

Navy League of the United States November-December 2025 Issue

The Ship's Bell

Placer County Council,
Navy League of the
United States
Auburn, CA



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President's Message

By Rebecca Dunavent

Wow! What a busy couple of months the Placer County has had!

November started off with the Council running a Vote Center in Foresthill for 4 days with the American Legion Auxiliary. My thanks to Bonnie Potter, August Anema, Don Anderson, Mona Anderson, Don Goard, Nancy Goard, Greg Wilbur, Alicia Wilbur and Tom Dunavent for their willingness to work as election aides. We will be looking for people to help out for this fundraising event next spring when we get ready for the 2026 primary elections. We'd love to have you join us!

On November 11, the Navy League participated in the annual Auburn Veterans Day Parade and ceremony. The weather was absolutely perfect as the Luther Burbank NJROTC color guard stepped off as the official color guard for the parade. The Sacramento Sea Cadets were the color guard for the ceremony at the fairgrounds. To all of the veterans in the Council – thank you for your service!

Our November Navy League dinner featured the Ruby Ulrich from the Quilts of Valor Foundation. Don Anderson and Chuck Matherly were presented beautiful handmade quilts in honor of their service. We also celebrated the USMC 250th birthday and we installed our 2025 Officers and Directors. I will be continuing to serve as your president with Bonnie Potter as Vice President, Mona Anderson as secretary, Treasurer – August Anema, and Directors Don Anderson, Natalie Brennan, Mike Holmes, Don Goard, Nancy Goard, Carol Ann Hackley, Janelle Kershaw, and Greg Wilbur. I want to extend a special welcome to our newest Director, Mike O'Docharty!

December's activities started off with the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7. The date actually fell on a Sunday this year and we had a beautiful remembrance ceremony at Solstice Senior Living in Auburn where special tribute was given for LCDR Lou Conter from our council. The ceremony was held inside the beautiful facility and *Taps* and rifle salute was included. I was honored to be the emcee and RADM Bonnie Potter and Natalie both gave poignant speeches – which are included in this newsletter in case you were unable to attend the observance. Special thanks to Don Goard for his efforts in planning this important event which we anticipate will continue to be held at Solstice.

On December 13 the sun greeted Auburn with a beautiful day as we were able to celebrate the Wreaths Across America Remembrance Ceremony at the New Auburn Cemetery. RADM Bonnie Potter was the Master of Ceremonies and many law enforcement and elected dignitaries were present for the occasion. Following the ceremony at the New Auburn Cemetery there were abbreviated ceremonies at Old Auburn Cemetery and Newcastle Cemetery and Bonnie made it to all of them! I was told that nearly 2,000 were placed on graves with almost 200 of them coming from the generosity of the Placer County Navy League!

Also on December 13 the 126th meeting of the Army-Navy game! I'm please to say that Navy triumphed 17-16, but it was a little nerve-wracking! We had nearly 30 people join us at the Veterans Hall to enjoy the game on a big screen! It was a great time!

On Monday, December 15, we will be holding our annual Christmas party and we will have Matthew Vidosh joining us from the Toys for Tots program. We will be taking donations of new unwrapped toys and you can always donate directly by going to the [Placer County Toys for Tots](#) website. We will also have Larry LaVerne and Paula Celick lead us in some caroling as we spend time have some good food and fellowship.

As the year draws to an end, please remember to take a few minutes each day to remember those men and woman in uniform and especially those deployed away from home during the holidays. It is truly through their sacrifice and willingness to risk their lives that allows us to live our life and enjoy our freedom. Also please remember the families that make the sacrifices so that their loved ones can serve.

Lastly, I want to thank you all for the wonderful support that you have provided me this past year as your council president. It is truly an honor to be your president and lead such an incredible Council. I wish you all the very best during this special time of year and may 2026 bring you the very best!

Please take care!

Becky

Announcing Merger of the Placer and Sacramento Councils

By Rebecca Dunavent & Mike O'Docharty

In October, the Placer Council Board voted to merge the Navy League Sacramento Council into the Placer Council. Therefore, members of the Sacramento Council have been transferred to the Placer Council. This merger will ensure continued support of units that were historically jointly supported by both Councils as well as units that were exclusively supported by the Sacramento Council. The Sacramento Council will suspend operations until, if and when, a new Board can be established.

