



Alaska Veterans Museum Memo

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Kulis eyed as future joint museum site

Task force representatives studying ways, means of utilizing Air Guard facility

Kulis Air Guard Base at Anchorage's Ted Stevens International Airport could be available as the temporary location for a joint military museum by 2011.

That welcome news was delivered by BG (Ret) Craig Christensen during his keynote address at the Nov. 15 annual dinner meeting of Alaska Veterans Museum.

Kulis is being closed and its operations are being relocated to Elmendorf AFB under a plan adopted by the federal Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

"Temporary" could mean 15 years or more, Christensen said, allowing time to secure a permanent site. Three parcels located in the vicinity of the Alaska Native Heritage Center are currently under review and negotiations will be undertaken to acquire one of them.

Co-location with the Heritage Cen-

ter, which was the venue for the Museum's dinner meeting, will have several advantages, the group was told. Situated off North Muldoon Road, the location would be convenient to Glenn Highway. Visitors would be able to combine trips to both facilities and the site is large enough to house a major museum displaying the many contributions the military has made to Alaska.

Christensen described the Kulis supply building, which is being eyed as the facility housing the joint museum, as being well suited for the temporary location of a museum.

Details as to how the various organizations would utilize the facility are still to be worked out. A joint task force organized by Lt. Gen. Craig Campbell, Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and The Adjutant General for Alaska, is holding regular meetings to come up with a plan. The Alaska Veterans Museum is a part of that task force, represented by AVM President Suellyn Wright Novak.

In addition to AVM, representatives

of Elmendorf AFB, Fort Richardson, the Coast Guard, Alaska Army and Air National Guard, the Veterans Administration and a group interested in preserving the Nike missile site are among those involved in the planning.

In response to a question about the operating costs for the hangar, Christensen acknowledged that they are substantial, but he suggested that state and federal sources could be counted on to assist with funding.

Members approve group's shorter name

Despite an impassioned plea to keep the name Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum, members overwhelmingly approved removal of the word "Memorial."

Prevailing was the argument that the name caused confusion. The shorter name was said to more accurately reflect AVM's purpose.

Santa pays early visit to remote Alaska villages

By GEORGE DARROW

It was early in December and four year old Matthew from the Alaskan village of James Port was excited. Early this morning Mama and Papa had awakened him, dressed him in his best parka and mukluks, put him in the family pick-up truck, and taken him to the village airstrip. Matthew wasn't too sure of what was going on, but he knew it must be something big because all of the other mamas and papas in the village and their children were also there.

Everybody was staring at the leaden sky above one end of the airstrip. At

first Matthew couldn't see any thing but the clouds, but then he noticed a tiny spot that appeared just below the clouds. The spot grew bigger and bigger until it turned into a huge green airplane that landed on the airstrip's gravel runway with a tremendous roar and a cloud of dust.

It came to a stop right in front of Matthew then, when the dust subsided, a door opened in its side and out stepped a figure in a red suit that was trimmed with white fur. Matthew took one look, closed his eyes, rubbed them with mittened hands, and then looked again. It was—no! It couldn't be! Why—It was Santa Claus! And right behind him was Mrs.

Santa Claus! "Mama, Papa!" Matthew cried: "Look! Look! Santa's here! Santa's here!" An excited Matthew took a quick peek inside the airplane while Mama and Papa unloaded part of its cargo into their truck for delivery to the village school and he saw toys, lots of toys!

Matthew, his Mama, Papa and James Port are fictional, but the aircraft bearing Santa and Mrs. Claus is very real. Santa's missions to Alaskan villages via aircraft began in 1956, which had been a bad year at St. Mary's Mission on the

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President's Corner

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



AVMM lists many activities during past quarter

Very successful 28 Sep final reunion and opening of “Castner’s Cutthroats” display at the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center. We were on Channel 2 news and also made the front page of 10 different newspapers.

Represented AVMM at 1 Oct Chugiak-Eagle River Chamber of Commerce luncheon where we received our \$2,000 check as the proceeds from the Slippery Salmon Olympics at Bear Paw Festival.

