



Museum
Memo

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Annual dinner, auction slated Nov. 4

An informative and inspirational program is on tap Nov. 4 when Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum holds its annual dinner and auction. The event will be held at the Elks Lodge on Eagle River Loop Road in Eagle River. A prime rib dinner will be served at 7 p.m.. Doors open at 6 p.m.

There isn't much time for newsletter readers to phone in their reservations. Those planning to attend are asked to RSVP by calling 696-4904 by Oct. 28 in order for a head count to be given to the hosts.

Sen. Charlie Huggins, who represents an area stretching from Chugiak to Trapper Creek, is keynote speaker. Al Romaszewski, a Museum founder and sponsor of the Eagle River appearance of the Moving Wall, will describe that experience. U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski has offered a video presentation for viewing during the evening.

Huggins, a Wasilla resident, entered the Army in 1970, serving as a platoon leader in the 75th Ranger Regiment. An aviator in both fixed and rotary wing aircraft, he was sent to Vietnam a year later. His subsequent overseas assignments included South Korea and Sinai, Egypt



SEN. CHARLIE HUGGINS
COURTESY PHOTO

where he commanded a task force.

Retiring with the rank of colonel in 1995 after 25 years of service, Huggins holds the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, Bronze Star with Valor

device, ARCOM V, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, Combat Infantryman's Badge, Airborne and Aviator wings and the Ranger tab.

Namd as Alaska Director of Veterans Affairs, he held that post from 2003 until 2004 when he was appointed to the state Senate. He previously had served on the Matanuska-Susitna School Board.

Huggins and his wife Becky have three children.

Price for the event is \$50, which includes a 2007 Museum membership. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in preserving the stories and artifacts associated with veterans of America's wars. It is not necessary to have served in the armed forces.

A silent auction, which is a major fund-raiser for the non-profit organization, is also scheduled. Many valuable items will be available to successful bidders.

Museum board president Roger Wortman will give a brief update on progress during a short business meeting. Members will be asked to vote for a slate of directors whose terms are expiring and need to be filled at the meeting.

A no-host bar will be available.

Alaskan takes reins as VFW national commander-in-chief

Gary Kurpius on Aug. 31 became the first Alaskan elected as national commander-in-chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. He was installed to the veterans organization's highest office at the 107th VFW National Convention in Reno, Nev. He had been chosen a year earlier and served as Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief in preparation for the top job.

Kurpius paid his respects to President George W. Bush on Oct. 11 in a White House meeting set to discuss issues important to veterans and uniformed service members and their families. During the meeting, Kurpius thanked the president for supporting the troops and their families. At the same time, he pointed to problems caused by late funding of the VA budget

and a backlog of Veterans Benefits Administration claims, according to a press release from the VFW national headquarters

Kurpius was quoted as saying that Bush expressed his concerns for the troops and their families. The president also complimented the VFW and its Ladies auxiliary for the programs they offer to assist veterans as well as active duty military personnel and their families.

The new national commander served in the U.S. Army in 1967-69 and spent a tour in Vietnam providing convoy secu-

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9 Pattens join U.S. Navy during WWII

By CLARENCE FLOYD PATTEN
and DALE E. SPORLEDER

Dec. 7, 1941 was a Day of Infamy for six Patten brothers. As the nation approaches the 65th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, veterans should know that six Patten brothers were there that fateful day on the battleship *USS Nevada*.

The first of the Patten brothers from rural Iowa joined the Navy in 1934. During peacetime, they were allowed to serve on the same ship. By January 1941, seven brothers—Gilbert, Marvin, Bick, Allen, Ted, Ray and Bruce—were serving in the engine room of the *Nevada*. In September, their father, Floyd, joined the Navy and the Pattens were recognized as the Navy's largest family. In October, Ted's enlistment was up and he returned to civilian life working in Long Beach, Calif.

On the weekend of Dec. 7, the *Nevada* was coming into port, but was directed to wait until the aircraft carrier *Lexington* cleared the entrance to Pearl Harbor as she left port. When the *Nevada* reached its docking place, the *Arizona* was moored where the *Nevada* normally docked.

