



Santa Barbara

# AIRPAC SQUADRON

UNITED STATES NAVAL SEA CADET CORPS

## HONORING FORGOTTEN WARRIORS

### SANTA BARBARA SEA CADETS RENDER HONORS AT THE MUSEUM OF THE FORGOTTEN WARRIORS

ENS Jeff Modic  
AIRPAC Squadron

May 19, 2006, Santa Barbara, Calif. – Striking out in the pre-dawn hours, 17 cadets and six officers of AIRPAC, Santa Barbara's Sea Cadet Squadron, set sail to Marysville California. Their mission was to attend the Armed Services Day ceremony at the Museum of the Forgotten Warriors. Armed Services Day is a day intended to render a sharp salute to the men and women in all branches of the military service who protect us and our country. The officers and cadets were proud to make the seven-hour trip north from Santa Barbara to render that "sharp salute" in the form of a Military Color Guard with Honor Guard ceremony. "We're here to honor our vets," said AIRPAC Commanding Officer LT Chuck Eskew. "Our unit will go anywhere within means to do that."



#### AIRPAC Arriving

Upon our arrival, Dann Spear, the founder and curator of the Museum of the Forgotten Warriors, provided us an overview of the museum. He explained that the museum is a collection of pictures, letters, news clippings, uniforms, patches, insignias, and weapons donated over the years from veterans, their families, and their friends. He said that he had been collecting military memorabilia since he was 11 years old. In 1972, as a sophomore in high school, he began collecting military patches sent back from his school mates then serving in Vietnam. "When the war ended in 1975 and the soldiers came home," Dann emotionally shared, "there were no parades or heroes welcome for these men and women returning from Vietnam." Dann continued, "Nobody wanted to know about Vietnam and nobody (the vets) wanted to talk about it. We were a nation pulled apart by the war -- and that is when I began building this tribute to the forgotten warriors of the Vietnam War."



(Left) Museum Founder, Dann Spear and  
AIRPAC's Commanding Officer, LT Chuck Eskew

#### Walking the Past

Entering the museum was like stepping through a time portal. We were immediately thrown back in time -- to the Vietnam War era. The light was dim. There was a thick damp musty smell of age in this bunker-like environment. Time stood still, anchored in the late 60's and early 70's. We ambled up and down the isles in reverent silence studying the collection of pictures, letters, news clippings, uniforms, patches, insignias and weapons. We were awed by the thought that there are stories attached to each and every item in the museum. We could have easily spent the day reading the stories which Dann had painstakingly crafted on the cards that accompanied the displays. We quickly realized that this museum was not a collection of things, but rather a compilation of soldiers and their war experiences. Although there were other wars represented (Korea, WW II, Desert Storm, and Iraqi Freedom), clearly the focus was on Vietnam. Exiting the museum, we were all somehow a little different for the experience. Rather than a bunker, the Museum of the Forgotten Warrior now seemed more like a solemn sanctuary -- a place to sit quietly and reflect upon what it might have been like to have been there and to have fought. Certainly it provided an opportunity for us to remember that the war was made up of thousands of individuals with their own lives and sacrifices.

#### Talking with the Past

The officers and cadets mingled easily with the 250 plus attendees who had traveled from far and near to be present at the ceremonies. They especially enjoyed talking with the vets. Curious to see young ladies and gentlemen attired in naval uniforms, the vets would go out of their way to meet the cadets and really enjoyed sharing their military experiences with them. Each vet, or friend, or family member of a vet had their own personal story to share, and they shared freely. Behind each story one could sense the pervasive pride and thinly-veiled emotion that remained -- in some cases, even 65 years later. The cadets were repeatedly thanked for their attendance by nearly everyone they met. One AIRPAC cadet remarked, "They thank us, but it's really my honor to be here and to be wearing the uniform for which they fought. It is they who should be thanked for fighting, not us for coming."