Placer Council will continue to support units historically jointly supported by both Councils, including Luther Burbank Junior Reserve Officer Training Program from Sacramento, and California Maritime Academy from Vallejo. Placer Council will also adopt the Kennedy High School Marine Junior Reserve Officer Training Program from Sacramento, as well as United States Sea Cadet Corps Golden Bear Division from Chico, as well as the Ticonderoga Division from Sacramento. Placer Council will now support the only active-duty command in the area, Coast Guard Air Station in Sacramento. Support will include continuity for various awards and scholarships.

The majority of the expected fiscal impact will be covered due to rebates and membership donations from former Sacramento Council members. The Placer Council Board will work with our membership as well as former Sacramento Council members to ensure vital continuity of the Navy League's mission namely support to our new adopted and supported units.

Join the Placer Council Officers and Board in welcoming our new members as well as the newly adopted and supported units. Please consider active involvement in supporting these new units, especially those who live down the hill towards Sacramento. We will share further details of the merger as well as highlight our new supported and adopted units in upcoming Council meetings.

Auburn Veterans Day Parade and Ceremony

By Bonnie Potter

The Auburn Veterans Day Parade on Tuesday, November 11, 2025, honored all veterans with special recognition given to Vietnam veterans. Commemorative medals were given to 500 veterans attending the events.

The Veterans Day Planning Committee includes three members of the Placer County Council, and they met monthly through the year to plan and do fundraising for the Auburn Veterans Day Parade and Ceremony.

The Luther Burbank Navy Junior ROTC Unit that Placer County Council supports led the parade as the official Color Guard. The Placer County Council was in the parade, led by Council President Becky Dunavent, with over 50 of our Sacramento Sea Cadets and Navy League Cadets marching with us. The parade paused at Central Square at 11:00 am where there was a brief ceremony with the National Anthem, three-volley rifle salute by the Auburn Area Honor Guard, TAPS, Amazing Grace played on the bagpipes, and the release of white doves. The parade ended at the Gold Country Fairgrounds where a patriotic ceremony was held, emceed by Bonnie Potter, Vice President of the Placer County Council. The color guard for the ceremony was provided by the Sacramento Sea Cadets.



Above Left: Luther Burbank NJROTC Color Guard halted at Central Square for the rendering of honors. (Photographer Unknown; photos were posted on Facebook).

Above Right: Sacramento Division Sea Cadets with Training Ship California marching in the parade (Photographer Unknown; photos were posted on Facebook).

VETERANS DAY PARADE 2025 cont.

By Rebecca Dunavent

Every year we are fortunate to have two of our youth groups participate in the Auburn Veterans Day Activities. The Luther Burbank Navy JROTC provides the color guard for the parade itself and the ceremony at Central Square. The Sacramento Division Sea Cadets provide a very substantial Navy presence in the parade as well as providing a color guard for the Veterans Day Ceremony at the Gold Country Fair Grounds.



Above: Luther Burbank JROTC Color Guard (Courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent).



Above: Sacramento Division Sea Cadets (Courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent).

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS!

By Rebecca Dunavent

The months of October and November were especially memorable this year because we were able to celebrate the 250th birthdays of the United States Navy and the United States Marine Corps! Special cakes were enjoyed by all as we celebrated these important occasions!

HAPPY 250TH BIRTHDAY!
UNITED STATES NAVY
OCTOBER 13, 1775-2025



On October 20, 2025, the Placer County Council of the United States Navy League celebrated the 250th birthday of the United States Navy with a special cake. Navy veterans were in abundance to help cut the cake as we celebrated this special occasion!



(Photographs courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent).

HAPPY 250TH BIRTHDAY!
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
NOVEMBER 10, 1775-2025

On November 17, 2025, The Placer County Council of the U.S. Navy League had another birthday to celebrate when we observed the 250th birthday of the United States Marine Corps! Special guest Marine Sergeant Chavez Jimenez and Navy League member/Auburn resident Joy Edelman joined in the traditional cake cutting ceremony.



