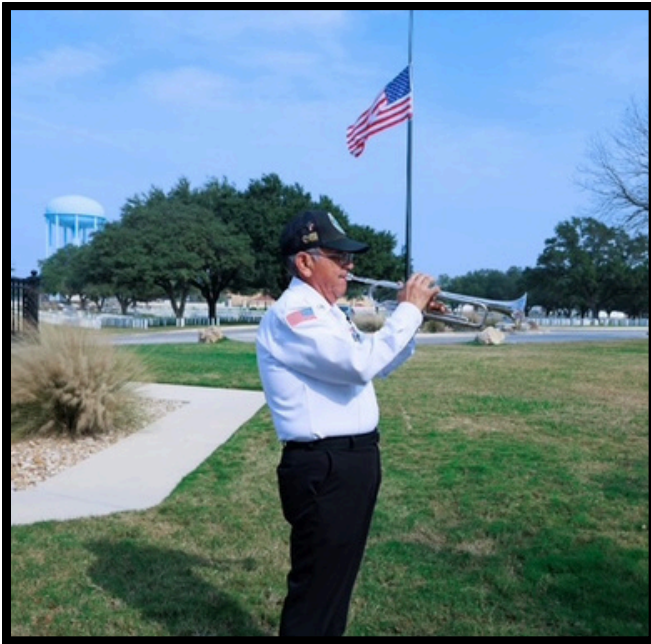
Seemed like a good answer. Which explains why, at age 77, Robert Ramirez is still at it, blowing notes and barking out commands ... call it driving nails with a velvet hammer.



Porfirio "Monty" Montellano (left) and Robert Ramirez (right) played Echo Taps at the April Unaccompanied Burial Ceremony at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery.

MONDAY SQUAD

PORFIRIO "MONTY" MONTELLANO



It's more than coincidence that Monty began playing the trumpet in fifth grade. Three older brothers had inspired him because they played the instrument as teenagers. Accordingly, Monty became sufficiently enamored that he started early and continued to blow those melodic notes through junior high and at Lanier High School (class of '71). For him, embracing a trumpet was an addiction in the nicest of ways. And today the 73-year-old San Antonio native still is at it, thriving even at maintaining his musical proficiencies (he also plays bass, keyboards and six-string guitar, and serves as a choir director for some of the groups at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church). It's notable, too, that his MSD commitment is a high-octane version -- he's a bugler for both the Monday and Wednesday squads.

"It keeps me pretty busy, but the support I get is considerable," says Montellano, a Texas Air National Guard master sergeant who dropped the curtain on a 24-year active duty career in 1998. "There's a lot of satisfaction in getting it right. And the more involved you are (two squads, plus church groups and family events), the higher your satisfaction."

Monty's military career got launched, largely because of a friend, Alejandro Ramirez, who at some point a couple years after high school graduation, cornered Monty and delivered a terse lecture, "You're going nowhere fast and that needs to change -- now." Next stop that summer of '73 became a recruiter's office of the state Air National Guard, of which Alejandro already was a member. Trusting his friend and seemingly sensing the potential, Monty signed an enlistment contract. His ensuing career which began as a personnel specialist, evolved from that into a number of recruiting billets, at installations in El Paso, Port Arthur and San Antonio.

Demonstrating a flair and aptitude for leadership, by the time he retired from active duty in December 1998, Montellano had been selected Supervisor of the Year three times. The added bonus along the way, Monty got married in 1996 to another state guard member, Deborah Marie, who he credits with "being highly supportive of my involvement with the military, MSD and the church groups."

Despite his somewhat hectic schedule, Montellano finds time for golf, ideally weekly. "I used to play on the Fort Sam course and I would hear in the distance the service songs and Taps from the services," notes Monty. "And I would say to myself, 'I need to see if I can help with that.'"

It finally happened when Monty joined the Wednesday Squad. He subsequently was recruited for the Monday Squad by the late MSD adjutant and accomplished military bugler Mike Kinkade, who passed away in 2023. They had become acquainted at a memorial service in which Monty played Taps for a deceased cousin. "Mike complimented me afterward and said, 'we could really use you in the detachment.' I finally joined Wednesday Squad in 2021."

MONDAY SQUAD

Monty said he remembers being finessed, by Kinkade, into regular duty on Mondays, in noting: "He asked me if I could play one day with them in May 2022. Well, it turned out one day has turned into almost four years. But I say with utmost sincerity, I am honored to play Taps for fallen veterans."

When discussing the challenge of being note-perfect when playing Taps, Montellano seems especially determined to blow a 4.0 performance every time.

"My greatest fear is in blowing the 18th note correctly," he says. "The 18th is the highest note in Taps, so nailing it can be a special challenge."

As someone with immensely strong faith, Monty says part of his prayer before every single service he plays at the cemetery is "to ask God to make it sound good for the family of the deceased."



JOHN HERNANDEZ

On Feb. 19, John Hernandez marked his 84th birthday. Worth celebrating, for sure. But maybe, too, a reminder to the San Antonio native that he needs to proceed a bit more cautiously with each day. Still, John continues to muster weekly with MSD's Monday Squad, even if he does occasionally check out a bit early on chilly days. Added up, Hernandez seems to maintain a "trooper mentality" serving in his main role as one of the squad's three buglers.

"Going back for many years, I always wanted to play Taps for deceased veterans," Hernandez says now in reflection.

"Yet somehow it never occurred to me when I was in the Navy for two years (1961-63) to try to be a military bugler."

