

# SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

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Three of Santa Barbara's most highly decorated World War II fighter pilots were honored Thursday in a ceremony at Fess Parker's Doubletree Resort, where they vividly recalled their military experiences.

The ceremony, presented by the Pierre Claeysens Veterans Museum and Library and the Channel City Club, brought together former Air Force Gen. Michael Rogers, Air Force Col. Hugh Dow and Navy Lt. William Davis for a discussion moderated by Col. Noel Zamot, commander of the test pilot school at Edwards Air Force Base.

Hundreds packed the resort's Reagan Room to hear from the three men, who led and participated in daring flights over Europe and the Pacific seven decades ago.

Mr. Davis, 91, received the Navy Cross for "extraordinary heroism" during an attack on a Japanese carrier while serving as a pilot on the aircraft carrier USS Lexington on Oct. 25, 1944.

While flying through intense aircraft fire, Mr. Davis delivered a 500-pound bomb on the Zuikaku, the last Japanese carrier afloat that had taken part in the attack on Pearl Harbor. The carrier was left burning and later sank.

A native of Ambler, Penn., Mr. Davis was a senior in college when he volunteered for the Naval Air Corps in 1942. He flew 50 combat missions during the war.

Mr. Davis, who moved to Montecito in 1982 upon retirement, authored the 2007 book, "Sinking the Rising Sun," in which he recounts dive bombing and dog fighting escapades over the Pacific.

Mr. Rogers, 90, was commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1943 and served as a P-39 pilot at the Yuma Army Airfield in Arizona. He was later sent to the RAF Greenham Common Airfield in England, where he flew P-51 aircraft.

He received numerous decorations during his 37-year career in the Army and Air Force, including the Silver Star, the Distinguished Service Medal, Bronze Star Medal and Air Medal.

Mr. Dow, 89, a native of Fort Worth, Texas, and Silver Star recipient, was stationed in the Mediterranean when his plane was shot down over Northern Italy by German anti-aircraft guns in January 1945.

The 31-year Air Force veteran was imprisoned in Moosburg, Germany, until being liberated on April 21, 1945 with 33,000 other POWs. Mr. Dow retired as a colonel in 1973.

All three veterans were presented with honorary proclamations from the city of Santa Barbara, signed by Mayor Helene Schneider.



Former Air Force Gen. Michael Rogers, left, discusses his first combat mission as Air Force Col. Hugh Dow, center, and Navy Lt. William Davis listen during a tribute presentation Thursday at Fess Parker's Doubletree Resort.  
THOMAS KELSEY/NEWS-PRESS



The medals of retired Air Force Gen. Michael Rogers are displayed at Fess Parker's Doubletree Resort, where a military tribute was held Thursday.

Mr. Rogers, who met with attendees and signed autographs alongside Mr. Dow and Mr. Davis after the ceremony, told the News-Press that he was stunned, yet grateful for the warm reception.

"We were overcome by the reaction of people here," Mr. Rogers said. "They thanked us for our service and we just thank them for coming and listening."

For Mr. Rogers, who often speaks to high school and college students about his military experience, it was interesting to address a crowd of older adults who have respect and admiration for his service.

"I speak to high schools and colleges and they don't even know when the war occurred," Mr. Rogers said. "They don't know when the war ended, when it started or what the Constitution says."

Former Navy pilot John Blankenship, who founded the Pierre Claeysens Veterans Military Museum and Library with his wife, Hazel, said the event provided attendees with a better understanding of the sacrifices of the "Greatest Generation."

"They are a very special breed in fighter pilots," Mr. Blankenship said. "If you want to talk about the best and the brightest, these men were the best and the brightest of their generation."

Though Mr. Blankenship said the three fighter pilots were initially skeptical about participating in the event, he believes that they are "superheroes" whose stories need to be told.

"They're very humble about it but when you get them around pilots, the stories start and it sort of grows," Mr. Blankenship told the News-Press.

For information about the Pierre Claeysens Veterans Military Museum and Library, visit [www.pierreclaeysensveteransmuseum.com](http://www.pierreclaeysensveteransmuseum.com).

For upcoming Channel City Club events and membership information, visit [www.channelcityclub.org](http://www.channelcityclub.org).

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