

Steve Thompson shows some of his posters, including one commemorating the Pearl Harbor attack that is signed by 35 veterans who attended last year's anniversary service. The poster on the left is from 1942. RICK WEST/DAILY HERALD

Historian proud to 'pass the word' about WWII warriors' sacrifices

Born in 1940, St. Charles resident Steve Thompson was too young to have been actively involved in World War II, and has only "faint recollections" of what was going on.

"But I had uncles who served in the military, and patriotic feelings were ingrained in me all my life," he said.

Born in a time that inspired an interest in the history of World War II, Thompson has become a collector of that momentous period of American history.

Dec. 7 was the 60th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. As an amateur historian, Thompson traveled on the anniversary to the site of the infamous battle, and visited many areas which people don't usually see.

One particular spot on his trip was the Natsunoya teahouse, formerly known as the Shuncho-Ro teahouse, which is now operated by the grandson of the Japanese man who first opened it in 1928.

In addition to having been a favored place of relaxation for many Japanese consulate workers, with its good food and geisha girls, this teahouse was a choice spot of Ensign Takeo Yoshikawa, a Japanese spy, from the Imperial Japanese Navy.

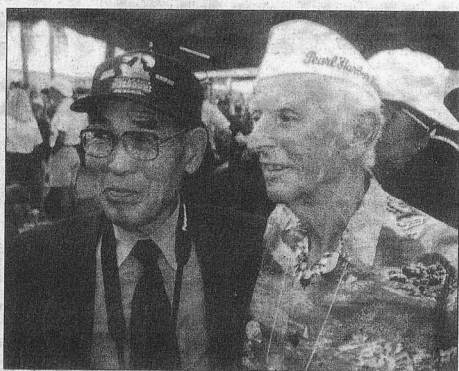
While visiting this landmark, Thompson met with the owner, and learned much about the spy's story. "As I was preparing to leave, the owner said to me, 'Would you like to see the telescope Yoshikawa used?' He explained that his father had found it in the basement," Thompson wrote in his memoirs of the trip. "He then proceeded back up to the now-enclosed second-floor deck with me, where he set it up in the same spot that was used by the spy to look out at Pearl Harbor and Hickham Field."

"There was just nobody there. This place hasn't changed since 1941. It's a very remote thing," Thompson said.

However, the spot has been frequented by a variety of celebrities over the years, including John Wayne, Kirk Douglas, and other movie stars, while shooting films on location.

During the trip Thompson also ventured out to the spot where the USS Utah was destroyed.

"To go out there is quite unique.



During his trip to Hawaii for the 60th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack, Steve Thompson of St. Charles took photos of veterans, including these from Japan and the United States.

There is no memorial, and you can't really see the ship. What you get is more of a feeling. What you're seeing is the tragedy that occurred there," Thompson said. He sailed out to the site on a sunset cruise with about 100

other people, most of whom were relatives of those who had served and died on this ship.

Thompson enjoys traveling with groups and meeting veterans. He has traveled with two groups, Military Historical Tours and Valor Tours, both of which cater to veterans, relatives of veterans, and any other individuals interested in military history.

"I am particularly interested in veterans who served," Thompson said. "I never met a veteran I didn't like. I enjoy their company and hearing their stories.

"If there's one thing vets always say to me it's 'Thanks for caring, and pass the word on.' They just want you to carry on the word of what they did in one way or another. They're just a great group of guys."

In addition to collecting memories and stories, Thompson has photographed all of the veterans he has met along his travels. He has also collected some memorabilia.

Although he is interested in World War II as a whole, Thompson is particularly fascinated with the Pacific

A memorial for the USS Utah, which was damaged in the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in 1941. Thompson went to Pearl Harbor on the anniversary of the attack and has plans for more World War II-related trips.



Yackley: WW II, veterans fascinate man

Continued from Page 1

battlefields and islands, because "there are still relics there. You can still find bones and ammunition laying on the ground. You can really get a feel for this."

Over the next five years, Thompson plans to visit the sites where major battles took place during World War II to observe their 60th anniversaries.

"My next three trips will include Corregidor and the Bataan Death March, Tarawa, and the battle of Guadalcanal, including a Solomon

Island cruise where we go ashore on the small island where JFK swam ashore after his PT boat was sunk," he said.

Thompson noted that for any remaining veterans from that era, "This will be the last chance for them to do this."

"There is a lot of interest today. It has been generated by movies, and what happened on Sept. 11 had a huge impact on our patriotism," said Thompson, who defined patriotism as "the love of freedom, the heritage, and the history of sacrifice."

With all of his experiences, Thompson is thinking about writing a book filled with the first-person stories he has collected along the way.

He is also interested in sharing what he has learned and experienced with school groups and other organizations, as a way of keeping history alive, nurturing patriotism and carrying on the simple requests of the veterans to pass the word on. He can be reached at (630) 377-7162.

• To contact Rachel Baruch Yackley, send e-mail to myr98@aol.com.

See YACKLEY on PAGE 2