The disaster that caused the death of 1,177 sailors and Marines on the *Arizona*



From left to right (youngest to oldest), Patten brothers Bruce, Ray, Ted, Allen, Clarence Floyd II (Bick), Marvin and Gilbert posed on the deck of the battleship *USS Nevada*. Al lived in Anchorage after he retired from the Navy with 26 years of service. His son and daughter continue to live there.

COURTESY PHOTO

has deservedly been well documented. The story of the Patten brothers on that day also merits remembrance.

Gilbert was standing in line waiting for the ship's store to open at 0800. He counted the sailors ahead of him and made a fateful decision to come back later. Allen had finished night duty and was eating breakfast. Marvin was in a skiff going ashore for duty. Bick, Ray and Bruce were below deck.

Allen's recollection of that morning was later published in their hometown newspaper, the *Lake City Graphic*. "I got up and showered about 7 a.m. and at about 7:45 I sat down to breakfast. I remember it was a 'dog' sandwich and beans. Then some of the other B Division sailors and I sat around drinking tea and coffee and discussing the Rose Bowl and who would win the football game, Duke or Oregon.

"Then something strange started happening and we couldn't figure out what was going on. It was just past 8 a.m., we were three decks down and the *Nevada* started shaking like a three or four scale earthquake. The porthole was open and I heard a rat-a-tat-tat sound like a machine gun. We were all very confused; it had been such a nice serene morning. We thought it odd that someone might be practicing with their guns. Then the B Division mess cook,

Henry, he was just a kid, 18 years old, yelled, 'Hey, you guys, we're being attacked.'"

Years later, Bruce recalled the eventful day to a Battle Ground, Washington, newspaper, the *Reflector*. He was a Boiler Tender; three decks down on the *Nevada*, when general quarters sounded before 8 a.m. "All hands man your battle stations!" ordered a voice on a loudspeaker.

"On the way to my battle station, I found one of my brothers arguing with a Chief Petty Officer," said Patten. His brother was insisting to the Chief that Japanese planes were overhead. The Chief was yelling that he was tired of all the rumors about an attack. "Then the first bomb hit and ended the argument," Bruce said.

The first wave of Japanese planes attacked at 0753. They bombed and torpedoed the *Arizona* anchored near the *Nevada*. A bomb struck near Marvin's boat that was leaving for the shore. Bodies flew in every direction. A bomb exploded where Gilbert had been standing at the ship's store. All those who were still in line were killed.

At the stern of Battleship Row, the *Nevada's* gun crews were marginally faster than other ships in getting into action and had beaten off all but one of the low-fly-

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P.O. Box 773364

Eagle River, Alaska 99577-3364
Telephone (907) 694-AVMM (2866)
www.AlaskaVeteransMemorialMuseum.org
www.alaskaveterans.org

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



President Bush met Oct. 11 with (from left) Bob Wallace, executive director, VFW Washington Office; Alaska resident Gary Kurpius, VFW national commander; and Gordon Mansfield, VA deputy secretary.

WHITE HOUSE PHOTO By PAUL MORSE

ALASKAN

(Continued from Page 1)

rity. He was awarded the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal with four bronze service stars and the Republic of Vietnam Service Medal.

In 1970 he joined VFW Post 1539 in Babbitt, Minn. and became a Life Member in 1976. He was recognized as All-American Post Commander in 1977 and in 1983 was named All-American District Commander.

Korpius transferred to Post 9785 in Eagle River in 1985 and currently is a Life Member of VFW Post 9365 in Wasilla.

Former Eagle River legislator Ed Willis chaired the Senate Military Affairs Committee during the time Kurpius was in the administration of Gov. Tony Knowles.

"I remember (Kurpius) as a very hard worker on behalf of veterans," Willis said

Kurpis and his wife Nancy now make their home in Anchorage.

Before being elected as Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, he served as the Department of Alaska Service Officer and as Department Adjutant. He gained All-American Department Commander status in 2001.

Pattens rack up 124 years before the mast

(Continued from Page 2)

ing Japanese Kate torpedo bombers. Nonetheless, the last Kate sent a single torpedo into her bow, opening up a 40- by 30-foot gash.

With a large hole blown in the *Nevada's* side, Lt. Ruff, the officer in charge, ordered the *Nevada* to prepare to get underway. Due to its proximity to the *Arizona*, he feared the explosions and fires would spread to the *Nevada*.