*Above: The United States Marine Corps 250th birthday cake.
Below: USMC Sergeant Chavez Jimenez & Navy League member Joy Edleman cutting the cake.
(Photographs courtesy of Natalie Brennan).*



Quilts of Valor

By Rebecca Dunavent

At its November 17th dinner meeting, the Placer County Council of the U.S. Navy League members and guests heard from Ruby Ulrich, founder of *Threads of Gratitude*, one of 700+ groups and approximately 11,000 volunteers across the country that make up The Quilts of Valor Foundation. The mission of the Quilts of Valor Foundation is to cover Service Members and Veterans touched by war with comforting and healing Quilts of Valor. The group is made up of ten quilters and all of the members are associated with a veteran either by marriage, family or friends. They take great satisfaction in meeting with veterans and wrapping them in a Quilt of Valor and thanking them for their service. Ruby is coordinating with the Foothill Quilters Guild to facilitate local quilt makers in honoring some of our own veterans and service members with quilts made by local quilters. As of September 30, 2025 there have been 424,428 quilts award to veterans. If you would like to nominate someone to recognize their service to our country, please visit [Quilts of Valor Foundation](https://www.quilts-of-valor.org/).

Don Anderson and Bob Matherly were both recognized for their service and received quilts. It was a special evening to be able to recognize these two men for their service to our county!



Above: Quilts of Valor Coordinator, Ruby Ulrich presenting Chief Petty Officer Don Anderson with his Quilt of Valor. Quiltmaker Patti Gray was able to be present for the ceremony and Don's wife, Mona, was also present (Courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent).

Top Right: Chief Master Sergeant Bob Matherly, (USAF) was joined by his wife Jan and as quiltmaker Carol Vierra looks on as he receives his Quilt of Valor. Bob credits the wives of the services members as the true unsung heroes, caring for families while service members are far from home.

Bottom Right: Don and Bob wrapped in their Quilts of Valor.

(Photographs Courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent).



Hometown Heroes Celebration

By Rebecca Dunavent

Navy League was well represented at the luncheon presented by the Auburn Unified School District Clubs on December 5, 2025, at EV Cain School. The celebration is a time of music and recognition by the service clubs of the law enforcement, fire departments, and veterans groups that help make our community so great! The service clubs raise funds during the year and presented checks to many of the Hometown Heroes groups.



*Above: Pictured (L to R) are Navy League Members Don and Mona Anderson, Cynthia Haynes (Chairman, American Legion Post 84 Veterans Day Committee), and Navy League Members Don and Nancy Goard.
(Photograph courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent)*

Wreaths Across America Two for One Sale through December 31st

By Bonnie Potter

Wreaths Across America is holding a 2 for 1 sale that only goes through December 31st. For every wreath purchased, a second one will be provided. If you take advantage of this special offer, we may reach our goal of having a wreath for every veteran's grave in the Auburn cemeteries next year!

To purchase one or more wreaths for 2026, go to www.wreathsassamerica.org. **Do not** click on the red Sponsor Wreaths button at the top. Instead, **click on the magnifying glass** Search button at the top right. Then click on Search Sponsorship Groups. Type **CA0221P** (or you can type Navy League) in the box for search groups and Placer County Council of the Navy League should show up; click sponsor. Select the number of wreaths to sponsor. Click Next; click on Next again. Auburn Cemetery should show up as location to support. Click Next. Click Customization if interested; Click add to cart to be taken to the shopping cart for checkout.

If you prefer to mail a check, please let me know by email BonnieBBP@aol.com or call me at 530-823-2820 and I will send you a form so you can send your check directly to Wreaths Across America. The form has our sponsor ID and location ID so that the Council will get the credit for the purchase, and the wreaths will be delivered to Auburn.

Remember, we get \$5 for the Council for every wreath that is purchased using our ID number CA0221P.

Thank you for your support of Wreaths Across America!

Pearl Harbor Anniversary Ceremony

This year marks eighty-four years since the day of infamy, when Imperial Japan bombed the United States at Pearl Harbor, Oahu, Territory of Hawaii on December 7th, 1941. This event launched the United States into World War II, truly making the conflict a global war. This year, the Placer County Council Navy League held a ceremony at Solstice Senior Living in Auburn to commemorate the 84th anniversary of the attack. We have included at least two speeches that were delivered during the event.

Natalie Brennan's Speech

Pearl Harbor: A Historical Perspective

Today marks eighty-four years since the infamous Japanese attack on the U.S. forces at Pearl Harbor in 1941. As we are nearing the centennial of the event with each passing year, it is important to understand the whys. Why was Pearl Harbor attacked in the first place?

