

Thomas Henry Mealey, Jr.

April 20, 1940 - February 24, 2016

Service Information

Memorial Service

Saturday, March 12, 2016

1:00 pm - 12:00 am

Christ's Church of the Valley - Etiwanda Gardens

7576 Etiwanda Ave

Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91739-9759

(909) 463-6687

Driving Directions

Committal Service

Monday, March 14, 2016

11:30 am - 12:00 am

Riverside National Cemetery

22495 Van Buren Blvd

Riverside, CA 92518-2740

Driving Directions



We don't have the official obituary yet but I wanted to include a some Class history. First, Tom is a proud member of the Ripley Society identifying those alums who have contributed to the Alumni Fund Every Year since Graduation.

From the WWW March 2010:

More Navy news , this from **Capt. Tom Mealey** , USNR (Ret.)'s local newspaper:

RANCHO CUCAMONGA - Pilots shot down over Vietnam during wartime knew safety lay in the water. Ships such as the USS King, a guided missile frigate, were stationed just off the country's coast in the Tonkin Gulf . These ships, outfitted with the most up-to-date computer systems for its day, kept track of fighter planes. When an aircraft got into trouble, the ship's crew prayed its pilot would head for the gulf.

"We knew that if their feet touched the water, they had about a 95 percent chance of survival," said Capt. Tom Mealey, who was stationed on the King in 1966 and 1967. Mealey, 69, of Rancho Cucamonga served in the Navy and the Navy Reserve for 30 years before retiring in September 1991."

Though he's left military life behind, his heart still beats with honor, respect and patriotism for his country - and he never passes up a chance to share it. For Veterans Day and Memorial Day, Mealey dons his uniform, which still fits handsomely, and speaks to students at several schools about what it means to be a veteran.



Vietnam veteran Tom Mealey, 69 , of Rancho Cucamonga , who served for 30 years in the Navy and Navy Reserve, took part in the blockade of Cuba during the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962. (Will Lester/Staff Photographer)

"I want to educate kids on who veterans are, their contributions and why they are celebrated," said Mealey, whose been substitute teaching for the Etiwanda School District for 15 years. "I want to make sure they know the difference between Veterans Day and Memorial Day."

Mealey teaches the students that the former Day was originally called Armistice Day commemorating the ceasefire of World War I.

"It was on the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month and it was supposed to be the end of the war to end all wars," Mealey said.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the last war for America. Thousands of soldiers have fought and died for their country and Mealey wants the students to get some understanding of a veteran's unwavering commitment.

"They put themselves in harm's way to do their duty for our country," said Mealey, father of five and grandfather of nine. "This is our country, someone has to defend it, and we can't expect someone else to do it. We must teach the children freedom isn't free and it's our soldiers that defend our freedom - bought and paid for with their blood, sweat and tears."

Mealey's experience with students has been a positive one. They've been respectful and interested in what he's had to say.

"I want to encourage all vets to talk to kids, go into the schools and expose them to veterans, let them know who we are," he said.

"We need to motivate them to have pride in America and devotion to their country."

Mealey was born and raised in Boston, graduated from Dartmouth and then went through the Navy ROTC program.

"In those days, the military was an obligation," he said. "I knew I was going in, and I wanted to go in as an officer."

Shortly after Mealey joined the Navy in 1961 and before his time in Vietnam, he was on a goodwill mission aboard USS Mullinnix around South America. That tour was suddenly cancelled and the ship was ordered to return to the U.S. through the Panama Canal, all the while keeping track of Russian ships.

"The crew had no idea what was going on," he said. "The Cuban missile crisis had happened and we didn't even know it. It's not like anybody had a cell phone."

Mealey learned later that had the Russian ships crossed into forbidden waters, the orders were to attack.

Once Mealey's two-year tour was over, he re-upped for the chance to go west and serve in San Diego. He became a battalion commander and for two years oversaw training of Naval recruits.

In 1966, Mealey was then assigned to the King as an anti-submarine officer and nuclear safety officer, and began his time off the shores of Vietnam.

The ship was equipped with a helicopter and specially trained crew that went after downed pilots who made it to the water.

Once a plane was destined to crash, a pilot's mission was to navigate that aircraft the best he could toward the water and then bail out - with or without a parachute.

Being stranded in the Vietnam jungle was never a good option.

"They just had to get to the water, if the pilot was in the water and was OK, the helicopter would go out, hover over him and drop the hoist," Mealey said. "The pilot would put the hoist on and the helicopter would lift him up."

If the man was injured, a crew member would jump from the helicopter into the water, help the wounded pilot fasten his hoist and guide him to safety.

"Those guys were fearless," Mealey said of the helicopter crew. "There was this one rescue where the pilot was in Haiphong Harbor (10 miles from the coast in North

Vietnam). The helicopter went in and got him while the bullets were flying all around them."

During one six-month stint, the King rescued 19 pilots.

Mealey's service continued in Key West where he was an instructor in antisubmarine warfare at the Fleet Sonar School followed by a stint at Boston's Inactive Ship Maintenance Facility, as a project manager putting ships out of commission.

After 10 years of service, he decided to leave the regular Navy, but not the military. He joined the Navy Reserve.

Mealey is proud to have served his country and of the men and women who have done the same. When asked what being a veteran means to him, he sites a quote from an unknown author found on several military tribute sites:

"A Veteran is someone who, at one point in his life, wrote a blank check made payable to America for an amount of up to and including my life. That is Honor, and there are way too many people in this country who no longer understand it."