

Unificationists Justin M. Harding, James Gavin, Ken Owens, Larry Krishnek and Rick Hunter Tell Their Stories on Veterans Day

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November 12, 2012

Sunday, November 11, 2012, was especially noteworthy in that, according to the Associated Press, it was the first Veterans Day in a decade during which no American troops were fighting and dying in Iraq. Furthermore, it marked the close of a decade of war in Afghanistan. In honor of the nation's armed forces, President Barack Obama presented a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns at the Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia on November 11, 2012.

Known as Armistice Day until 1954, Veterans Day celebrates the service of all U.S. military veterans on November 11th. It is distinct from Memorial Day, which celebrates those who have died in service.

In the spirit of paying tribute to those in our community, Unificationnews.com has collected the following testimonies from Unificationists who have served in the military in hopes that by sharing these stories, readers could vicariously experience a taste of what their peers and seniors have endured. We extend our thanks to all the heroes of our nation and wish you a happy Veterans Day!

James Gavin

James Gavin is the president and regional secretary general of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) USA and works in Washington, D.C. with UPF state chapters across the United States. Gavin was Blessed in marriage in 1975 to Gudrun Bresch, originally from Germany, and has six sons, six daughter-in-laws, and six grandchildren. His residence is in White Bear Lake, Minnesota.



After attending college for one year, I joined the U.S. Navy in November of 1967 and served until August of 1971. I enlisted in the Navy along with a few of my friends at a time when the war in Viet Nam was escalating. After boot camp I was assigned to a Destroyer, the USS Rupertus DD 851 and left the shores of California for a tour in Viet Nam, in 1968.

Most of our time on the duty station off the coast of Viet Nam was spent on shelling missions of targets given to us from observers. After expending all our shells, we would go out to sea and rendezvous with supply ships which would provide us with food, oil, munitions, and if we were lucky, a movie or two.

Life aboard a ship is conducted in pretty tight quarters. The sleeping quarters were made up of scores of bunks stacked three high. For recreation we would play cards, lift weights, run around the deck of the ship, write letters, talk with buddies, read books and on rare occasions watch a movie.

I read everything from Tolstoy to Tolkien while serving in the Navy and came to believe that there had to be something more in life and began to search for it. I studied eastern religions, started meditating (Transcendental Meditation), and in my last year of service I started a weekly bible study that was attended by many of my ship mates.

I was a Signalman, and my job was to send messages to other ships and to shore stations via Morse code with a flashing light. We would also communicate with multi-colored flags and hand flag signals (semi-four). Maintenance was another part of our duty, and we were continually fighting rust by mopping off the salt water, scraping paint and covering surfaces with new paint. Not much fun but part of the job.

The sea is a beautiful place to be, and I can remember the phosphorous waters that sometimes sparkled under the waves. I appreciated the deep blue water and many magnificent sunrises and sunsets. The smell of the salt air and the wind in your face is something that is well remembered. We would sometimes go through incredible storms (typhoons) that would rock the ship at angles that seemed like we might just

turn right over but thank God it never happened. I was lucky because even in the worst of seas I never got sea sick.



We went to numerous ports, Yokosuka Japan, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, Bangkok, Thailand and Subic Bay, Philippines to get supplies and give the crew a few days' time off. My shipmates and I were able to see many beautiful sites and meet many interesting people all over Asia. I was a pretty good guy and never got thrown in the brig my entire tour in the Navy.

In 1970 I was assigned to a defense cable-laying ship, the USS Neptune. I caught the ship in Adak Alaska where I was flown in by helicopter. I was told that Adak was an incredible place and that I would find a girl behind every tree when I arrived. The problem was that on Adak there are no trees, so I had to settle for my new ship. Our mission was to lay sonar defense cable around the west coast of the USA and Hawaii.

While serving on the Neptune, I met the Unification Church in the San Francisco Bay Area. One of my friends, an ET guy (electronics mate) on the ship, Jerry Capelli, met members of the Church on the Berkley campus. He introduced me to Mrs. Onni Durst, and within a few weeks, I joined the Church.

Every officer and many of the enlisted men on my ship received Divine Principle books before I was discharged in August of 1971. It's funny where life takes us. I guess you could say that if it wasn't for the U.S. Navy I would have never met True Parents and all the great members of the Unification Church. "Anchors Aweigh"!

