

‘Castner’s Cutthroats’ display coming

AVMM, Fine Arts Museum sponsor Sept. 28 reunion of last three Alaska Scouts

**By LEE JORDAN
Museum Memo Editor**

Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum will join with the Anchorage Museum of History and Fine Art Sept. 28 in hosting a display honoring the World War II Battle of the Aleutians. The event, featuring artifacts and photographs of the famed Alaska Scouts, will be held at the Anchorage Museum at the Rasmusen Center.

Highlight of the opening will be the final reunion of “Castner’s Cutthroats,” the fabled unit cobbled together in 1941 to do reconnaissance along Alaska’s sparsely settled shorelines. Of a maximum roster of 66, only three remain alive.

“All three are planning to be present for this final reunion,” said Col. Suellyn

Novak (USAF, Ret.), AVMM president. They will recall their part in the Aleutian Campaign and answer questions during a panel discussion on opening day of the year-long exhibit.

The three, along with fellow Scout Buck Delkette who died recently, will be awarded medals honoring their service which for so long went unheralded.

Coming from Virginia will be Earl Acuff. He will join William “Billy” Buck of Glenallen and Ed Walker of Palmer. Acuff and Walker are both 90, while Buck is 87.

Officially known as the 1st Combat Intelligence Platoon (Provisional), it was the brain-child of Col. Lawrence V. Castner, intelligence officer for Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner’s Alaskan Defense Command. They quickly became known as the Alaska Scouts.

The initial group consisted of trappers, miners and Alaska Natives who had no military training but knew the terrain they were recruited to defend. Their opera-

tions were to be stealthy and required unusual skills—hence the nickname given to the group set up by Castner.

Acuff had been picked at the beginning of the war to serve as a lookout on a remote Aleutian island, keeping watch for enemy activity.

His introduction to the Alaska Scouts provided a good story, one recounted for a July 30, 2006 feature in the Roanoke (Va.) Times.

As reported by Lindsay Key, Acuff alerted the Army about several sightings, but then made no further contact for some time. After a long period of silence, a detachment of the “commando rangers” was sent out to recover his body.

Far from dead, Acuff said he was “living like a king. I was diving for king crab and eating fresh seafood and fowl—wild ptarmigan, ducks and geese—for dinner.

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AVMM wins blue ribbon, donation in July 4 Parade, annual Bear Paw events

“It was fan-DAMN-tastic,” Suellyn Novak, president of Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum, said of the group’s participation in the Chugiak 4th of July parade and the annual Bear Paw Festival in Eagle River.

The Museum won a blue ribbon as best float in the Patriotic category on a glorious Independence Day in Chugiak.

“We are also to receive a donation based on proceeds from the Chamber of Commerce’s Slippery Salmon contest,” Novak said. The amount is to be determined after Bear Paw records have been completed.



AVMM directors with servicemembers at Chugiak parade.

President's Corner

Col. Suellyn Wright Novak, USAF, Ret.
President, Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum



AVMM lists many activities during past quarter

- Did an oral history on Frank Ashby, a member of Merrill's Marauders on 1 July.

- AVMM won \$25 Bella Vista gift certificate, a 1st Prize ribbon and a certificate for "most Patriotic" in the Chugiak 4th of July parade.

- Collected oral history of Jim Reuter of Wasilla. He was on the design team for the legendary P-51 and the B-25.

- 8 July met with Misty Nesvik, a contact from the Anchorage Chamber, who gave us marketing advice and many new contacts. For example, she suggested a partnership with Jared Dye of the funeral pre-planners. They could, when families come in to pre-arrange a funeral, ask if a veteran and then give our literature and card re oral histories as a lasting tribute. That afternoon, briefed the Seniors FYI Group at the Chugiak Senior Center.

- The Bear Paw Spaghetti Feed at Joy Lutheran Church was a raging success on Wed 9 July and we gained \$365.25 for the work 9 of us put forth. Great job all, thank you. A thank you card and letter were sent to Doug Boyer who arranged the event.

- On 10 Jul Barbara Wortman represented AVMM at the Bear Paw Pageant, where our sponsoree, Casey Bridges, was first runner up (and got his picture in the Alaska Star on 17 July.

