

## My Day with the SEALS

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By JR Vice Commander Stephen West

On Sept 19th, I had the great fortune to participate in The Birdies for the Brave Golf Tournament thanks to the sponsorship of Post 9601. The event is held to support the Navy SEAL Foundation. The Foundation raises money to assist family members of SEALS that have lost their lives in conflict or training. I have previously reported to the Post that 90% of all money raised goes directly to the Families. Well, I found out on this day that is not entirely true. The Foundation has gotten that to 97 cents of every dollar collected now supports the families. This is done primarily due to how the Foundation is organized. Their Board of Directors are either Active Duty SEALS or Family Members of SEALS and no one takes a salary for their time. They truly know how to take care of their own!!!!

Bugler from Travis AFB with the Ritz Carlton in the back ground



The event was held at the beautiful Half Moon Bay Golf Links. When you arrive, the real reason you are there is brought to your attention. The first thing to happen is a club house attendant removes your golf bag from the car and affixes a uniform name tag of the most recent Team Member who lost his life in action. In this case; SOC Charles Keating IV who was KIA in Iraq 23 May 2016. The name did not register with me until one of my playing partners mentioned that when it

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happened all the newspapers could write about was his grandfather and not the service member who lost his life, typical!

Uniform name tags on my golf bag from the last two years, not to be removed



The tournament was kicked off with an Opening Ceremony on the 18th fairway of the Old Course. All of the golf carts to be use during the day are lined up in the shape of the SEAL Trident on the fairway. This lead to the first challenge of the day, trying to find the cart with your name on it. Not an easy task with only a half a cup of Chief go juice (coffee for the un-informed) in you!!! Next was the call to formation by a Navy Bugler. The Navy Color Guard and Bugler was provided by a Naval Unit stationed at Travis Air Force Base. To experience the Presentation of Colors, the singing of the Nation Anthem (no one was kneeling down) with the sounds of the Pacific in the background on such a beautiful sunny morning was truly a wondrous sight for the eyes and sound to the ears!!!!!!

We were introduced to the Tournament Director Bill Troyanoski, Honorary Co-Chair Rear Admiral Steve Oswald (3 time space shuttle

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astronaut, Cmdr of Endeavor) and Metal of Honor Recipient Lt Mike Thornton.

Presentation of Colors and Nation Anthem



For those not familiar with the golf course in Half Moon Bay, there are actually 2 courses. The Old Course which winds its way through trees and houses and The Ocean Course with its spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean and Ritz Carlton.

I had the pleasure of playing the Ocean Course. Since I was a single player I was paired with other single players. Our foursome consisted of all Sailors, (Go Navy!). Besides myself, there was Bill Balson, a Vietnam era Boiler Tech, who is also the President of the Pacific Skyline Council for the Boy Scouts of America and fellow VFW member. We had the Honor of playing with 2 Active Duty Seals stationed in Monterey. SOCS Tom \_\_\_\_\_ and Lt Sumner \_\_\_\_\_ (they asked not to add their last name). We spent the next 4.5 hrs getting to know one another and telling sea stories. Although it was a spectacular day with great conditions, none of us played all that well. That may have to do with

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not seeing the refreshment cart all day, (no swing lube)!!! After we finished our round, I took the group over to the 18th hole of the Old Course so they could play one of the most visually amazing holes in the Bay area, which turned out to be a highlight.

Vice CMDR Steve West with Metal Of Honor Recipient Lt Mike Thornton



After the golf, we all ended up at the club house for cocktails and dinner. There was also a room full of items up for a silent auction. Things that were up for auction were items such as autographed sports equipment, bottles of wine, and foursomes of golf. It was in that room where the true meaning of the day took place. On one of the walls, was the sobering sight of Gold Star plaques of all the SEALS lost in action or training.

Nancy West reflecting at the Gold Star Wall



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Prior to the dinner, was the time for speeches and a live auction. It is here that I must back track a little. At the Post meeting prior to this event, Adjutant Kasey Warner, handed me an envelope with 2 hand written letters in it. The letters were written by 2 students from Redwood Christian School, as part of their 9/11 project. Instead of addressing the letter such as "Dear Marine" or "Dear Sailor" or "Dear Soldier" these 2 students (Jeffery Rice and Andre Prelipceanu) addressed theirs "Dear Navy Seal"..... They were simple letters thanking them because they protect us "from bad guys in boats" and such and asking God to protect them. So I brought those letters with me and before the evening got going, I asked Mr. Troyanoski if I could have 5 minutes at the dais and present the letters to the 2 SEALS I had played with. He thought it was a great idea (thanks Bill). I was the seconded person at the podium and was introduced as "Vice CMDR, VFW Post 9601 in Castro Valley". We got to show our colors at a major fundraiser and we were the only Veterans group to do so. After I read the letters, I presented them to Tom and Sumner, a Gold Star Mom approached me and said how much she loved hearing it and it brought a tear to her eye!!!

Steve West presents two letters to Navy Seals



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One of main speakers, a widow of a SEAL(sorry, I don't remember her name), that, at the time, there was not a group like the Foundation to help her and why she had joined the Foundation to help others like her.

All told, it was a great day! Met new friends, played OK golf and the Foundation raised over \$18K!!! (that is a very conservative estimate). Perhaps next year, more of the members of this Post could join us for the dinner portion of this event and support this fantastic group.

