

Brazos Valley Marine Corps League

March 8, 2021

General Meeting at Cooper's Bar B Q

At 7:00 p.m., Sergeant-at-Arms Glen Saunders secured the facility, determined that all present were qualified to be so, posted the colors, and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chaplain Al Diaz led the detachment in prayer. Commandant Benito Vallejo declared the meeting open for the transaction of official business. The Commandant determined a quorum was present.

Commandant Vallejo altered the normal order of business due to the **presence of a guest speaker, Brigadier General Joe Ramirez, Commandant of the Texas A & M Corps of Cadets.** General Ramirez shared his background, current statistics on military service, some of his various duty assignments, what it means to him to be Commandant of the Corps of Cadets, some personal experiences, and his faith in the future of the Corps and nation. He also praised the Marine Corps for its ongoing ability to instill a certain ethos in its personnel – “Once a Marine, Always a Marine.” To view additional comments from General Ramirez, please see Addendum below.

Commandant Vallejo welcomed everyone, just in case he missed visiting with anyone upon arrival.

Commandant Vallejo asked, of Sergeant-At-Arms Glen Saunders, if there were any applicants for membership. Glen introduced two applicants: Officer Robert Turner and Devon Dippre. Both candidates were accepted via vote and were dully sworn in. Chaplain Diaz led the detachment in prayer.

OFFICER REPORTS:

Adjutant Report: Commandant Vallejo indicated that he had sent out an email with the minutes from the 2/8/21 meeting attached. Could the membership agree to accept the minutes as posted? Jeremy Williams so moved; seconded by Patrick McClung. Minutes accepted as posted.

Paymaster Report: Commandant Vallejo shared that Paymaster Roger Martinez is presently out of state and requested that membership abstain from presentation/ acceptance of the paymaster report until Roger returns. Jeremy Williams so moved; Patrick McClung seconded. Motion passed.

Chaplain's Report: Chaplain Al Diaz shared that John Withers is in the hospital in a diabetic coma. Doc (Tom) Powell continues residency at Legacy due to ongoing respiratory issues following COVID; Doc has his good days and bad days and is eager to go home. Darrel Ray came out of surgery on his left shoulder at 13:30 today. Tomorrow Darryl will go home from Temple. Benny and Steve Ament will be going to Caldwell to help him get out of the car and transition into the house. Glen

Saunders updated membership on his son's condition. (His son had been in a horrific accident during the 'snow and ice' invasion causing his truck to flip and land on the median resulting in his son's spine being broken and paralysis. His son was taken to Houston.) His son has now regained use of his left side. Paralysis appears to be diminishing. Doctors indicate it will be a month or two before his final condition will be known. His son is at home.

OLD BUSINESS:

Last month **Jeff Murski**, of Senator Pete Sessions' office, was our guest speaker. Jeff stated that Senator Sessions is a huge supporter of veterans. Commandant Vallejo reported that he had been working with Jeff regarding the **pursuit of a VA hospital in the Bryan/College Station area**. (The current closest/most frequently used by our veterans in the Brazos Valley is in Temple.) Discussion has gone on for years about this possibility. Benito indicated that he would like to see the Marine Corps League take the lead in this endeavor.

Patrick McClung (Red) reminded membership (from last month) of a fellow **police officer** whose **daughter** recently incurred a **terminal cancer diagnosis**. Red indicated the CSPOA (College Station Police Officers Association) is leading a benefit on April 17 to help offset family expenses. There will be BBQ at \$10 a plate, Tshirts, and raffle items. Red is the liaison with our organization and will continue to update us via email as more information becomes available. Red indicated that he thought he had already sent out an email with links to donate, dinner plate tickets, raffle, etc. Membership was urged to check their email. A goal of \$100,000 has been set. Our organization has been asked to assist with manpower on the day of the event, the extent of which will be determined shortly. Gustavo (Gus) Flores indicated he has a connection that will facilitate the donation of 100 pounds of chicken. Red will follow up with Gus. Steve Ament shared that this will be a significant undertaking. The membership of BVMCL has already donated \$1000. Commandant Vallejo thanked the membership for their personal financial support of this undertaking.