John Hernandez (left) played Taps for the Memorial Ceremony for Chapter XV Special Forces Association in 2023. Porfirio "Monty" Montellano (right) played the National Anthem and Ballad of the Green Berets.

For sure, Hernandez was planning ahead when he enlisted in the Naval Reserve during his senior year at Lanier High School. After graduation, that meant he had to report for his two-year active duty obligation. Which became orders to the Deck Department of the attack aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVA-42). He became a seaman in striker status to become a boatswain's mate third class.

Looking back, he remembers his tour on the 900-foot long Roosevelt with good memories, and also some that were mundanely ordinary. The ship, homeported in Mayport, Fla., back in those days, did deploy, although not to the Western Pacific. Hernandez said he remembers the Roosevelt headed a task force that maintained a presence during tense times in Latin American waters in the early '60s.

"Working in the deck department involved a lot of cleaning and maintenance," John recalls. "But we also stood watches on the carrier. The best experience I had was standing watch up there on the bridge -- sometimes even at the helm, part of steering the ship."

MONDAY SQUAD



Hernandez served his two years and was discharged, after which he pursued what became a civilian career for which he had natural talent -- as a commercial artist. Along the way, John's first wife, Angelina, passed away from heart issues after their 20-year marriage. Five years later, he married his second wife, Carmen.

John noted he played trumpet in the high school band, which probably influenced his rekindled interest in blowing Taps as a bugler.

He was unaware of the existence of the MSD outfit at Fort Sam until nearly 10 years ago when he attended his brother David's funeral at the cemetery and noticed the ranks of the honor guard at the service were filled by distinguished, graying personnel wearing these uniforms. Hernandez said he contacted then-current MSD commander, Manny Mendoza; after which he was assigned to the Thursday Squad for what became a four-year tour. He transferred to the Monday Squad in 2022.

As for playing Taps and the military service songs during the interments, Hernandez termed it "truly a rewarding experience. It is fulfillment of something I always wanted to do." John said he was compelled to practice extensively at first to regain the "musical precision" necessary to fill a bugler role for MSD.

The challenge for Hernandez was greater, too, because his general health suffered a setback of heart failure in 2007. The ordeal included five weeks spent in a coma, John recalls, before recovering eventually. "In some ways, I haven't recovered," he says. "I do what I can. To continue as a bugler now, I practice every single day so I can maintain the level needed."

Which is to say John Hernandez remains steadfastly focused, continuing to strive to be note-perfect... because the families and friends of a lot of deceased veterans are counting on it. It's notable, too, that the squad's three buglers actually play trumpets -- not bugles -- for the services. Why? The general feeling seems to be a trumpet arguably produces a richer, more poignant sound.

There's a bonus, too. On most Mondays, the squad also can offer the special effects of "Echo Taps." Which is just what it sounds like. A reverently reflective echo touch -- by two synced-in buglers -- to the 24 notes contained in Taps, making it sound arguably better. Although some would counter that it's not part of official protocol and technically is not authorized by the Defense Department for military funerals.

"Still, it adds something extra to what you're hearing," said one squad member, who noted Echo Taps, for sure, has a different ring to it.

TUESDAY SQUAD

MSD Bench Refinished and Restored to Resilience

For a long time, memorial benches have been powerful symbols of remembering, thinking, and connecting. These personalized memorials are more than just outdoor furniture; they are places to store memories, stories, and legacies that will last forever.

The Master Carpenter from Tuesday Squad, Lawrence Cabanilla (right), repaired and refinished the bench dedicated to SGM Rick Davila. A bench is a wonderful way to honor SGM Davila's work for the MSD and celebrate it in a meaningful way.

Commemorative benches serve as lasting, functional tributes that honor loved ones or special occasions while enhancing public spaces like parks, gardens, and trails. They provide a peaceful spot for reflection, community connection, and personal remembrance, offering a durable alternative to traditional memorials while benefiting the community.

Memorial benches serve as poignant symbols of remembrance, reflection, and connection. Integrating both functionality and sentimentality. The bench is more than just pieces of outdoor furniture; it is a repository of memories, stories, and lasting legacies.

The memorial bench is outside the MSD Building at the Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, commemorating SGM Davila's service.



Lee H. Smith served in the United States Army from November 1958 to February 1962 (3 years), including service in Korea. Lee attained the rank of Specialist Four (SP4). He was born on 21 September 1939 in New Britain, Connecticut. He applied for the Memorial Services Detachment (MSD) service on 6 August 1999 and served for 15 years. While serving as a member of the Memorial Services Detachment (MSD) Tuesday Squad at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, he received a proclamation from President Obama recognizing his volunteer service to the MSD. Lee died on 10 October 2014 at the age of 75. His burial site is Section 2S-561 at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery (FSHNC). Lee was an avid Notre Dame fan and was very proud of his Irish heritage.

On Tuesday, 17 February 2026, Mrs. Alva Smith and family donated several Memorial Service Detachment (MSD) shirts from her late husband to MSD Commander Jacqueline Jones. Pictured from left to right: Former MSD Tuesday Squad member Lee Smith's family: daughter Sharon, receiving the shirts; MSD Commander Jacqueline Jones; and Lee's wife, Alva Smith.



TUESDAY SQUAD

Weapons Training

Tuesday Squad conducted Weapons Safety Instruction on 17 February 2026. Squad Leader Keith Wall led the training for all squad members and MSD personnel present.