To answer this question, we must go back to the situation at hand that Japan was facing. It was four years since their invasion of China in 1937, and by the time 1941 rolled around, the Imperial Army was bogged down and losing men and material to the combined forces of the Chinese Nationalist and Communist Parties, and their allies, such as the American Volunteer Group (which included the famous Flying Tigers). The militant Japanese government was divided between the Army, led by Hideki Tojo, and the Navy, led by Isoroku Yamamoto, on what should be done to not only take pressure off of the troops in China, but to acquire vital resources in order to supply their imperial conquests. After the rape of Nanking and the subsequent crimes against humanity that the Japanese committed, the United States halted all sales of scrap metal and oil to Japan unless they withdrew from China, which was a devastating blow to the Japanese war machine and their dreams of a Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere where they ruled over all of Asia.

The Japanese government devised plans to relieve their army in China while also exploiting a loophole to gain resources without trading with the United States, but the Army and Navy were divided on which plan to use. The Army wanted to go north through their puppet country of Manchukuo into the Soviet Union, where the oil rich fields of Siberia lay. The Navy, on the other hand, believed going south was the better option due to the multitude of other valuable resources that lay within the South Pacific islands, such as rubber and tin. Initially, the Army's Northern Route was chosen, and in May 1939, the Japanese Army invaded the Soviet Union, but were defeated by Russian forces at Nomonhan. The only other option in this absence of strategy was the Navy's Southern Route. With the war in Europe breaking out in September 1939, and most of the continent falling to the National Socialist German Worker's Party, that left the Pacific colonies of France, the Netherlands, and Great Britain vulnerable. However, there was one major problem that the Imperial Navy faced with this southern route: the Philippines were right in the middle of everything, and while the U.S. was still staunchly following their isolationist policy, an attack or even the threat of one on or near the Philippines was a recipe for U.S. involvement, and possible disaster for Japan. By April of 1941, the United States had moved their Pacific Fleet from their base in San Diego, CA, to Pearl Harbor, Oahu, Territory of Hawaii, as a way to let Japan know that America had its eye on them.

Since Yamamoto studied in the U.S., he knew full well what the Americans were capable of when it came to fighting a war, even though at the time America ranked around 17th in the world militaries both in size and power. He knew that the American people had strength in numbers, and more importantly, material. Yamamoto understood that Japan had no hope of winning a prolonged war with the United States; so, he devised the plan to attack the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. In doing so, it would give Japan at least six months to

conquer the Pacific and build a defensive perimeter around their newly acquired assets before the United States could recover. Whilst negotiations were going on between Japanese ambassadors Nomura and Kurusu and U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull—which were really little more than Japan stalling for time, on November 26, 1941, the Kito Butai—the Japanese Naval Task Force—set sail to carry out Yamamoto’s plan.

The plan, as we know, was to launch two waves of naval aircraft such as high altitude bombers, torpedo bombers with modified loads, dive bombers, and fighter escorts, to attack and destroy as many American planes and ships as they could. In addition, five Type A miniature submarines with two 1500lbs. torpedoes were to sneak into Pearl Harbor and sink as many ships as they could. While there is no evidence of a third wave of planes being considered, we can hypothesize that after every American plane and ship was sunk or damaged in the two waves, the next targets in the Japanese’s list of priorities would have been to destroy the oil tanks and dry docks. Had these last two targets been attacked, it would have the potential to completely cripple the Americans’ ability to recover faster, which would have put such recovery time over six months. In the end, Admiral Nagumo, who commanded the Kito Butai’s attack force, decided to not send a potential third wave of planes due to the loss of surprise. On top of their loss of surprise, American airmen were able to get into the air and, combined with the antiaircraft batteries, shoot down a total of 29 Japanese planes. The risks of these American airmen, as well as scouts from the nearby USS *Enterprise* finding the Kito Butai, Nagumo decided that enough damage was done to the Americans, refused to send out any more planes, and withdraw to Japan.