Ellen Fuller, member and **Wreaths Across America** representative, thanked BVMCL for their support either at the American Legion site, the Ranch site, or in Navasota when the Veterans' Education trailer was in each respective area. The picture of two of our members, Ed Holcomb and Al Diaz – who were asked to assist in a ceremony at the American Legion – appeared in Friday's paper. Ellen reminded members that Benny Vallejo and Doc Powell were instrumental in bringing **Wreaths Across America to this area in 2015**. We have dramatically grown from 115 wreaths to 1836 wreaths since then. We help each other. She shared an incident of a woman approaching her recently about a sister, Helen Flores, who had not yet been 'found /identified' as a veteran in the cemetery. Ellen located this lady and placed a veterans' marker on her headstone, which the family had originally purchased. Roger Smith was able to get an American Flag boxed for display/presentation; Ellen was able to do the same with an Army flag. Other members of this family had been in the service and several are currently serving. This effort was done to honor a family for service as well as the deceased.

Commandant Vallejo reminded members that BVMCL had received a check for over \$1500 from Wreaths Across America due to achieving the goal of selling 300 wreaths. This is certainly **more money that we earn by removing seatbacks at Kyle Field** and much less painful. Benny suggested we set a similar goal this year regarding the sale of wreaths.

NEW BUSINESS:

Recognition:

Commandant Vallejo presented **Jeremy Williams** with his **Lifetime Membership** card.

Jeremy Williams recognized and honored, on behalf of the Brazos Valley Marine Corps League, Gustavo Flores with a plaque for his **ongoing devotion, support, and service to his fellow Marines**. Gus (and his crew) have been jumping between Doc Powell's home and Jeremy's own home, both of which were severely damaged from the severe winter weather. Both homes were damaged affecting at least three rooms and roofs in each home. Jeremy stated that, whenever help is needed, Gus is always there, ready to help – sometimes until 2 a.m. to finish a damaged roof! Fixing water heaters, doing plumbing repairs, flags/wreaths on graves, brisket hauling, etc. – Gus is there. Commandant Vallejo supported the same.

Commandant Vallejo inquired regarding any new candidates or nominations from the floor for our **upcoming slate of officers**, which will be installed at our next meeting. No further nominations were provided. A motion was made to adopt the slate of officers proposed at last month's meeting and cited in the minutes previously adopted. Multiple seconds ensued. The slate was adopted. Installation will be at the April meeting.

Commandant	Steve Ament
Sr. Vice Commandant	Glen (Santa) Saunders
Jr. Vice Commandant	Patrick (Red) McClung
Judge Advocate	Thorin Moser
Pay Master	Roger Martinez

Commandant Vallejo validated that Jeremy Williams, addressing death benefits and surviving spousal benefits, will be our **speaker next month**. Benny further indicated he will reach out to Sean Amo (New Braunfels) for Memorial Funeral Home to address things to consider at that time. Benny felt this would be a timely presentation due to inquiries he has recently been receiving.

Gustavo Flores inquired regarding **Letters of Appreciation** for the four young people he took for seat back removal. Benny indicated he had emailed a request for clarification of names as well as a draft for approval. Gus will investigate and get back with Benny.

Commandant Vallejo then pursued each **Appointed Office** by asking those present if they are willing to serve or confirming prior conversations with those not present, thus establishing the proposed Appointed Officers for the BVMCL.

trip)	Adjutant	Mary Jean Holcomb
	Chaplain	Al Diaz
	Sgt. At Arms	Olivia Burnside (presently on a preplanned
	Historian	Thorin Moser (work)
	Information Officer	Doris Carter (work)

Commandant Vallejo asked if there was any further business for the good of the League. It was determined that there was no further business. Sergeant-at-Arms Glen Saunders retired the colors. Chaplain Diaz led membership in a final prayer. The meeting was adjourned at 8:12 p.m. until we next meet on April 12, 2021.