Tuesday Squad members handling firearms, particularly for honor guards, parades, or ceremonial duties, must adhere to strict safety protocols. These are:

THE SIX BASIC WEAPON/GUN SAFETY RULES

- Treat all guns as if they are loaded.
- Keep the weapon/gun pointed in the safest possible direction.
- Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot.
- Know your target, its surroundings, and beyond.
- Know how to properly operate your weapon/gun.
- Store your firearms with a trigger lock or cable lock. The best way to store them is in a locked cabinet separate from the ammunition. Secure firearm storage is essential for safety.

Additional topics included proper, secure storage, such as in locked cabinets or with cable locks, which is required for all ceremonial rifles, and inventory certifications. Also covered were the safe handling of blank ammunition, cleaning the weapon, clearing malfunctions, and legal responsibilities.

Adults must prevent children under 17 from accessing loaded firearms. Legal "secure" storage includes using locked containers, gun safes, or disabling devices.

While federal law is limited, specific state laws (like Texas Penal Code § 46.13) create penalties if a child accesses a firearm, strongly encouraging storing guns locked, unloaded, and separate from ammunition.

Legal liability can arise from negligence. Primary safety rules (NSSF/NRA) often define the standard of care: always point the muzzle in a safe direction, keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot, and keep the gun unloaded until ready to use.

Laws, such as Texas Penal Code § 46.03, prohibit carrying firearms in specific places, including schools, polling places, courts, and secured airport areas.

Storing a gun in a manner that allows easy access by unauthorized persons (e.g., in a car's glove box) can result in criminal charges if the gun is stolen or used in a crime.

At the conclusion of the training, squad members signed the annual safe firearms-use agreement and submitted it to the squad leader for endorsement.

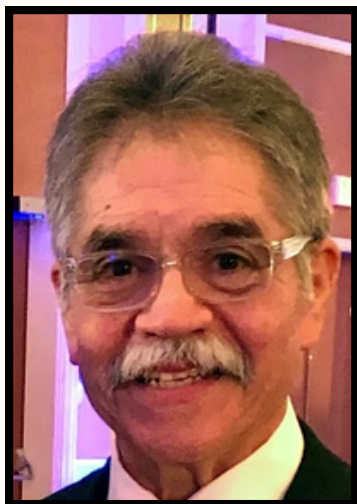


Members of Tuesday Squad listen as Squad Leader Keith Wall provided instruction on firearm safety and handling.



TUESDAY SQUAD

Northside Lions Club of San Antonio presents a check to the Memorial Services Detachment in Memory of MSD Member Leon Portello



Leon Portello was born on 26 April 1955 in Canutillo, Texas. He joined the United States Air Force on 31 July 1973 and served for four years as a security policeman, eventually attaining the rank of Buck Sergeant. He mustered out of Davis Monthan AFB, AZ, on 30 Jul 1977. Leon referred to his enlistment as the best decision he could have made. After serving, he spent 30 years as a Chicago police officer, and his DD-214 lists the city as his home of record. He joined the MSD on 28 Dec 2021. The Memorial Services Detachment is a volunteer organization composed of retired and former military members who provide full military funeral honors for veterans buried at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery.

Leonilo “Leon” Portillo of San Antonio, Texas, passed away on Wednesday, October 1, 2025, at the age of 70. Throughout his USAF military service, Airman Portello was recognized as an “Honor Graduate in Air Training Command” and “Outstanding Marksman” on the rifle range and achieved the title of Law Enforcement Specialist. He was honorably discharged from the USAF on July 30, 1977.

Leon retired from the Chicago Police Department after 30 years of service. Throughout those years, assignments highlighted his career in the police force. Officer Portillo was recognized and presented a Chicago Police Department “Lifesaving Award” that read: Awarded to Sergeant Leonilo Portillo #920; “For a Successful Effort in Saving a Human Life Which Involved Exceptional Courage or Performance.” Another notable aspect of his law enforcement training and responsibilities was five years on the Chicago Police Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Team.

He is survived by his loving wife, Martha; his children, April Groveau, Tina Marie Guzman, and Jason John Portillo (Beth); his grandchildren, Mia Bella & Jacob Xavier Guzman, David Riley, Jordan James, and Layla Brooke Portillo. He is survived by his siblings Irma Moll, Mary Grand (Al), Hermilo Jr. (Andrea), Guadalupe (Christina), John (Adriana), Richard (Norman), Jesse, Ramon (Maria), Raul (Francine) and Laura Portillo.

Courtesy of <https://neptunesociety.com/obituaries/san-antonio-tx/leonilo-portillo-12544309>

The Fort Sam Houston Memorial Services Detachment received a charitable contribution from the Northside Lions Club of San Antonio today, Tuesday, 24 February 2026. The contribution was in memory of Leon Portello. The Northside Lions have consistently upheld the commitment of all Lions to adhere to the motto “WE SERVE.” MSD Commander Jacqueline Jones accepted a check from Mr. Saul Lopez from the Northside Lions Club of San Antonio in memory of Leon Portello, a past MSD member. Leon was a member of the Thursday Squad.



