

13th Annual:

# MILITARY BALL 2009

By **JEANETTE CASILLAS**/ CASA

**R**EGALIA, REMEMBRANCES, AND AN EVENING OF ELEGANCE describes the 13th annual Santa Barbara Military Ball.

“It is important not to forget the history and the people that served,” shared John Blankenship, Founder of Pierre Claeysens’ Veterans Museum & Library. “The Military Ball allows us to get together once a year and honor the veterans.”

Pierre Claeysens started the Military Ball in 1997 to honor and remember veterans in the Santa Barbara area. For the 13th year, all branches of the military were represented by



**Julie and Nicholas Koonce**, Former Governor **Pete Wilson**, Honoree **Elmer Koonce**, grandbaby **C.J.**, and **Marian Koonce**

both veterans and active duty personnel at the annual ball at Fess Parker’s DoubleTree Resort.

The evening was full of military color and ceremony, including a Color Guard Presentation; the pledge of allegiance led by Sgt. Major Bob Forties, a D-Day survivor with five Purple Hearts; the national anthem sung by Sergeant David Gonzales; and a missing man ceremony in which the room shared a moment of silence for the soldiers who were missing that evening.

“It is always nice to see everyone in uniform,” noted Blankenship. “People don’t realize that there is a special bond between people that wear a uniform.”

Former Governor and US Senator Pete Wilson was the Keynote Speaker. Wilson is a member of the US Marine Corps where he served for three years as an infantry officer before returning to school to earn his J.D. degree from Boalt Hall at UC Berkeley.



Marine **Pete Schenck** with **Russell Smith**, an Iwo Jima survivor



**Kate Carter**, **Larry Crandell**, and **Terry Bartlett**

Wilson served as Governor of California from 1983 to 1991 and as a US Senator from 1991 to 1999. He also served as a State Assemblyman and Mayor of San Diego for 16 years.

“This is the second year that we awarded the Greatest Generation Award,” shared Blankenship. “We started last year with the first recipient, Larry Crandell.” This year’s recipient was Elmer Koonce who served in the Pacific Theatre in the 7th Air Corps Bomber Command in the Marshall Islands.

The award is given to someone who served in the military during WWII and upon their return became active in the community and have been giving ever since.

From 1943 to 1944, Koonce flew and fought in 50 missions earning the Air Medal and the Bronze Star. Koonce is credited with inventing ‘skip bombing’ which is a maneuver where bombs are released over water and skip like stones into the intended target. He is a successful businessman and land developer of many years in Santa Barbara. Koonce and his wife, Marian, have contributed thousands of hours and significant financial support to numerous non-profit organizations and causes.

Claeysens’ pledge to honor and remember all veterans lives on through the annual



**John and Hazel Blankenship** with **Gayle Wilson** and Former Governor **Pete Wilson**



**Doug Crawford**, Navy League Vice President and **Karen Crawford** Navy League President



**Michael Carbajal** and **Salud Carbajal**, SB First District Supervisor

Military Ball. “To be killed in a war is not the worst that can happen. To be lost is not the worst. To be forgotten is the worst,” Claeysens words resonated throughout the event, as those in attendance exchanged experiences and shared war stories.

The rest of the night was spent swing dancing on the dance floor with Derrick and Trudy Curtis leading the way.

For more information call The Pierre Claeysens Veterans Museum & Library at 966-1660 or visit [www.pierreclaeysensveteransmuseum.com](http://www.pierreclaeysensveteransmuseum.com).

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