As history has showed us, Yamamoto’s plan, while successful, was also not entirely so. Yes, Japan did sink many ships and destroy hundreds of planes, but the choicest targets being the aircraft carriers, were thankfully not in the harbor at the time of the attack. All but three ships sunk or damaged at Pearl Harbor were rebuilt and went on to fight in both theaters of the war, and the dry docks and oil refineries were relatively undamaged. In response to the attack, as Yamamoto worried, the American people, in their acrimonious fury, ramped up war production in what President Franklin Roosevelt dubbed the Arsenal of Democracy. And as Yamamoto predicted, six months later, the Americans would sink four of Japan’s six carriers within the Kito Butai at Midway, and later changed the course of the war officially in the U.S.’s favor at the Battle of Guadalcanal.

I honestly could talk all day about this subject, but I will end my speech here. Before I conclude, however, I will say this: President Abraham Lincoln said in his 1863 Gettysburg Address, ‘we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain.’ The 2,403 American lives lost at Pearl Harbor on this date, 84 years ago, were and always will be on my mind—and I hope yours—along with the total 400,000 American lives that were given among the 16 million U.S. men and women who served to protect the world from tyranny. Remember, remember, the seventh of December. Remember Pearl Harbor.

[Natalie’s Note: Also, for those of you who are interested, I was in another historian interview on YouTube where I talk about the legacy of Pearl Harbor. Follow the following links to see the video, along with my first historian interview below].

Historian’s Lounge Pearl Harbor video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OIBLra-tWU>

Historian Interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfDtU8JddtE>

Pearl Harbor Anniversary Ceremony cont.

Bonnie Potter's Speech

Why We Remember Pearl Harbor

The attack on Pearl Harbor was 84 years ago ... so why is important to continue to remember it?

The easy answer is that we should honor the bravery and courage of those who were there, and especially the more than 2,400 who died that day. Even so, there are many other battles in which Americans bravely fought and made the ultimate sacrifice. So why remember Pearl Harbor? It was not even a decisive battle. The Pacific Fleet, though temporarily crippled, would quickly rise again thanks to a heroic salvage effort. And American carriers, submarines, and the fuel storage facilities at Pearl Harbor escaped damage or destruction. And there were many more battles to come, in both the Pacific and in Europe, that would decide the fate of the war. And perhaps most interesting, the battle was not an American victory. Though it was not the demoralizing loss Japan hoped it would be, it certainly was a tactical defeat. Most countries celebrate their victories. So why commemorate a defeat?

The main reason I think we remember Pearl Harbor is that it was a pivotal moment in the modern history of America and the world. The unprovoked attack is what brought America into WWII, and our response determined the outcome of the War. So, it is an important event in our history that should be remembered. But I think it is much more than that.

On December 7, 1941, a calm morning was shattered as bombs and torpedoes from the Japanese raiders hit their targets. Chaos and confusion reigned. Fire and death were everywhere. Over 2,400 American killed and over 1,100 injured. Nearly two hundred aircraft were destroyed. The Pacific Fleet was in flames.

Not long after the first bombs fell, the USS *Oklahoma* took three torpedoes and began to capsize. Two more torpedoes tore into her hull. In less than fifteen minutes, she had rolled so far that her masts touched the bottom of the shallow harbor. Ensign **Francis Charles Flaherty** and Seaman First Class **James Richard Ward** were both in a turret when the ship began to capsize after the torpedo hits. They both grabbed flashlights and used them to illuminate an escape path for their crewmates in the confines of the dark turrets. Remaining to light the way for their shipmates after the call to abandon ship, neither had time to get out, and they both went down with the ship. Both of them were awarded the Medal of Honor.

Aboard the USS *Arizona*, our late friend **Lou Conter**, a 20-year-old Quartermaster 3rd Class, had just reported for duty on the quarterdeck when the first Japanese planes came in. Captain Van Valkenburgh, the Commanding Officer, passed through on his way to the bridge to direct the crew fighting the attack, and he ordered Lou to secure the quarterdeck and then report to the bridge. That order was the difference between living and dying. Rear Admiral Kidd entered a few minutes later on his way to the bridge. At 8:09 am the ship was torn apart by an armor piercing bomb that detonated in the forward ammunition magazine, incinerating everyone in the forward end. There was also a direct hit to the bridge, which killed both RADM Kidd and Captain Valkenburgh; both were posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. Fortunately, Lou was between the quarterdeck and the bridge when the explosion happened; he was one of the 96 men on board who survived the explosion. 1,177 shipmates were killed or mortally wounded. Lou rescued men from the flames, assisted in fighting fires and helped to evacuate the wounded. He also searched for survivors in the water and participated in the recovery efforts after the ship's fires were extinguished days later. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Lou became a pilot, flying more than 200 combat missions, and he survived being shot down twice. He also flew combat missions during the Korean War, and he established the Navy's first Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) course. At the time of his death last year, he was the last living survivor of the *Arizona*.