WEDNESDAY SQUAD



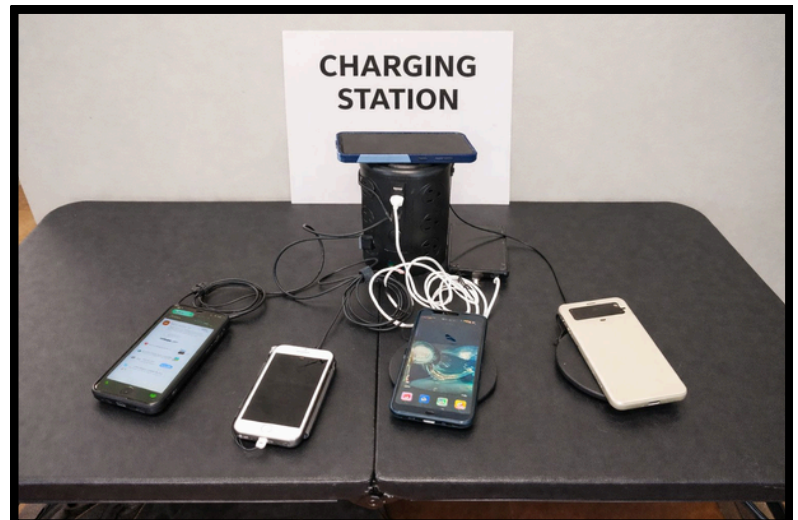
**Wed Squad
Flintstone Mobile**

Greetings from Wednesday Squad - Between January and April 2026, the Wednesday Squad rendered military honors for **109 veterans**, dedicating a total of **1,574 volunteer hours** at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery.

It is a privilege we never take lightly. Each service represents more than a final farewell—it reflects our unwavering commitment to honoring those who served and the legacy they leave behind. We are sincerely grateful for the opportunity to stand in their place and ensure their service is remembered with dignity and respect.

14 Jan - New Charging Station for the Wednesday Squad . The Wednesday Squad is proud to share our new charging station, now available during services at the cemetery.

This station helps keep our veterans connected, powered, and mission-ready—ensuring phones, tablets, and other essential devices stay charged while we honor our fallen heroes. From coordinating ceremonies to staying in touch with family and fellow volunteers, this small upgrade makes a big difference.



As always, our focus remains on professionalism, readiness, and respect— Always Ready to Honor.

WEDNESDAY SQUAD

Feb 18 - The 5th Annual Non-Denominational Ash Wednesday Service at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery was a meaningful and well-attended gathering that brought together members of the Wednesday Squad, cemetery staff, families, and friends in a spirit of reflection and renewal. Presided over by U.S. Army Veteran CW4 Deacon Jesse Nuñez, the service welcomed all in observance of the beginning of Lent.

**5TH ANNUAL
ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICES**

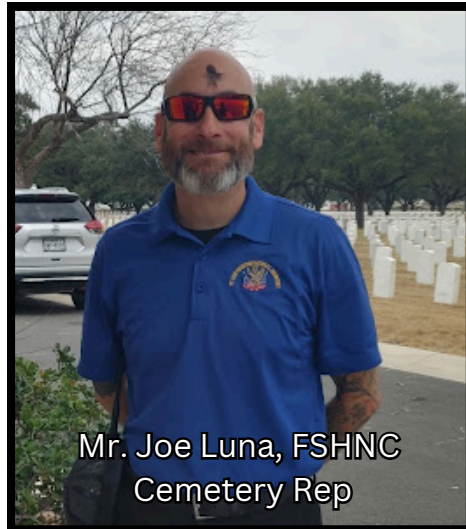
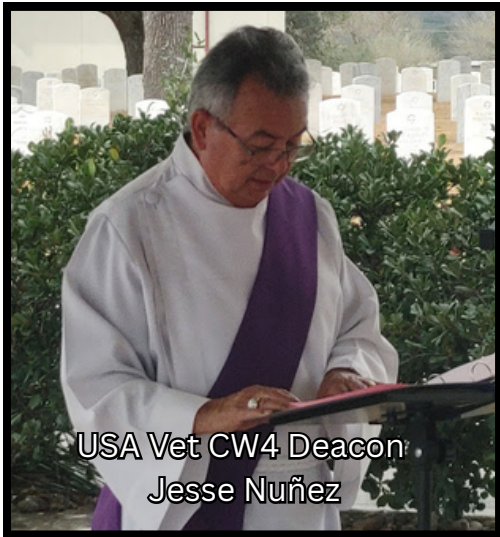
Ash Wednesday is Feb 18, 2026, at 12pm
Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery Shelter 5

Sponsored by Wednesday Squad,
Memorial Services Detachment.

For civilians, VA employees, family members, and friends of the
Wednesday Squad. Presided by U.S. Army Veteran CW4 Deacon Jesse Nuñez.

Wednesday Squad

A particularly heartfelt moment came from MSD Life Member, former Commander, Adjutant, and Squad Leader, 93-year-old Joe Casas, who, with a smile, told Deacon Nuñez, “See you next year”—a testament to the enduring faith, fellowship, and strength of this community.



WEDNESDAY SQUAD

Quarterly Social Event

21 Mar - We conducted an award ceremony and social gathering with our spouses and friends at Saltgrass Steakhouse. We recognized our veterans with Certificates of Achievement, trophies, and plaques for a job well done. This was also another great team-building event, strengthening teamwork and camaraderie among our veterans. It was an opportunity to come together, share stories, enjoy each other's company, and continue building the strong bond that makes our team special. Thank you to Saltgrass Steakhouse for hosting us and supporting our veterans.



USMC Vet CPL Manuel Valdez is recognized as the **2025 Volunteer of the Year for Wednesday Squad**. Manuel participated 236 Funeral Services last year. Thank you Manuel!

