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A return trip to Iwo Jima

■ St. Charles man explores World War II sites, visits with Medal of Honor winner who was wounded during battle for Mount Suribachi

History buff Steve Thompson of St. Charles recently made a return trip to Iwo Jima and his first trip to Peleliu to further visit and study World War II sites.

Thompson documented his first trip to Iwo Jima in an article in the Kane County Chronicle last November.

On this return trip, he met Jack Lucas, one of only three surviving Medal of Honor winners from Iwo Jima, and

sent along a photo of him. Lucas was severely injured as a member of the Marines who were trying to secure Mount Suribachi under heavy resistance from the Japanese entrenched in the jungles and mountains.

Lucas sustained his injuries when he fell on a hand grenade to save the five other Marines he was with. He pulled a second grenade over to him at the same time he fell on the first. The explosion threw Lucas over on his back.

"It never did knock me out," he told Marines stationed at Iwo Jima today. "If it had knocked me out, I would have drowned in my own blood because I was bleeding profusely."

Thompson submitted an article about Lucas that was published in the Pacific Daily

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Steve Thompson, St. Charles

News. In that article, Lucas said he was originally taken for dead, with a poncho even thrown over his face. But he was later transferred from Iwo Jima and underwent five major operations in seven months.

After those operations, Lucas, who is now 73, returned home a hero to Mississippi. The Medal of

Honor winner promptly returned to the ninth grade to continue his education.

The other photos Thompson sent in were of his explorations in the jungles of Peleliu, part of a full week at World War II sites on Tinian and Saipan.

More than 125 participants were on the trip, including author/historian Stephen

Ambrose and James Bradley, son of one of the "flag-raisers" on Iwo and author of the best seller "Flag of Our Fathers." Also in attendance was Pamela Marvin, wife of late actor Lee Marvin, who was wounded on Saipan as a member of the Fourth Division Marines.

"This latest visit to Iwo was even better than last year,"

Thompson said. "I went from the highest point on the island (Mount Suribachi) to the lowest point — Japanese caves and tunnels extending 50 to 60 feet beneath the surface, where I found many artifacts.

"It is best to do this with at least two other people, with ropes and flashlights," Thompson said. "You can easily get lost or injured.



Photo submitted to Kane County Chronicle
Steve Thompson of St. Charles stands next to a rusted Sherman tank in the jungles of Peleliu. The tank sits at the exact location where it hit a mine, killing five Marines in the blast.

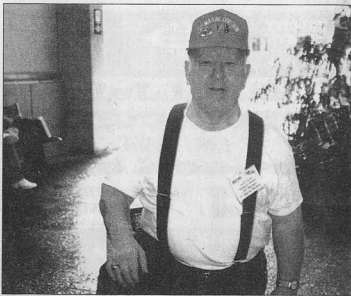


Photo submitted to the Kane County Chronicle
Jack Lucas was a member of the touring group of which Steve Thompson of St. Charles was a member. Lucas is a Medal of Honor winner who survived falling on two Japanese grenades to save the lives of other Marines near him during the battle to take Mount Suribachi.

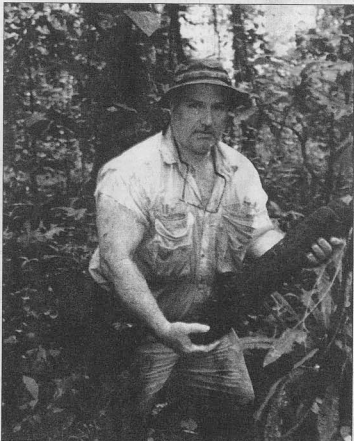


Photo submitted to Kane County Chronicle
Unexploded shells "are everywhere" in the jungle areas around Iwo Jima, said Steve Thompson of St. Charles, shown here holding one he found during his explorations of the World War II sites.