

WE SHALL NOT FORGET

By George Darrow

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Alaska occupies a unique niche in American military history. Did you know the last shot of the American Civil War was fired in Alaskan waters? This occurred when the CSS *Shenandoah* sank the Union whaling fleet in the Bering Sea in the summer of 1865. The book *'The Last Shot'* by Lynn Schooler, details this fascinating saga. Or that Alaska was the setting for another unique action when, for the first time since 1812, the territory of the United States was invaded and occupied by a foreign nation? This, of course, was the Japanese invasion in the Aleutian Campaign of World War II.

Alaskans have answered the call of duty at very high rates, with the Alaskan Natives leading the way, per capita. All these stories of our Alaskan warriors are being collected and preserved by the Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum (AVMM). These memories and artifacts are a vital part of the weave and fabric of American life and history. Lose these (and we are losing 2000 WW II and Korean War vets every day), and part of our heritage is lost forever. Recognizing that Alaska is the only state in the union without a veterans' museum, AVMM was founded, in November 2001, by a group of Eagle River veterans.

The AVMM is dedicated to telling the story of the common military man and woman who is an Alaskan or who served here. The museum has a three-fold mission: (1) Establish and maintain a museum; (2) Tell our veterans' stories of service to secure our freedom; and (3) serve our active duty, Guard, Reserve, and veterans. To accomplish the first, we need memberships, volunteer hands and feet to help, business studies, and

monies; but we have made seven-league strides on the latter two missions. We have done 28 veterans' oral histories and have a dozen more waiting in the wings. We have developed an 11 minute DVD for recruiting members and monies and are showing it to all the state's patriotic organizations. This effort is also giving us access to many more oral histories.

The museum recently received great press in our effort to rectify a 62 year old error in getting Drafin "Buck" Delkettie, an Alaska Scout of WW II, the awards he had earned but never received due to errors in record keeping. **Thank you Anchorage Daily News and the Alaska Star for making that day so special for Buck and his family.** The AVMM is hot on the trail of rectifying two other errors, uncovered (as was Buck's), in an oral history.

The AVMM also supports our active duty troops via the "Fan Mail for the Troops" program which is conducted through local schools. We have consistently rated in the top 20 in the nation (one time as high as 8th), which is super considering our population in comparison to other states. Other programs include: collecting of historical materials and artifacts (we are partnering with the Anchorage Museum of History and Art to create a display on the Alaska Scouts and the Aleutian Tigers in WW II using our oral histories); developing AVMM events to honor veterans on appropriate days; and providing educational experiences regarding veterans and their sacrifices to America.

Presently the AVMM is raising funds for the acquisition of land and the design and construction of a museum here in South Central Alaska. This facility will provide space

for exhibits and include a comfortable area for veterans to share experiences and heal old wounds. We are in need of volunteers and members willing to work on museum projects.

Contact us at AVMM, PO Box 773364. Eagle River AK 99577. Our website is

<http://www.alaskaveterans.com> or call Forest Brooks at (907) 753-2627 (work); (907)

351-3520 (cell) or Col (Ret.) Suellyn Wright Novak (907) 696-4904.

As President Calvin Coolidge once said “A nation which forgets its defenders, will itself be forgotten.”