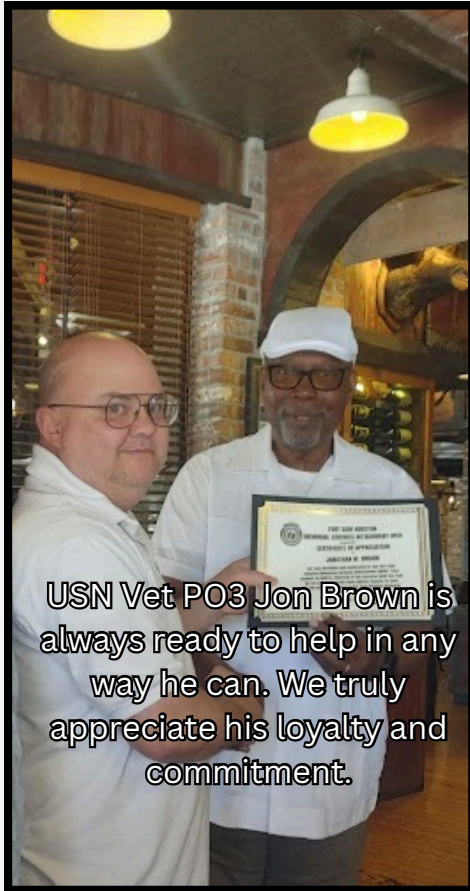
USA Vet SFC Michael Barnett was selected as the **2025 Wednesday Squad Member of the Year** as he participated in over 241 funeral services.

WEDNESDAY SQUAD

Quarterly Social Event



USN Vet PO3 Gene Carter is our go-to M1 expert, ammo loader, and flag folder, playing an essential role in our squad.



USN Vet PO3 Jon Brown is always ready to help in any way he can. We truly appreciate his loyalty and commitment.



USAF Vet SSgt Richard Puente is the spark that keeps our squad inspired with his weekly motivational quotes.



USA Vet MSG Alex Estrada, our golf cart driver and Superman. We truly enjoyed working with Alex and are grateful to have him as part of the team.



USA Vet Colonel Alex Bealer, our historian and counselor, took part in over 220 funeral services and contributed more than 300 volunteer hours during FY 2025.



USA Vet MSG Joe Casas, although not active, Joe continues to support our team. Joe will be 93 years old in April. Happy Birthday Joe!

WEDNESDAY SQUAD

AWARD CEREMONY

25 Mar - We recognized our veterans with **Certificates of Achievement** for the great job they continue to do at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery. Their dedication, teamwork, and commitment help ensure every veteran receives the dignity and honors they deserve. We are proud of their service and grateful for all they do.

Wednesday Squad – Always Ready to Honor.



A Certificate of Achievement was presented to USMC Vet LCpl Ernest Ybarra for his contributions to the Wednesday Squad. Ernest makes sure our meals are delivered on time, every time! Thank you, Ernest, for your selfless service!



A Certificate of Achievement was presented to USMC Vet MSG Raul Marroquin for his outstanding performance of duty during FY2025. Raul completed over 220 services and accumulated more than 330 volunteer hours. Great job, Raul!



A Certificate of Achievement was awarded to USN Vet PO2 Frank Medina III for his outstanding performance of duty during FY2025. Frank took part in over 110 services and dedicated 175 volunteer hours. Thank you for your loyalty and service, Frank!



Our talented bugler, USAF Vet MSgt Porfirio “Monty” Montellano was recognized with a Life Member Tab for five years of dedicated service to the Wednesday Squad. During FY2025, Monty took part in over 580 services, logging nearly 800 volunteer hours, and missed only one day the entire year. His commitment and performance are truly outstanding!

WEDNESDAY SQUAD

UNACCOMPANIED VETERANS SERVICES

Both the **January** and **April 2026** Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Services at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery were powerful tributes that brought together the community, veterans' organizations, and supporters to honor those with no known family. In each service, military honors were rendered for 10 Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen laid to rest during the previous quarter. The January service featured remarks from **Grant Moody**, Bexar County Commissioner for Precinct 3 in Texas and a decorated Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, while the April service included meaningful remarks from **Gina Ortiz Jones**, U.S. Air Force veteran Captain (former intelligence officer), and the 69th mayor of San Antonio, Texas. With strong attendance and continued community support, these ceremonies ensured that no Veteran was forgotten—standing in their place and serving as their family, honoring each with the dignity and respect they earned through their service to our nation.



SGM Walter Trotter & SFC Michael Barnett



Commissioner Grant Moody



SGM Walter Trotter & SFC Michael Barnett



Mayor Gina Ortiz-Jones



THURSDAY SQUAD

Flag Folding Training

Each day that services are rendered, it is customary for the host service of the deceased veteran to provide two service members to fold the American flag for the family. When no military personnel are available to perform this sacred duty, the MSD Honor Guard proudly steps in to ensure the family receives the honor their loved one has earned.

As shown in this photo, the MSD Thursday Squad trains continuously to support the cemetery in its mission to honor veterans and their service. Their commitment reflects a deep understanding that flag folding is far more than a ceremonial task—it is a symbolic act rooted in respect, discipline, and tradition.



Flag folding at a military funeral carries profound meaning. Each of the folds of the American flag symbolizes values such as life, liberty, honor, sacrifice, and faith. When performed with precision, the ceremony becomes a silent tribute that expresses the nation's gratitude. Without proper training, that symbolism can be diminished.

Precision and uniformity are essential in military honors. The armed forces are built on discipline and attention to detail, and a funeral is one of the most visible and emotionally significant moments where those values are displayed. Well-trained MSD Honor Guard members ensure the flag is folded crisply, evenly, and with dignity—never rushed or careless—reflecting the professionalism expected in military service.



The ceremony also has a profound impact on grieving families. For many, receiving the folded flag becomes one of the most powerful and lasting memories of their loved one's service. A properly trained honor guard provides comfort, closure, and pride. Even small mistakes can unintentionally cause distress, which is why training is so vital. Honor guard training also strengthens teamwork. Flag folding requires synchronized movement, clear communication, and practiced timing. This level of coordination can only be achieved through repetition and instruction.