Taught Anchorage Museum docents about Castner’s Cutthroats so they can lead the school tours etc.

Collected oral history, 6 Oct, from William Just, a WW II B-24 co-pilot.

George Darrow on Sat 11 Oct & Forrest Powell on Sunday 12 Oct manned the AVMM table at the AK Gun Collectors Association Gun Show. They sold four T-Shirts and signed up 12 for oral histories. Well Done gents!!! Thank you.

The Aleutian Tiger display at the AK Aviation Heritage Museum is up, although more signage needs to be finished.

The US Coast Guard Auxiliary was briefed Tuesday 21 Oct.

Brochures were passed out at the Alaska Native Veterans march on Thursday 23 Oct at the new Dena’ina Convention Center.

Our Senior Voice article has netted us four oral histories and Al Woodard recommended us to Lloyd Samsal (his neighbor) who was scheduled to be interviewed but was ill. He’ll be rescheduled.

Eric Imig offered us a 20% discount (maybe more after he sees how much work) to make dual-channel cassettes of our oral histories so Jeri Taylor can transcribe them. First six tapes dropped off to Imig Audio-Visual Services on 14 Oct. Now we have all of 2007 done!

Our Annual Dinner Meeting on 15 Nov. was a huge success. We heard some good news from BG Craig Christiansen when he described sites being reviewed for a permanent museum and availability of Kulis Air Guard Base.

Wow, what a year this has been for the Alaska Veterans Museum! I’m absolutely amazed at what we accomplished. Share our joy (and take the time to get involved; we need loads of folks to devote just a few hours a month to sustain our momentum) at our top 10 accomplishments: (1) the final reunion of Castner’s Cutthroats and the opening of our display at the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center; (2) the opening of our display on the Aleutian Tigers at the Alaska Aviation Heritage Museum; (3) receipt of a \$5000 grant from Friends of the NRA (yes, that’s the National Rifle Association) for transcribing our oral histories; (4) receipt of the proceeds from the Bear Paw Festival’s Slippery Salmon Olympics (these two together will just about cover transcribing all 75 of our oral histories), donation of \$365 from Spaghetti Feed with Joy Lutheran Church and donation of \$350 from the work done for the Russian

American Colony Singers “Echoes of WW II” Program; (5) rising to #6 in the nation in “Fan Mail for the Troops” (this thanks to Forest & Kathy Brooks and their tireless devotion to this program); (6) TV coverage on Channel 11 of our oral history program; (7) TV coverage (2x) on Channel 2 and they want to do a follow-up on Castner’s Cutthroats and also film and discuss the Aleutian Tiger display; (8) the article in The Senior Voice netted us another five oral histories and more to come as the word spreads; (9) the Alaska Star article also gained us four more oral histories and spread our fame; and (10) last, but by no means least is our exploration of a joint venture museum with the AK National Guard Museum effort. There is about a 95% certainty we will open a joint military museum at Kulis Air National Guard (ANG) Base (next to the Ted Stevens/Anchorage International Airport) in 2011.

We also took a huge step in clearing up confusion in the minds of the 34 organizations to whom we told the story of our museum’s effort. This was the step to remove “memorial” from our name. Polling those organizations resulted in 33 of the 34 saying we needed to remove that word as it connoted granite to them. While that was not (I believe) the intent of our founders, and the word does have different meanings, the “old or dead folks” meaning most often sprang to the fore for our audiences. Our annual meeting’s silent auction chair, Kandy Kizis, and you generous patrons, raised an astounding \$1,322 for us.

These are certainly exciting times and we sorely need willing hands, feet and voices to help us realize this dream. We are so close, we can see our opening. Come join us in this historic undertaking. [Come see our display at the 3 Jan 2009 50th anniversary of statehood too.](#)

Thanks to all of you for a great year. God bless each of you and may you have the merriest of holidays ever!!

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Honoring Veterans with the Pledge:
“They Shall Not Be Forgotten”

Alaska children benefit from ‘Operation Santa’

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Yukon and Andreafsky Rivers. Spring floods that year had damaged the fishing season, and a drought had eliminated a lot of the wildlife that the residents depended upon for their survival. The Ursuline Sisters running the orphanage had used all of their money to buy food, and this left them with nothing with which to buy Christmas gifts for the orphans. This lack of money to buy Christmas presents was of great concern to the Sisters.