Semper Fi,
Respectfully Submitted,

Mary Jean Holcomb

Addendum: Overview of Presentation of Brigadier General Joe Ramirez

General Ramirez shared that he recently viewed the mini-series “Pacifica.” He reflected on ‘where do we get these brave young men?’ The series showed the continuous, island to island, ongoing fighting. He praised the Marine Corps for its unique ability to instill the ethos of service – “Once a Marine, Always a Marine.”

General Ramirez is Houston born. He is a graduate of Texas A & M where he was a member of the Texas Aggie Band in the Corps of Cadets. General Ramirez shared that he initially signed the paperwork joining the Army because he needed the money, thinking he would be in for five years. This led to a 31-year career in the United States Army. Since 9/11, less than 1% of Americans serve today. Less than 6% of the population have served, with less and less each year. As a result, many Americans have no concept of what the military does. He feels that, opposed to the prevalent attitude of ‘what can you do for me?’, we need to return to the concept cited by former President John F. Kennedy, “What can you do for your country?”

General Ramirez’s father served 21 years. He was in the Korean War, had been shot five times, and was taken as a Chinese prisoner. He was repatriated later at 70 pounds. His father taught him

three critical things to love: God, family, and country. General Ramirez has two sons currently serving. He feels serving is an honor and a blessing – it is good to be part of something special. He believes this generation of young people is going to change the world in ways we cannot conceive.

Last year the Corps of Cadets at A & M came to a halt due to COVID. Classes were online, kids could go home, and there was a total loss of senior traditions. Despite being able to go home, 600 corpsmen / women stayed, stating: 1) “I can do better here in dorms than back at home;” 2) “my buddies are here – my buddies are here.” One thing that is very different from our generation is that they are **very** flexible and adaptable. General Ramirez had been told that he could not have a Corps in the fall of 2020 due to the ongoing battle with COVID. Adjustments were made, and the Corps survived. A lot of work has gone into getting them where they are today. Senior traditions will happen this year: Parent Weekend will be at Kyle Field; Final Review will be at Kyle Field; and March to the Brazos will happen (9 miles out and 9 miles back). These young men and women make me proud every day.

Anytime a soldier is killed, the Army assigns a general officer to preside over the funeral. When you agree to this duty, you are sent a packet about the deceased, who, in this case, had two younger siblings – one as an undergrad at West Point and one in high school, eager to get to West Point. The deceased, in this case, was a graduate of West Point. I agreed to this duty in January in Nebraska. The center of town held a Civic Center, where 1500 people, including the governor, lieutenant governor, and a senator, all turned out for the service. This young man had sung in the Glee Club at West Point and had sung “Mansions of the Lord” with said Glee Club in the movie. Therefore, that piece was played at this young man’s service. Part of the job entailed handing the parents his medals and the mother, a Gold Star. The General shared his comments to the parents at that time (which were very different than the normal, ceremonial words,) and very personal; then he quickly exited the service following the mother’s words to him, which were very moving. The General traveled to the gravesite, about 2 ½ miles away from the Civic Center to await the family, etc. Those 2 ½ miles were lined with people – men, women, and children – in miserable cold, waving the American flag.

Five years later, General Ramirez was greeting and welcoming an incoming class of cadets. As one cadet recited his name and home, General Ramirez realized this was the younger sibling, who was in high school and so eager to attend West Point, from the same family in Nebraska. He saw the mother and asked what she was doing here. She indicated she saw I was at A & M; she wanted her son to attend here. At that time, the mother presented him with a picture of the moment he was on bended knee presenting the flag and sharing that personal message with that mother at her oldest son’s graveside.

Capturing the service ethos, as the Marine Corps does, is critical. As veterans, we have an impact on young peoples’ lives every day. – a word of encouragement, a ‘well done,’ etc. We have the responsibility to develop these young people.

