

# In Loving Memory



Albert Leonard Kovalick

March 17, 1921 – September 15, 2021

World War II veteran Albert Leonard Kovalick, age 100 and 6 months, passed away peacefully at home on September 15, 2021 in San Francisco. His family and loving caregiver Felisa were at his bedside.

Al was the tenth of twelve children born to Michael and Anna Kovalick in Mt. Carmel, Pennsylvania on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1921. His parents immigrated from Czechoslovakia.

He attended Mt. Carmel High School and was a standout track star especially in the 100-, 220- and 440-yard dashes. He was awarded 24 gold, silver and bronze medals at local and regional competitions, and at the state-wide “Penn Relays”. For his age bracket, Al clocked a Penn Relay state record for the 440-yard dash in 1939.

After high school Al joined the Civilian Conservation Corps. Service in the CCC ignited a love of nature and gardening that accompanied him for the rest of his life.

When the United States entered WWII, Al joined a company that built wartime airplane instruments in Stamford, Connecticut. In 1943 he joined the U.S. Army Air Forces. He was assigned to the Fifteenth Army Air Force with the rank of Sargent and served as a tail gunner on a B-24 Liberator bomber based in Lecce, Italy.

Al’s flight missions were primarily over Yugoslavia and Romania. He and his fellow crew members completed fifty missions. On their last mission, the one that would give them the credit to be sent home to the U.S., their B-24 took heavy anti-aircraft fire and became disabled. The pilot was searching for a place to crash-land. Fortunately, Al was serving as a photographer on the flight and had memorized the locations of newly built airfields in Yugoslavia. He assisted the navigator to find an acceptable landing location. Miraculously, thanks to the pilot’s skills and Sgt. Kovalick, the plane crash-landed, and the entire crew survived. Al was awarded three *Oak Leaf Clusters* and two *Battle Stars* for his service.

Upon returning home, Al was assigned to Camp Beale near Marysville, California and joined a forest fire-fighting unit. On VJ Day, Al met Virginia Carlson, his wife-to-be, at a victory party in Chico, not far from Camp Beale. They courted and after Al's army discharge, got married in San Francisco. The young couple settled on Corbett Ave and, in time, built a custom home next to the home of Virginia's parents. Al and Virginia lived their entire married life of 65 years on Corbett Ave and raised their two children, Al Jr. and Janis there.

After studying to be a plumber, which included evening courses for several years, Al joined UCSF. He specialized in repairing and maintaining autoclaves (sterilizers). To repair a faulty unit, he occasionally had to don surgical scrubs and enter sensitive areas while surgery was in progress. Al worked at UCSF for thirty years.

During his working years and well into his retirement Al rose each morning at 5:00 AM, regardless of weather conditions, and jogged for an hour at Ocean Beach. He loved running!

In the early 1980s Al began caring for a neglected city owned park two doors from his home on Corbett Ave. He spent countless hours turning soil, planting various trees, buying plants at his own expense, and installing benches and sculptures. The sculptures were often unique and idiosyncratic, but always infused with a touch of humor. Neighbors enjoyed sitting on the benches and soaking in the tranquility and peacefulness the park provided. Al said that the work in the park gave him joy and peace of mind. A sign at the park's entrance proclaims, "Al's Park" and a Google search has many references to it.

On his one hundredth birthday, San Francisco Supervisor Rafael Mandelman awarded Al a "Certificate of Honor" for his thirty plus years working on the Park and recognized Al for his service in WWII.



The family would like to express gratitude to Dr. Carolyn Welty, UCSF Gerontologist, for 15 years of excellent advice and support. Also, we convey heartfelt appreciation to Felisa Perez and Josie Colindres for the loving care they provided to Al. Felisa became part of the family. She showed extraordinary abilities in making Al's life more enjoyable with "dancing music", exercise, good food, outdoor walks, and companionship.

Al was preceded in death by his beloved wife Virginia. He is survived by his son Albert W. Kovalick (May) of Santa Clara, his daughter Janis L. Rubiales (David) of Penn Valley, Nevada County, and many nieces and nephews.

A memorial with family and friends will be held on October 9, 2021. If desired, a donation may be made at [corbettneighbors.com](http://corbettneighbors.com) then click on "Restoration of Al's Park".