Ken Owens

A resident of Fort Lee, New Jersey, Ken Owens works part-time at Unification Church Headquarters in New York City as a photographer and drives a school bus in Bergen County. He was Blessed in marriage to Meeyung Cho in 1982 at Madison Square Garde, and is the father of three children: Julie Mesun, 22, Leilani Unhye, 22, and Douglas Hyo-yung, 18.



(Left) Owens processes messages in Radio Central on USS Preble in 1973. (Right) Owens today.

My father, John Owens, joined the Navy in 1942, training as a radioman/gunner on a SBD Dauntless dive-bomber, and then the Curtiss SB2C Helldiver. In 1944, he was transferred to VB 11 bomb group on the USS Hornet. He participated in raids in the Philippines, Formosa and Hong Kong. His bomb group helped sink the Japanese battleship, Fuso, receiving the Presidential Unit Citation.

In 1960, he became one of the founding members of the Navy's Chuting Stars parachute team that toured the country with the Blue Angels. After a year, he was sent to Midway Island for another year. He retired from the service in 1963.

My father passed away on Memorial Day, 2010, and my mother, Frances Owens, passed away five months later on Veterans Day.



John Owens, father of Ken Owens' father, stands on top of his dive-bomber with his pilot, LTJG George Russell, on the USS Hornet in 1944.

Because of my father's love for the Navy, I joined the Navy in 1971 in San Francisco, becoming a radioman stationed in Pearl Harbor on the USS Preble DLG-15 until 1975. Having been born and raised in the Navy, I found the decision very easy.

After having finished boot camp and Radioman school in San Diego, my birthplace, I joined my ship, the USS Preble stationed in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

In September of 1972, we joined the United States Seventh Fleet off the coast of North Vietnam. Our mission was to help control our air strikes over the North and to watch for enemy planes.



John Owens once rescued a crewman from a plane that had fallen into the water from trying to land on an aircraft carrier.

In December, we were ordered to place ourselves off the coast of the DMZ, supporting our ground forces with our 5" gun and missiles. During those few weeks, we rescued two downed navy pilots just two miles from the Vietnamese coast. Being the largest ship on the "Gun line," we were also the most tempting target for the North Vietnamese artillery. We saw them, they saw us, we shot at them, they shot at us, we hit them and they hit us. We received two direct hits. One was on top of the mast, destroying our most important antenna; and the other was just off the port side, (left side of the ship), which was exactly where the radio room was, and I was working at that moment, with only a thin steel wall and some radio equipment protecting me. The noise was deafening, with shrapnel holes everywhere, pipes broken, and steam and water filling the spaces. By God's grace, no one was wounded.

We stayed on the "Gun line" till the end of the war and returned to Pearl Harbor in March.

The following month, I returned home on vacation and met the Unification Church.

Rev. Larry Krishnek

Resident of Seattle, Washington, Rev. Larry Krishnek is the current District Pastor of District 10 [Washington, Arkansas, Montana, Oregon, Idaho]. He was Blessed in marriage in 1982 to Akemi Kaneda, and has three daughters, one son, and one grandson.

I enlisted in the Coast Guard in the summer of 1966, just after my graduation from High School. I had no great patriotic motive. I had some notion about military life from the stories my father told. He was a WWII and Korean War Veteran. I joined because I didn't have any particular goal in life and I knew the

military would keep me busy until I found my way.



My service took me to San Francisco, where I served on a buoy tender, then to Connecticut and New York to attend electronics school. After completing my training, I was assigned to duty in Guam where I stayed for 18 months. I concluded my four years of service on the CG Cutter Modoc out of Coos Bay, Oregon.

I'm grateful to God that I chose a path that did not include combat duty. I'm always thankful to my peers who had to fight, many of whom carry deep wounds in their hearts to this day.

I hope that Americans can always be mindful of the terrible price our veterans willingly paid for our freedom.

Rick Hunter

Rick Hunter was Blessed in marriage to Elizabeth (Betsy) Hunter in 1975 as part of 1,800 couples and has two sons, Nathan and Dave, and one grandson. Hunter is retired and currently resides in Pasadena, Maryland.