Aboard the USS *Vestal*, moored outboard of the *Arizona*, Cmdr. **Cassin Young** sprinted to the bridge. As he directed the actions of an anti-aircraft gun, he was blown overboard by the exploding ammunition magazine of the *Arizona*. He proceeded to swim back to the *Vestal*, which was on fire, listing, and under heavy strafing attack from enemy aircraft. Cmdr. Young calmly moved the *Vestal* away from the *Arizona* and then beached her in order to save her from sinking. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions that day.

On the USS *California*, Machinist's Mate **Robert Scott** manned the air compressor at his battle station. When the compartment began to flood because of a torpedo hit, all personnel evacuated, but Scott refused, saying words to the effect of "This is my station, and I will stay and give them air as long as the guns are going." He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

I could go on for hours about the heroes that were there ... 16 Medals of Honor were awarded for heroic actions that day.

What is important to remember is that our response to the attack began with those men who, without warning, found themselves under fire that morning, and they demonstrated that freedom and liberty were worth fighting for, and if necessary, worth dying for. That should never be forgotten.

And, the significance of Pearl Harbor was not just that the American people were attacked, and responded, but that they came together and grew stronger! Pearl Harbor became a symbol of American grit and resilience! **Remember Pearl Harbor** became a battle cry. Pearl Harbor drew people together, and everyone wanted to help the war effort, and protect the world against evil, and defend the thing they loved more than themselves, freedom.

Another reason I think it is important to remember Pearl Harbor is personal to me and my career. In 1940, the first peacetime selective service, or draft became law, and pressures were building from women's groups to become part of the mobilization effort. But there was resistance to women serving in military, from the War Department, Congress, the Services, and elsewhere. But, with the attack on Pearl Harbor, the resistance disappeared because of a desperate need for manpower, so Pearl Harbor was a turning point for women in the military.

Despite the passage of 84 years, Pearl Harbor still invokes feelings of patriotism and sadness and remains a poignant symbol of freedom and sacrifice. In the space of a few hours, America became the world's foremost defender of liberty. Remembering Pearl Harbor matters because it reminds us that we must always be willing to fight for our freedom and for the freedom of others. Most of all, it reminds us what America is capable of when we come together as a united nation fighting for a just cause. In remembering Pearl Harbor, we remember who we are. **Remember Pearl Harbor!**

The G.O.A.T.

By Natalie Brennan

Odd title, but trust me, it's going to make sense once you read this story. This article is going to be about the world's greatest sniper, the Greatest Of All Time (G.O.A.T), The White Death: Simo Häyhä of Finland.

The setting is early in the Second World War, the winter of 1939-1940 to be exact. The country of Finland is engaged in a war with the Soviet Union, known as the Winter War, or the Talvisota as the Finns call it, or the Russo-Finnish War. Whatever you want to call the conflict, this war was due to the mistrust between Finland and the Soviet Union. According to the Imperial War Museum, Finland believed that the U.S.S.R. wanted to expand its territory, retaking land that it lost when the Russian Empire ended after the First World War, while the Soviet Union worried that Finland would let itself be used as a base from which enemy countries could attack them.

While Finland was neutral at the beginning of World War II, the Soviet Union made concession demands from them, which Finland delayed by seeking assistance from the Western Allies and their other neutral neighbor Sweden. A faked incident along the border—very akin to all of the 'incidents' that the soon-to-be-Axis Powers used in 1931, 1937, and 1939 as excuses to invade their neighbors—gave the Soviet Union the justification to invade Finland on November 30, 1939. While it is reasonable to assume that the much larger and numerically superior Soviet Union would win against the smaller and less populated country of Finland, the opposite is true. The Red Army were poorly led and ill-equipped to tackle the winter weather and terrain of Finland. The resilient Finns, on the other hand, took advantage of this and by comparison, they were better led and exploited the land that they knew so well. Despite the odds not exactly being in their favor, Finland gallantly resisted the invasion for three whole months on their own. This is where Simo Häyhä's time to shine came.