Again, Allen recalled, "Part of the crew was on liberty, and only one of the ship's six boilers was lit and on line. Thick ropes held the ship tightly in place. An axe cut through the hemp mooring lines, and by 8:18 a.m. we had all six boilers off in 10 minutes—record time. The *Nevada* was underway in 18 minutes, steaming through billowing smoke, which was pouring from the *Arizona*."

Lt. Ruff directed the *Nevada* to proceed and she steamed toward the open sea to escape further attacks by Japanese planes. The sailors on the other ships cheered as they witnessed the *Nevada* pull out of its berth in Battleship Row. It was a morale boost for them to observe one of their ships underway.

Allen continued. "Our skipper was making a run for the channel at 18 knots, but when the Japs spotted us we really took a pounding. The first of three 500 pound aerial bombs struck the *Nevada* mid-ship. It sounded like a big stick of dynamite going off with a thundering noise, and then a

torpedo struck the portside and the *Nevada* came out of the water two feet, just like somebody lifted it up."

Lt. Ruff soon realized the *Nevada's* foray to escape would fail due to her additional damage. He ordered the ship to be run aground before she sank. Except for his quick decision and action, crewmen below deck, including the Patten brothers, would have suffered the same fate as the sailors trapped below deck on the *Arizona* when she sank.

Later, Allen recalled the scene. "I went topside for the first time an hour after the Japanese attack began and I couldn't believe my eyes. We had been tied up next to the *USS Arizona* and as I looked across Pearl Harbor to Battleship Row, the sight was incredible. Ford Island was engulfed in fire and smoke. I saw a nightmare. The *Arizona* had sunk, the *California* was ablaze and sinking, the *Pennsylvania* was in dry dock and burning, the *Oklahoma* and *Utah* were capsized. The Japs had left and the fleet was in ruins."

The Patten brothers' sister, Martha Sporleder, and her husband lived on an Iowa farm. They had a battery-powered radio and that afternoon they were gathered in the kitchen. The fall harvest was completed and the family was listening to WHO when the Des Moines radio station announced the attack on Pearl Harbor.

In Long Beach, Ted Patten entered a café with his lunch bucket and sat next to his fellow workers. There, he first heard

about the attack on Pearl Harbor. He immediately left for the nearest Navy station to seek news about his brothers. He also reenlisted in the Navy.

After Dec. 8, Martha's husband, Ernest, trekked daily to the Western Union office at the railroad station seeking a message on her brothers. On Dec. 10 a telegram from Ted simply announced, "All okay."

In June 1942, the eighth Patten brother, Wayne, joined the Navy and they continued to serve their country during World War II. They served aboard ships that were involved in the Battle of the Coral Sea, Battle of Leyte Gulf and Battle of the Philippine Sea (the "Marianas Turkey Shoot"). The eight brothers and their father's Navy careers totaled 124 years of service to their country. Today, the two youngest brothers, Bruce and Wayne, survive.

Bruce shares a special status with few remaining World War II sailors: He was aboard the *Nevada* during the attack on Dec. 7. Bruce was aboard the destroyer *USS Wren* within 300 yards of the battleship *Missouri* when the Japanese surrendered on Sept. 2, 1945.

The book "124 Years Before The Navy Mast - The Patten Family" details the Patten Brothers' Naval experiences during World War II. The book may be ordered over the Internet at www.lulu.com/content/438110 or www.Lulu.com or from Huntington Publications, 5089 Huntington Drive, Carmel, IN 46033.

AVMM video outlines project to preserve vets' oral histories

A video describing the oral history project of Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum is nearing completion, said Col. Suellyn Wright-Novak, USAF (Ret.). The video will be shown in promotional material used by the Museum.

“Our project is moving right along,” Wright-Novak said. “We have recorded about a dozen interviews and several others are lined up to record in the near future.

“The stories we are hearing are remarkable in the insight they give as to what military service is like. There are humorous stories, tales of bravery, of suffering and of inspiration,” she said.

“These are the stories the Museum had in mind when it chose to insure that ‘They Shall Not Be Forgotten,’”

Suggestions for possible future interviews are sought.

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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