

## Vietnam veterans thanked in special ceremony

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Veterans Day may have come and passed, but local organizations are continuing to honor those who served.

The Sons in Retirement #143 of Turlock honored their Vietnam veterans during a ceremony Wednesday, recognizing those who served in the longest running war in America's history. Turlock's SIR chapter was authorized by Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter to honor Vietnam veterans with commemorative Vietnam veteran lapel pins. The veterans were grouped into three categories: combat veterans, in-country veterans and Vietnam-era veterans. In total, 73 local Vietnam veterans received the special pins, with Turlock Mayor Gary Soiseth and County Supervisor Vito Chiesa on hand to award each veteran.

"When guys came back from Vietnam, they weren't treated very well," said past Big SIR and Area 22 Governor Rick Kindle. "We want to make sure they know we appreciate what they did, and we want to honor them and their families."

The Vietnam veteran lapel pin is given to living United States veterans who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces at any time during the period of Nov. 1, 1955 to May 15, 1975, regardless of location. The lapel pins are typically presented in a dignified manner at public events. The pin features an eagle, which is said to represent courage, honor and dedicated service, a blue circle, a laurel wreath representing victory, integrity and strength, stripes, six stars and the message "A Grateful Nation Thanks and Honors You."

Also honored at the event were local soldiers who lost their lives in the Vietnam War. Eighteen soldiers from Denair, Hughson, Turlock, Ballico, Livingston, Gustine, Hickman and Hilmar were recognized, and all but one were age 23 or younger when they were killed in action.

Speaker Garry Dudley, who served in the Vietnam War as a fighter pilot, told of his time in the war and reflected on the lives lost.

"Young men go to war...young men went to war. They shouldn't," he said. "Older men have more experience and are more likely to come home, but we don't

send them. We send the young ones, and lose a generation like the 58,000 during this war.”

While the event focused on saluting military veterans who served in the Vietnam War, other veterans were applauded for their service as well. Veterans of World War II, the Korean War and the Cold War were also recognized.

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