

**By Ana Gomez Salcido**

Veterans and their loved ones celebrated the unveiling of a new memorial for paratroopers at the Miramar National Cemetery in a ceremony that included post colors and an honor guard rifle salute.

The monument is dedicated to airborne forces, especially to the men and women who have worn silver parachute wings, the uniform badge that signifies someone has passed paratrooper training.

The airborne forces are military units, usually light infantry, set up to be moved by aircraft and dropped into battle, typically by parachute. Thus, they can be placed behind enemy lines, and have the capability to deploy almost anywhere with little warning.

“It’s an honor to serve our country. We are the first ones to go in and probably the first ones to die, and young people should be proud of the heritage we leave for them and what an honor would be for young people to see this monument and see the traditions we are leaving behind for all the things that we did when we were on the service,” said Secretary of the San Diego Chapter of the 82nd Airborne Division Association, Al Gonzalez. “When we looked at the monuments here at the Miramar National Cemetery, we saw that there wasn’t one to honor the airborne and paratroopers. We come down to the cemetery for burials and provide the full honors to any veteran regardless of the unit they served in. So we formed a committee to raise funds for the monument, we had raffles, and received donations.”

It took almost two years for members of the Army’s 173rd Airborne Brigade and the 82nd Airborne Division San Diego Chapters nonprofit associations to raise the funds to pay for the monument that was unveiled on Saturday, March 17.

“Being a paratrooper is being part of a brotherhood, we are people of different ages and different eras, but we all have that common bond, we all jump, we are all crazy to sign on that dotted line and volunteer to jump, and we all do it again, some of us have bad backs or bad knees, but we wouldn’t change any of it, I think that is the beautiful thing of the airborne, that you have a bond and it just grows,” said San Diego native and retired Army Staff Sergeant, Miguel Alatorre, who was the keynote speaker at the event. “The bond goes beyond the uniform.”

The new monument is located at the cemetery’s Memorial Walkway located near the main entrance.

“This monument represents a lasting presence in this cemetery, a monument dedicated to the service and sacrifice that airborne troopers in any branch of the military have provided for this country, many of them gave their all, but many of us, paratroopers are ready to give the rest,” said Vietnam veteran and recipient of the Purple Heart, Nick Aguilar, who was part of the honor guard rifle salute at the event. “The monument it’s a tribute for the high-spirited and high-quality service that the airborne

is committed to, and for the long-standing tradition of 78 years of being the best and elite of infantry of the U.S. Army.”

Aguilar served on the Sweetwater Union High School District board, on the San Diego County Board of Education, and has been a member of the Color Guard and Honor Guard of the San Diego Chapter of the 82nd Airborne Division Association, for eight years.

The Miramar National Cemetery is located at the northwest corner of Marines Corps Air Station Miramar, and it was designed to provide a full range of burial alternatives to approximately 235,000 veterans in San Diego County.

Be Sociable, Share!