THURSDAY SQUAD

Thursday Squad Revamps MSD Recruiting Program



The Thursday Squad is taking the lead in strengthening MSD recruiting efforts at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery. As the original Guardians age, bringing in new members has become essential to sustaining our mission of honoring every veteran with dignity and respect.

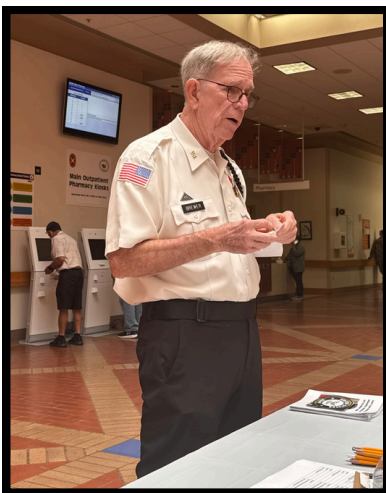
Gordon Brewer and Kathleen Shortland (left) from our Squad, with support from Bryan Teague (Tuesday Squad), have developed a streamlined recruiting plan that includes:

- Formalized new MSD Recruiting Program-Developed detailed recruiting plan
- A step-by-step process for recruiting events
- Standardized follow-up and suspense tracking
- Clear timelines for reporting volunteer hours
- A dedicated MSD recruiting email account
- Squad-to-squad shadowing to ensure new recruits fit each team's dynamics

Bryan Teague (second from left) is also creating a physical-requirements checklist to help potential recruits understand the expectations of Honor Guard service. Bryan, along with Gordon Brewer (Thursday/Friday Squad), Katie Shortland (Thursday Squad), Deb Parsons (Friday Squad) and MSD Commander Jackie Jones briefed at a recent SACVF meeting. They also set up an information and recruiting table.



Recruiting is a shared responsibility across the entire MSD organization. With this renewed structure and leadership, we are confident that MSD will remain strong for years to come.



Left-Gordon Brewer briefs a potential recruit at BAMC. Right-Gordon Brewer, Katie Shortland and Fred Mittelstedt (Tuesday Squad) at a recruiting event at the BAMC atrium.



THURSDAY SQUAD

MSD Honor Guard & San Antonio Guardians of the Children Team Up to Support Kids in Need

The MSD Honor Guard and the San Antonio Guardians of the Children (GOC) joined forces this April to bring comfort and care to children served by the Child-Safe Kids Program. This special initiative was spearheaded by Thursday Squad's Katie Shortland, who organized a donation drive focused on collecting new stuffed animals and snacks for children navigating the challenges of abuse, neglect, and trauma.

Katie, who also volunteers with CASA San Antonio as a Court Appointed Child Advocate, met with many MSD squads to share information about the Child-Safe program and the realities faced by the children it serves. Her outreach helped raise awareness among MSD members about how even small acts of kindness can make a meaningful difference.



The MSD family responded with overwhelming generosity. Members donated stuffed animals, snacks, and monetary contributions that quickly filled the collection boxes. On Thursday, GOC members Sain, Raptor, and Kookie visited MSD to pick up the donations. They were deeply moved by the outpouring of support and grateful to load their vehicles with items destined for children in need.

Thank you to every MSD member who contributed. Your kindness reflects the heart of our organization and our shared commitment to serving others.



About the Guardians of the Children – San Antonio Chapter - The San Antonio GOC is a nonprofit organization of bikers dedicated to supporting and protecting children who have experienced abuse. They work to restore dignity, hope, and trust while educating the community about child abuse prevention.

About Child-Safe San Antonio - Child-Safe is Bexar County's only Children's Advocacy Center. They coordinate the efforts of child protection professionals, law enforcement, family advocates, medical experts, and mental health clinicians to support children and adolescents who have experienced sexual abuse, severe physical abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

About CASA San Antonio - Child Advocates San Antonio (CASA) empowers dedicated community volunteers to stand beside children who have experienced abuse or neglect. Our Advocates provide the stability and support that so many children in the child welfare system lack, ensuring their needs are heard and met. Through strong advocacy, meaningful connections, and a commitment to permanency – including reunification when it is safe and possible – CASA works to change the trajectory of a child's life. Our vision is to be a powerful and compassionate presence in the child welfare community, serving every child in Bexar County who needs a voice.

FRIDAY SQUAD

Michael Mills Takes Permanent Shore Leave



After 13 years with MSD, USN Senior Chief (Ret) Michael Mills has retired from Friday Squad.

Mike is originally from Oxnard, CA and upon completion of high school he chose to enlist in the Navy looking to further his education. He served in the Navy from September 1965 until Sept 1971, when he separated to explore other opportunities. In 1972 he reentered the Navy and served as a machinist mate specializing in air conditioning and refrigeration on numerous ships to include the USS Midway. While stationed at Yokosuka Japan in 1970, Mike met his wife Eiko and they were married at the US Embassy in Tokyo. Mike and Eiko have three children. In 1978 he was reassigned as a Company Commander at Naval Training Center San Diego for 7 years before returning to his original rate.

Friday Squad Leader Randy Brown presented a retirement certificate.

After 24 years of service, Mike retired from the Navy in December 1990 and began employment with the Santee School District in the San Diego area as an air conditioning and refrigeration specialist. Mike worked for the school district for 15 years before retiring in 2005 and then relocated to New Braunfels after a fellow motorcycle enthusiast convinced him to leave California.