After two years of college at Virginia Tech and a few night courses at the University of Minnesota, a friend and I joined the U.S. Navy in 1967 when we were promised we could enter together on the "Buddy System" and that we could go to Hospital Corps School. We went through both basic training and Hospital Corps School at Great Lakes, Illinois. After that, I was assigned to the Flagship of the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, the USS Little Rock, a guided-missile cruiser, home-ported in Gaeta, Italy. From the U.S., I flew to Naples to meet the ship, but the ship had sailed. Eventually I caught up with it in Rota, Spain.

On that cruise, we visited the Rock of Gibraltar, Tangier, Morocco and Nice, France before returning to Gaeta, Italy. Serving on the Flagship, we were allowed to wear civilian clothes on liberty in our home port. I was able to travel to Rome and Venice as a tourist. Unfortunately, after only four months in the Mediterranean, I received orders to the Marine Corps base in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The Marine Corps depends on the Navy for its medical care, so as a hospital corpsman, I entered Fleet Marine School to prepare to be attached to a Marine Corps fighting unit, specifically for Viet Nam. I didn't know it at the time, but Navy hospital corpsmen had the highest casualty rate of any who served in U.S. Forces in Viet Nam.

This was a time of great tumult in the United States. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated in April, 1968 while I was still at sea in the Mediterranean. Shortly after I arrived in Camp Lejeune, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, a Presidential candidate, was assassinated in June, 1968. Violent riots had occurred in many cities. In addition to being trained for fighting in jungles and rice paddies, we were also trained in riot control.

My Marine Corps unit was deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and Greece, before I received orders to go to Viet Nam in 1969. During the spring and into July of 1969, I heard the Divine Principle in Washington, D.C. at Upshur house. I had a number of spiritual experiences with Jesus that led me to accept Rev. Sun Myung Moon as the Messiah on July 20, 1969, the same day the first man, Neil Armstrong, walked on the moon. I ended up not going to Viet Nam but was discharged honorably on August 22, 1969.

In the last few weeks of my military service at Camp Lejeune, I did my best to teach several Marines the Divine Principle.

Justin M. Harding

Justin Harding was Blessed in marriage by Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han in 1992 at the 30,000 International Holy Blessing ceremony and has three children, Mathew, 15, Reyna, 14, and Maxwell, 9.

I joined the Unification Church via CARP in 1988. I completed three years of MFT, three years of witnessing in Boston CARP, and then returned in 1995 to college, pioneering CARP at the University of Bridgeport. I was elected from 97-98 Student Body President and Graduated in June of 1998 with a BA in Literature & Civilization and a minor in Education (Magna Cum Laude). I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in July of 1998 and have served as an Infantry Rifleman with a specialization in Anti-Tank Assaults on two tours to Southeast Asia, four tours to Iraq and one tour to Afghanistan from that time until present. I am currently stationed in Bessemer, Alabama as an Inspector-Instructor of Reserve Infantry Marines and serve on the Funeral Honors Detail.

The following is a testimony about a funeral service Harding attended on Veterans Day this year.

“On behalf of the President of the United States of America, the United States Marine Corps, and a grateful nation allow me to present this flag, a symbol of your loved one’s dedication and sacrifice to the Nation,” I spoke softly from a bended knee as I looked into the eyes of an elderly, wrinkled lady and presented her the National Flag that moment’s ago was adorning her husband’s casket. I then stood at the position of attention and presented the Last Salute, slowly as is the tradition in honoring veterans. My Marines and I then drove from the country church cemetery and returned to civilization to spend the weekend with our families.

It felt good, and it felt right to honor this wife, the family of this Marine on Veterans Day Weekend. Another brother honored and laid to rest. I pondered the meaning of the weekend, the extra-time off, as we drove. Staring into the blurring, autumnal trees my mind drifted to my son’s fourth-grade Veterans Day school assembly.

“We do the right thing because it’s the right thing to do!” yelled the kids at the assembly. The speaker taught the origin of Veterans Day. She explained that its roots lay in the burial of three unknown soldiers; one in America, one in Great Britain, and one in France. The inscription “Here Rests in Honored Glory an American Soldier Known but to God” adorns the tomb in Arlington. The blurred trees had passed, and I was home. I was surprised to see that my wife, Yuriko, had left a note. She had taken the kids out to the woods for a walk. I pondered . . . “What was his name?”

It was Private First Class Jerry Clark. He served this nation for a year in Vietnam, and today we honored his life and service to God, Corps, and Country. The apartment door burst open, and Maxwell, my youngest, came running in, the family was home.