

From the President | April 2026



James McLanahan
President SFA Ch. 78

Moments Become Momentum, and It Grows

From the beginning, the purpose of the Valor Luncheon has been threefold: to raise money for our chapter's operating budget, to support local causes that matter to us, and to spend time with honored heroes in the company of people from our community who may not otherwise have the chance to meet them or hear their stories.

You are reading this thanks to our editor, How Miller, and our designer, Debra Holm, who produce great work. Our *Sentinel* is published monthly both in print and online, featuring stories from our Special Forces Regiment and the wider military community. They put in serious effort month after month, and the catalog of stories they have built is vast.

We also host monthly meetings where we often bring in guests who have stories to tell or causes to support. In March, we had speakers from a tech startup called One Brief that helped build a monument to the French Resistance. In May, we'll welcome an author who wrote about a legendary pilot. In June, we will hear a presentation about Lawrence of Arabia. The goal is to keep these meetings going, because they are something we all look forward to.

Our other efforts usually begin when we see a need or hear about something happening and decide we are going to help, even if only in a small way. Like a retired Green Beret injured while training this generation. We now sponsor four graduates from Sunburst Youth Academy with the Special Forces Association Outstanding Cadet Award, prepared by our Chapter Secretary, Gary Macnamara, along with gift certificates to help them start their next adventure. We also continue to partner with Afghan Commandos who now live in California. These men and their families risked so much in service to both our countries. We take great pride in gathering with members of our community to meet and have lunch with some of our nation's greatest heroes. This year's guest, Dick Thompson, is one of them.

Events like this do not happen without many people volunteering their time. Vendors work extra hours to get every detail just right, often to meet Mel's high standards. Our sponsors make the event possible. We are fortunate to have people like Debra, who produces all of the printed and digital materials. Our Chapter Vice President, Don Deatherage, always keeps his cool and is always ready to help. Even after serving several years as VP, he stepped up again when we needed him.

Our film production team Ignatius, Stefanos, Joe, and others, have been incredibly helpful in capturing these stories for our YouTube channel and helping us share them with a wider audience. My friend Reza even brought his son along to help set up and run the slide-show. And of course, we cannot forget the Saturday Tennis Girls, who together make the event happen every year.

Our master of ceremonies, Johann Hindert, hosted the first luncheon while he was a Battalion Commander. He had only one day to review the schedule and talking points, but he nailed it.

There is one person, however, who always swings for the fences and has a batting average that would make Ken Griffey Jr. jealous. My wife, Melanie. She hosted the first luncheon without me, with no warm-up, and knocked it out of the park. It was so successful that our Chapter Treasurer, Richard, insisted it become an annual event, and that I take good care of her so she would come back. I do; she's here. I'm sure you've seen her.

The mission of the Special Forces Association: to serve as the voice of the Special Forces community, to perpetuate Special Forces traditions and brotherhood, to advance the public image of Special Forces, and to promote the general welfare of the Special Forces community.

When I was a much younger man, I read several books about Green Berets in Vietnam. Those stories changed the direction of my military career. My hope for this chapter is that it continues to grow so that our nation's very best choose to serve because of the people they meet here or the stories they hear and read that come from this community. ❖

De Oppresso Liber,
James McLanahan
President, SFA Chapter 78



SFA Chapter 78 Monthly Meeting

Sunday, April 19, 2026

Valor Luncheon

11 am – 2 pm

On The Greens Conference Center
(Navy Golf Course)

5660 Orangetown Ave., Cypress, CA 90630

Guest Speaker:

U.S. Army LTC (Ret.) Henry "Dick" Thompson, Ph.D.1

Legendary MACV-SOG Veteran, Codename "Dynamite"

Internationally recognized consultant, educator, speaker, and author

Next Meeting: Saturday, May 16, 2026

Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos

The Pub at Fiddlers Green

4745 Yorktown Ave Bldg 19, Los Alamitos, CA 90720-5176

2026 Meeting Schedule: June 20, July 18, August 15,
September 19, October 17, November 21 December (tba)