Mike joined Friday Squad in December 2012 at the urging of Court Van Sickler and Randy Brown. Mike continued to faithfully serve with MSD until January 2026, during which time he amassed 3,549 volunteer hours and rendered honors to 3,381 departed Veterans. In addition to rendering honors, Mike performed an invaluable additional duty of translating the rates of Navy Veterans from the daily schedule for all of us "non-Navy" folks. Mike will be greatly missed by Friday Squad and we wish him all the best in his future endeavors.



Above-Randy Brown presented Mike Mills with a retirement plaque made by Friday Squad member Martin Urrutia. Left-Friday Squad gathered with Mike Mills one last time.



FRIDAY SQUAD

Passing of Friday Squad Retired Life Member Anthony Grauzer



Anthony (Tony) Grauzer entered into eternal rest on 11 March 2026 after a short battle with pancreatic cancer.

Tony, originally from Detroit, Michigan enlisted in the Navy August 1966 as a cryptologic technician. He served on active duty for 11 years before transferring to the Navy Reserve for a short period. He concluded his military service in June of 1989 after serving with the military police battalion of the Texas Army National Guard.

Tony joined MSD on 28 August 2009 and retired on 30 August 2019. He served as a rifleman, color guard member and assistant squad leader with Friday Squad. Tony was best known for his recitation of the “13 Folds of the Flag” at many MSD ceremonies. He is the only person I have ever known who had the entire recitation memorized and didn’t need to read it line by line.

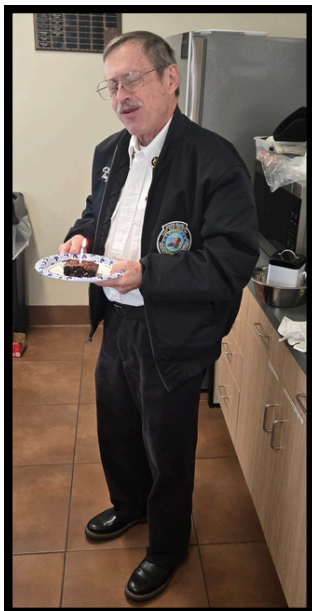
MSD truly owes Tony a huge debt of gratitude. In 2015, he alone took on the system, submitting numerous documents to the various agencies involved to obtain the first “new” weapons for MSD since the organization was founded in 1991. Up until we received those weapons, we had to manually reload the rifles after each volley. Tony was also solely responsible for initiating the program whereby MSD members are able to receive the Army Civilian Service Award. He wrote the requirements for the program and then coordinated with Army leadership to obtain the first awards for our members.

Tony tried to put up a gruff facade, but underneath he had a fantastic sense of humor and a heart as big as Texas. He was a one of a kind and it was privilege to have served with him on Friday Squad. Those of us who served with Tony will always smile and remember him for his favorite saying “oh shit” whenever he made a mistake calling commands.

RIP Tony...



Above-Tony Grauzer received his Certificate of Retirement from past Friday Squad Commander Gene Kuwik



Several Friday Squad members celebrated birthdays over the past 4 months! Left-Dale Taylor. Middle-Gordon Brewer, Jose Cepada, Sean Habina, and Morris Chase. Right-Squad Leader Randy Brown with Billy Reilly, the sole February birthday. All enjoyed homemade treats to celebrate another year of life!



FRIDAY SQUAD

Friday Squad Bids Tom Earnest Farewell

Friday Squad member Thomas A. “Tom” Earnest retired from the Memorial Services Detachment on 27 February 2026 after serving just over 21 years. A native of Cleveland, Ohio, he entered the Air Force in February 1959 and served until August 1981, when he retired as a master sergeant. Afterwards, he worked in banking until he retired in December 1995.

Tom joined Friday Squad in 2005 and initially served as a rifleman. When Mike Hoffman became MSD Commander in 2006, Tom volunteered to be Finance Officer. (Mike and Tom had known each other when serving together at Headquarters, Air Training Command in the early 1970s and later at the USAF Military Personnel Center in the late 1970s and early 1980s.) When Mike termed out as Commander in 2008, Tom was elected Commander and Mike served as his Finance Officer. After two years as Commander Tom was succeeded by Richard Mann in 2010. When Abel Araiza became Commander in 2011, Tom served first as his Finance Officer and then as Vice Commander from 2012 until 2018.



Tom Earnest received his retirement certificate and retirement plaque from Squad Leader Randy Brown.



Tom and his wife Joyce started the Wreaths Across American program for Bexar County in 2007. Later, he and Joyce began the Missing in America Project in 2015, which provides military honors at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery (FSHNC) for the unclaimed remains of eligible former service members from all over Texas. Additionally, he arranged for and conducted ceremonies at the FSHNC, including the National Vietnam War Veterans Day until 2021, Memorial Day (2009-2019), Veterans Day (2009-2020), and assisted with the Buffalo Soldiers Day (2010-2020) at the San Antonio National Cemetery. Tom was president of Veterans of Greater San Antonio for eight years, until it was disbanded in 2019 and the remaining funds given to the FSHNC.



Members of the Navy Honor Guard folded the flag during the Missing in America ceremony in 2022.

As if he didn't have enough to do, Tom has been active in the local community also. Tom was with the Boys Scouts of America for over forty years, and attended the National Jamboree every four years from 1985 until 2017, instructing scouts on using Dutch ovens to cook meals. He was co-founder of the Lone Star Dutch Oven Society (LSDOS) in 1994 and co-founder of the Bare Pots Society of San Antonio. He was LSDOS State Treasurer for three years.

