



*Pictured L-R: NCOA President Paul Kingsbury, MM1 (SW/EXW) Christopher K. Miletich, MCPO(Ret) Michael Sklar, and NCOA Chairman of the Board and Chairman of the NCOA Rogue Chapter Terry Haines.*

The 2021 NCOA Navy Vanguard Award, sponsored by the NCOA Rogue Chapter, was presented to Petty Officer First Class Christopher K. Miletich in honor and memory of Medal of Honor recipient Machinist Mate First Class Robert R. Scott. Petty Officer First Class Christopher K. Miletich distinguished himself by exemplifying selfless and heroic actions on September 5, 2020.

On Saturday afternoon, September 5, 2020, the Valley Fire near Jamul, California started approximately one mile east of Petty Officer Miletich's home. From his back deck, he could see a huge plume of black smoke rising from behind the closest ridge directly east of his property. With winds gusting between 20-30 miles per hour from the east, he immediately relocated his wife and five children to safety, at the same time a mandatory evacuation order was issued to his community by local authorities.

Once he ensured his family had safely departed the area, Petty Officer Miletich selflessly abandoned his personal property, staying in the danger area to assist his neighbors in moving multiple semi-trucks, tractors, and farming equipment from the destructive fire's intended path. By 1630, fueled by the dry brush and strong winds, the fire had visibly crested the ridgeline and was continuing to move west, less than a half mile away from Miletich's small rural community. He fearlessly returned to the area to usher a set of elderly neighbors from the danger area before the fire became too intense and subsequently swept over their community.

From a nearby vantage point, Petty Officer Miletich and his neighbors watched as the destructive inferno moved through their community. He was certain that his home, along with many others, had been engulfed in flames. At 1900, seeing that the head of the fire was now west of their neighborhood, Miletich and approximately 20 neighbors bravely made their way back to their small community to salvage what they could and prevent further damage if possible. Upon reaching the west side of his community, Miletich

realized that many of his neighbor's homes were not directly damaged but could be soon due to the large amount of vegetation that was on fire surrounding them.

Drawing upon his firefighting training and qualification he received on the USS Peleliu and USS Cape St. George, and as the only person in the group of brave neighbors with such training, he boldly took charge of the situation to prevent further damage to his neighbors' homes before his own. Petty Officer Miletich divided the group into two separate working parties to extinguish the immediate threats utilizing a neighbor's water pump and 300 feet of 1.5" fire hose, chain saws, shovels, and axes. It was not until 0100 on September 6, that Miletich reached his own house to discover it too had survived the fire.

Over the next four days, overcoming temperatures that exceeded 110 degrees Fahrenheit, the rugged east San Diego County terrain, and lack of sleep, Petty Officer Miletich selflessly spearheaded the effort to extinguish the remaining immediate and surrounding fires to prevent further damage to his community. Miletich skillfully led the volunteer firefighters in extinguishing multiple fires around their homes, felling over 20 trees and clearing countless square yards of thick brush from the area to remove the fire's fuel source. During this time, they smothered multiple hot spots and additional flare-ups that ignited due to the hostilely dry climate and uncooperating Santa Anna winds. Additionally, Miletich led the California Department of Forestry and fire protection (Cal Fire) pump trucks to local wells to refill their water supply. Cal Fire refilled their pump trucks countless times at these wells to contain the Valley Fire and keep it from damaging additional communities.

Recognizing that food and water supplies had decreased below a sustainable amount, Petty Officer Miletich was instrumental in coordinating with local and state law enforcement agencies to allow animal rescue services into the area to evacuate a countless number of farm animals. Miletich's work ethic and character are what make him a respected member of his community. Through his aggressive leadership, bravery, and implementation of training he received in the Navy, his actions directly prevented 10 of his neighbors' homes and countless farm animals from being destroyed by the Valley Fire.

Petty Officer Miletich's decisive actions personify the spirit and intent of the NCOA Military Vanguard Award and bring great honor to him and the U.S. Navy.

