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Division 9 Mechanic Jaime Lozano (left), and his brother Alfred, Division 9 equipment maintenance supervisor and former Marine, stand before the temporary memorial to fallen comrades, part of the Nov. 9 celebration of the Marine Corps Birthday. Jaime holds a photo of his stepdaughter, Army private Laura Melodona.

Division 9 Event Marks Marine Corps' 231st Birthday

- Celebration honored all military branches, POWs and MIAs

By NED RACINE

(Nov. 21, 2006) San Gabriel Valley Division 9 held its fourth Marine Corps Birthday celebration, Nov. 9, and paid homage to the Marine Corps and to fallen comrades.

Some 35 Metro employees met in the San Gabriel Valley Sector conference room to hear guest speakers, see presentations, swap stories and share cake marking the Corps' 231st anniversary.

Although the audience featured a high percentage of current and former Marines, the pre-Veteran's Day event made a point of recognizing each branch of the United States military.

"It's not just for veterans; it's for everyone," Alfred Lozano, Division 9 equipment maintenance supervisor and former Marine, said of the annual event. The celebration struck a contemplative tone; even the gaily dedicated cake paid tribute to United States prisoners of war and those missing in action.

Organizers converted a corner of the conference room into a memorial for fallen veterans, using a wooden cross, rifle, bayonet, boots and a helmet worn in Vietnam, all displayed against a background of camouflaged netting. Lozano supplied four Marine swords.

Marine Cpl. Eric Llamas (left) and his brother, Division 9 Mechanic Salvador Llamas, kneel before the temporary memorial constructed in the San Gabriel Valley Sector conference room. Built to honor fallen comrades, the memorial includes seals of the branches of the United States military. Salvador Llamas is a former Marine staff sergeant who served two tours in Iraq. The photo above the cross shows Salvador's nephew, an Army specialist killed in Iraq Sept. 30.

Photos by Ned Racine

A 'quiet pride' in service

"We're very proud of people who served, including ourselves," explained John McBryan, a Division 9 maintenance manager and former Marine. He describes the birthday event as having a "quiet pride." Speakers included Lozano and Procurement Chief Lonnie Mitchell, a retired Navy officer.

McBryan noted that the birthday celebration grew from casual get-togethers begun by Paul Lennon, Metro's former Director of Intelligence.

Now McBryan and other Division 9 veterans are planning a permanent memorial at the division to honor military veterans.

"Once a Marine, always a Marine," Jack Bartman, bus operator and 1950s Marine drill sergeant said, in explaining the closeness of the Marine veterans.

The Continental Congress established the Marine Corps on November 10, 1775. The Marine Corps currently has approximately 177,000 active troops.