FRIDAY SQUAD



Joyce, Randy and Tom

After he was no longer an MSD officer, Tom continued to serve with Friday Squad, until he had a heart attack in August 2021 while shopping at the Fort Sam Houston Commissary. Tom “died” and had to be resuscitated three times before he reached Brooke Army Medical Center. Things looked grim; even his doctor said that he wouldn’t make it, but Tom rallied, and eventually returned to limited duty with Friday Squad, “playing” the electronic bugle when needed.

Tom suffered another medical setback in August 2024, when he had a stroke. Again, things looked bleak, but Tom fooled them all and was soon back with Friday Squad.

Tom has rendered outstanding service to MSD as rifleman, Finance Officer, Commander, and Vice Commander, and continues to be a valuable member of Friday Squad. In his 21 years of MSD service Tom racked up 9,509 volunteer hours and participated in 5,229 ceremonies.

Tom and Joyce have been married since August 1984 and have four children, two boys and two girls, nine grandchildren, fourteen great-grandchildren, and two great-great grandchildren.

Congratulations, Tom Earnest, for your long and faithful service to MSD and the community. You’ve done more than your share. Vaya con Dios.



Tom, Joyce, and their family.



Friday Squad group photo with Tom, Joyce, and their family.

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER



Well as I write this It's Easter Sunday, I hope that y'all worshiped this day in your own way. we went to the 8:00 Mass, the church was packed, this happens twice a year, I'm sure you know what the other day is.

Well it looks like that winter is back, at least for a few days, It's days like this that people are thankful for the winter clothing that is provided for them, by the donations that y'all have provided for them. My wife Rosy and Wednesday Squad Member John Francis are both volunteers at CAM Christian Assistance Ministries, The need is overwhelming for the homeless and the unfortunate members of our society.

We are in need of new members, this last Thursday we had six members for our services, Illness of our member's, other obligations all contributed to our low member attendance that day.

We're not getting any younger, we really need some new members who will be with us for quite a while. So try and let people know what it is what we do at the cemetery, I have heard before members say that they didn't even know about us until they saw us doing funeral services.

As the Chaplain for MSD, I am available to offer prayers and condolences for any member of MSD, so please just contact me any time.

I remain your servant in Our Lord's name, God bless every one of you and your Family.

Francis Michael Giglio
MSD Chaplain



MSD HAPPENINGS

Guadalupe County 2026 Honor Wall Recipient

27 Mar - Our Wednesday Squad Leader, U.S. Army Veteran Command Sergeant Major (Ret.) Luis Gonzalez, was honored to be selected as the Guadalupe County 2026 Honor Wall Recipient. At the ceremony, he joined others in honoring our Vietnam War Veterans, recognizing their service and sacrifice. Other members inducted include SgtMaj Harold G. Overstreet, 12th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, among other distinguished veterans. CSM (Ret.) Gonzalez thanked everyone who attended and helped make the event special. Having his photo placed on the Honor Wall alongside so many deserving individuals is a true honor. He is grateful for the recognition and proud to stand among such outstanding veterans.



L-R Mrs. Isabel & Luis Gonzalez, Guadalupe County Sheriff and USMC Vet Joshua Ray, and Guadalupe County Constable Jeff Large



Mrs. Isabel and USA Vet CSM Luis Gonzalez

MSD HAPPENINGS

Refinishing the MSD Rifles

An honor guard cannot perform the duties of honoring our veterans, without our M-1 Garand rifles. It takes time cleaning and oiling the weapons to ensure the 3 volleys go off without a hitch.

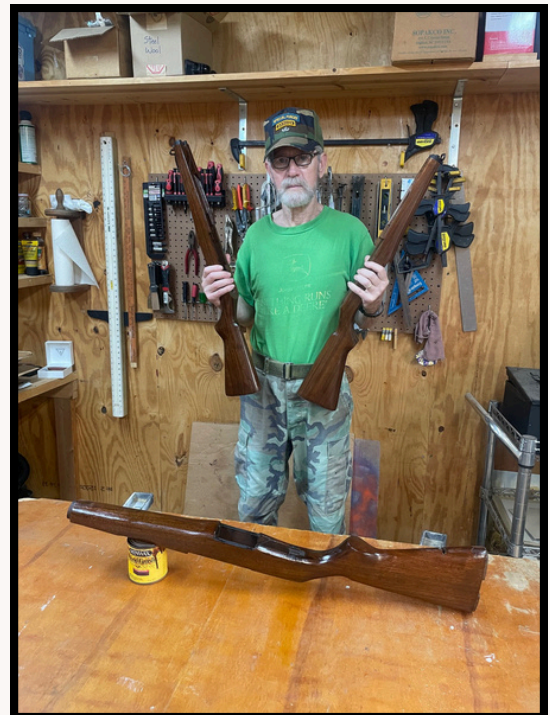
When it comes to keeping the wooden components pristine, it takes hard work to refinish them, and two of our MSD members—John Hernandez and Fred Mittelstedt have been putting in extra hours to ensure our rifles not only sound sharp, but also look professional. Refinishing involves disassembling, cleaning, stripping, sanding, and applying an oil finish and then a wax coating. Each layer of finish takes 24 hours to cure, and each weapon can take a week from start to finish. After all of these steps, the rifles look as good as new!



The wooden components of the M-1, after the coats have been stripped off.



Robert Ramirez, Monday Squad Assistant Leader, holds one of the rifles that have recently been refinished.



Fred Mittelstedt, Tuesday Squad, displays the M-1 stocks that have been refinished.