- The Bear Paw Parade on 12 July featured a full (9 servicemen and -women) float - thank you all, especially John Peck for assembling the float and pulling it too! All had fun.

- Sunday 13 Jul saw Forest Brooks, Diane Fearon, Karen Schuessler, and Suellyn teaching three ANG folks how to do oral histories. Very receptive audience and a good time was had by all.

- Monday 14 Jul an oral history was collected from 98-year-old Charlie Allen of his time in the Pacific Theater.

- Two oral histories were collected Mon 21 Jul at King Career Center. The first was Bob Wolf who flew B-29s out of Elmendorf in the post-WW II years. The second was Al Woodard, a WW II Carrier Aviator.

Welcome to the most exciting year in the short history of the Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum effort! This is the year we start an avalanche of activity, so jump on board or miss all the fun and excitement! AVMM will be the recipient of the proceeds from the Slippery Salmon Olympics at this year's Bear Paw Festival. Thank you Chugiak/Eagle River Chamber of Commerce!!!

AVMM is now on the Board of Directors of the Alaska Museum Fund Inc. (the funding arm of the Alaska National Guard Museum effort) and on the Board of the Association of the United States Army (AUSA). These Boards allow us access to and the opportunity to publicize and fund raise for the museum effort. The idea here is to combine forces in a joint venture to get a veterans museum built. The reality is that if each of us (AVMM, the National Guard and the

Cold War Museum folks) tries to build a museum, statistically at least two will fail. As we all wish to build a museum to honor all of Alaska's veterans, it only makes economic sense to join forces. There will be meetings to get all our constituents on board with our effort. We envision representation on this "joint" board from the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine. Thereby all Services are represented, just as they are in our recruiting/fundraising DVD.

At the AK Museum Fund Inc. meeting we were told that the future is bright in that our joint efforts most likely will include a temporary (in this parlance, I'm told, that means a 10-30 year) alternate location in the Kulis ANG maintenance building. We would then set up our museum and build "credits" with the public and foundations, while we do fundraising for our own museum. These truly are exciting days as we would be setting up our temporary museum in 2010.

We were also notified by phone that our Friends of the NRA grant for oral history transcription was approved for \$5,000. We are awaiting word on a grant from the Downtown (Anchorage) Rotary to help us with our business case analysis and other paperwork through the Foraker Group.

We continue to "get the word out" by briefing patriotic and service organizations. In 2008 we have briefed the Anchorage Women's Club, the Pioneers of Alaska and are going to the Prospector's Society, the Downtown (Anchorage) Lions and the Newcomers and Old Timers. We are compiling long lists of eligible oral history candidates and are training a new interviewer (our Chief of Publicity, Karen "Kandy" Kizis).

Jump on quick or you'll miss our fast moving train! Here's to a fan-damn-tastic 2008!!!!

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Honoring Veterans with the Pledge:
"They Shall Not Be Forgotten"

'Castner's Cutthroats' played vital role in allied defeat of WWII Japanese invasion of Aleutians

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"They told me not to break radio silence unless I saw a Japanese plane, so I didn't," Acuff was quoted as saying. "When the Alaska Scouts came to 'rescue' me, they started thinking that maybe they'd like to stay with me."

After the war, Acuff returned to teaching, but was called back to serve in the Korean conflict. He was assigned as an instructor at the Army's Arctic training center in Big Delta and retired after a distinguished career.

Ed Walker, then Sgt. Walker, was in the lead boat in August, 1943, when American troops stormed Kiska to retake the island from the Japanese who had held it for several months. Walker and his men moved stealthily inland, cutting barbed wire to ease access for following infantrymen.

Spotting a machine gun emplacement, Walker's Scouts destroyed the position. Only then did they discover that under cover of fog, the enemy the night before had evacuated the island and headed back to their home country.

Unfortunately, American forces sustained 21 casualties from friendly fire as the troops moved inland from the beaches where they landed. GI's cresting a hilltop on the narrow, 22-mile-long member of the Rat Islands were startled by a force approaching from the opposite side.

Had they been able to hear the words of Sgt. Clyde Petersen, a Scout who had often fished the waters off the Aleutians, the casualties might have been avoided.