Born in the hamlet of Kiiskinen on December 17, 1905, Simo's profession was that of a farmer, though he enjoyed hobbies that included shooting, hunting, and skiing. Once the Talvisota broke out, Simo fought for his country at the age of thirty-three, serving in the 6th Battalion, Infantry Regiment 34. It was his hobbies which enabled and allowed him to be an exceedingly proficient sniper. In his ninety-eight days of combat, Simo became an invisible, inaudible terror for the Soviet Union due to his deadly accuracy with his Finnish-produced M/28-30 Mosin-Nagant variant. According to historyextra.com, he succeeded in killing twenty-five men in a single day. His reputation as a marksman earned him the nickname 'The White Death' from the Russians, and put a heavy prize on his head.

Since Simo was causing so much trouble for the Russians, they would do whatever it took to eradicate the White Death. According to historyextra.com, on one occasion after Simo killed an enemy sniper with one shot, the Russians started indirectly firing near him, including mortar bombardments. All of these efforts were for naught because Simo walked away without a mark. Another instance was when an artillery shell landed near his position and ripped the back of his greatcoat to pieces, but Simo still walked away with minor scratches.

Despite knowing that he was one of the most wanted snipers in the Winter War, Simo was reported to never be afraid. He simply treated sniping enemies like hunting, and just like hunting, he was always thinking of ways to stay hidden and fool the enemy/targets. Some of his tricks included putting snow in his mouth so that his breath would be hidden, pouring water into the snow in front of him so that the muzzle blast would not disturb the light snow and give him away. He even used sounds, artillery fire, and smoke to cover his movements whenever he changed positions, relying solely on his memories for getting to the choicest hiding places. His gun, the M28-30, was used by him before the war, and he preferred its reliability and consistency of the shot. The true miracle to the White Death's success was that he never once used a scope, saying that the glare of the sun would give away his position—which was how he

was able to bag many Soviet snipers due to their use of scopes—so he made all of his kills with iron sights alone. The years of his youth spent hunting trained him to develop sharp eyes and a sharp mind. Truly, he was the bane of the Soviet Union's existence in the Winter War, but alas, his seeing the end of the Talvisota was not to be.

On March 6, 1940, in the last week of the Talvisota, Simo was struck in the jaw by an explosive bullet during a Soviet attack. The White Death had fallen. He lapsed into a coma and did not come out of it until a week later, after the armistice had been signed. By February 1940, the Finnish Army was exhausted and they were eventually overrun, losing the Winter War. The Treaty of Moscow of March 12, 1940 forced Finland to cede eleven percent of its territory to the Russians. While the Finns lost the Winter War, they did prove themselves as formidable opponents to Russia. For Simo, however, his injuries required twenty-six surgeries and left him with lasting facial scars—the doctors had to reconstruct his jaw by taking parts of his pelvis to repair the damage—and nearly constant pain.

After the war, Simo went back to farming, preferring his own company despite the fact that his exploits were legendary in Finland. He remained alone until 2001 when he moved into the Kymi Institute for Disabled Veterans. He died in 2002 at the age of 96.

Simo Häyhä, the White Death, is the G.O.A.T. when it comes to snipers. He remains the deadliest sniper who ever lived. Not one has surpassed his body count of over **505 kills**.

Sources

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/second-world-war/worlds-deadliest-sniper-simo-hayha-finnish-white-death-winter-war/>

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/a-short-history-of-the-winter-war>



Above Left: Simo Häyhä during the Winter War circa February 1940.

Above Right: 1st Lt. Simo Häyhä after the Winter War

(Images found on https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simo_H%C3%A4yh%C3%A4).

Army/Navy Game 2025

By Rebecca Dunavent

Navy Wins 17-16! Yay NAVY!

A great time seemed to be had by all (except those cheering for Army!) that joined us at the Veterans Hall on Saturday, December 13 for the Army-Navy game. Navy didn't seem to really get into the game until the second half but what a second half it was! It was a suspenseful game up until the last few minutes but Navy finally got their act together and won!

(Photograph Courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent).



Special Thanks to Our Community Affiliates

Special thanks goes to one of our Community Affiliates, Lassila Funeral Chapel, Chapel of the Hills, and TGH Aviation. Your partnership with the Placer County Council Navy League is most appreciated.



Placer County Council Navy League Board of Directors

Council President:

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