After much prayer Mother Superior Antoinette Johnson wrote a letter to acquaintances in Anchorage giving the nun’s concerns. In it she explained that the children’s basics, such as food and clothing, were covered. However, her children (like children everywhere) also needed toys and games.

The letter eventually wound up with the 144th Airlift Squadron of the Alaska Air National Guard in Anchorage. The Anchorage Daily News and Anchorage Times newspapers were notified as were the Anchorage television and radio stations. Word spread across the city, and the Air National Guard began to receive donations of new and used toys. Air National Guard members, after making any necessary repairs, then turned the toys over to Santa Claus who loaded them aboard an Air National Guard C-47 “Gooney Bird” transport aircraft for delivery to St. Mary’s Mission. The C-47 was used until 1960, when the Guard changed over to C-123J “Provider” aircraft.

The operation (eventually named “Operation Santa Claus”) became so popular that St. Mary’s Mission was its sole destination through 1976. Other villages and groups were added after 1976, and St. Mary’s Mission was visited annually through 1981. The annual visit to St. Mary’s was discontinued after 1981 due to the apparent drop in the need for the operation.

According to an Alaska Air National Guard aid-lead dated 1957 an Alaska Air National Guard C-47 delivered supplies to St. Mary’s Mission via parachute during the 1957 operation. One student at the mission high school wrote of this operation: “As the plane made its last round there was a general rush for the boxes on the tundra. Wonders haven’t ceased yet judging from the oh’s and ah’s heard in the recreation room... We shall ask Our Lord to bless you all your life.” That year Christmas toys were also flown to Gulkana.

The mission at St. Mary’s has been closed for many years now, but many of the village elders who once were children there still remember with a smile when Santa and Mrs. Claus came to visit them in a big green “sleigh” with four really loud engines.

Operation Santa Claus has significantly expanded its operations over the last fifty-two years, and today Santa and Mrs. Claus (along with a variety of elves and volunteers) are flown to the villages by the Air National Guard on C-130H Hercules aircraft. The Alaska Army National Guard assists by giving Santa and Mrs. Claus rides to the remoter villages via UH-60L Black Hawk helicopters and C-23B+ aircraft. Donations now include food, books, and clothing in addition to the toys. Obtaining and



Richard Nashoalook of Wainwright smiles as he receives a gift from Santa Claus during Operation Santa Claus in 2007. The Alaska National Guard program each year delivers school supplies, presents and Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus to rural villages across the state.

Photo by Capt. Guy Hayes, USAF, courtesy AFNS

supplying all these items has turned into a year-round operation, and is a big challenge to Santa’s elves, so they have a lot of help from National Guard spouses and civilian volunteers who collect, clean, repair and organize donations of food, clothing, toys, and books. In the past these included the Salvation Army, Canadian Forces, Military Spouses Club, Sam’s Club, Costco, WAL-MART, and many individuals.

By this time those of you with small children may be asking: “Where are the reindeer?” Well, an unnamed source among the elves told me that the reindeer are having dinner in at the moment and that they all look fine. He also said that Rudolph is in his stable getting that shiny nose of his all polished up in case of fog on Christmas Eve. MERRY CHRISTMAS!

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George Darrow is a retired Air Force veteran who is active with Alaska Veterans Museum where he participates in the oral history project. He lives in Anchorage.

Web site carries military information

A convenient Web site gives quick access to information of interest to servicemembers. By clicking onto www.mil.com, anyone with an Internet connection can access the portion of the government site that deals with military matters.

Separate links are given on the Home Page for the Secretary of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Defense organizations, Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, National Guard, Navy, Joint Service Schools and Veterans Affairs.

Those links connect with home pages for the indicated agencies.

Other buttons will connect Web surfers to other departments of the federal government or with state and local government home pages.

Information is updated on a regular basis and is helpful for anyone seeking the latest data on items of interest.

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*