According to an account by military historian John B. Dwyer posted on the Web site of the American Thinker, Petersen paused and whispered to a fellow member of the Cutthroats. "Hear that? That's a kit fox bark. If there were any (enemy soldiers) around, fox parents would kill their young."

After the war, Walker returned to civilian life and became an entrepreneur. He was credited in a "We Alaskans" feature as having built "the largest hotel in Valdez."

William "Billy" Buck entered the

Noted Alaska author Jim Rearden appears with 'Cutthroats' subjects

Jim Rearden, author of "Castner's Cutthroats," will appear at the Sept. 28 Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum event featuring the three surviving members of that fabled World War II unit.

Rearden, who makes his home in Homer, has written more than 500 articles and authored more than 20 books, including the one that chronicles the exploits of the commando unit instrumental in repelling Japanese invaders from the Aleutians in 1943.

First coming to Alaska in 1947 as a fishery patrol worker for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Rearden was studying fish and game management at Oregon State College. After receiving his Master of Science degree from the University of Maine in 1950, he returned to teach wildlife management at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks.

service at Ft. Randle in Cold Bay where he served as a Post Scout.

When he learned that the Alaska Scouts were being formed as an intelligence platoon, he wrote a personal letter to Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner, asking to be transferred to the new unit.

Buck said he "got in trouble" for writing directly to the commanding officer for Alaska's military forces. He was relieved, however, when his commendation for saving the six-man crew of a downed B-18 bomber offset his breach of protocol.

Earning the rank of T-5, equivalent to today's E-4 rating, along with Acuff and Walker he was in the first wave of troops landing at Kiska.

Buck was among the Scouts who participated in many survey expeditions to map the western coast of Alaska. He also was involved in surveying the route for a pipeline for the U.S. Navy Petroleum Reserve No. 4 near Barrow.

He and "Big Jake" Jacobson built a 12-foot-kong heavy freight sled for use in those expeditions. He also helped build on-site the canoes and dories needed to cross lakes and rivers.

The Kiska assault was the last major operation for the Scouts, who returned to their Ft. Richardson base. They remained active until 1946, with Acuff leading 20 survey patrols along the entire western edge of Alaska, from Naknek to Point Barrow.

Stand Down 2008 set Friday, Aug. 8

Stand Down 2008 will be held Friday, Aug. 8 at Camp Carroll on Ft. Richardson.

The annual event is designed to provide veterans in need with information on shelter, counseling, housing, medical and dental care, employment, job training, veterans benefits, legal issues, social security, social skills, emotional well-being and more.

Bus transportation will be available to veterans with a valid VA ID card. Shuttle buses will run from Northway Mall starting at 0800, with the last bus

departing from Camp Carroll at 1900.

A continental breakfast compliments of Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Alaska will be served from 0800-0900, Lunch will be served from 1130-1330 and dinner served from 1730-1900.

Clothing will be issued from 1500-1630.

The Stand Down event is drug- and alcohol-free.

Stand Down has been popular over the past several years and has benefited hundreds of veterans.

9/11 Freedom Walk honors fallen ones

An “America Supports You Freedom Walk” will be held Sept. 11. It will follow a ceremony honoring fallen firefighters and other responders who lost their lives in the 2001 terror attacks in New York City and at the Pentagon.

The Anchorage Fire Department memorial service will begin at 8:30 a.m., with tolling of bells to be at 8:58 a.m., the time the first Trade Center tower collapsed seven years earlier.

The Walk will start at approximately 9:10 a.m. and proceed from AFD Station 3 on Airport Heights Road to the 11th Air Force Memorial at Merrill Field.

Begun by Pentagon employees who wanted to remember colleagues who died in the attack against their workplace, the event has grown since 2005 to include every state and several nations around the world.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION



To: Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum
P.O. Box 773364
Eagle River, Alaska 99577-3364

I want to help make the Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum successful and wish to become a member.

Membership Type:

- Veteran [\$25] Active, Reserve, Guard [\$20] Adult [\$30]
- Senior (55+) [\$25] Student (under 18) [\$15] Family [\$50]
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Invite your comrades to join us in our efforts to help people remember the contributions and sacrifices by those who served our country

