



virtual museum

Due to the effects of a super typhoon, people can't come to Guam's War in the Pacific museum - so the museum is coming to them

by Tammy Duchesne

On December 8th, 2002 Super typhoon Pongsona decimated the island of Guam and destroyed the War in the Pacific National Historical Park's (NHP) museum, administrative offices, contact facility, and the research library. A year and a half later, while still lacking a physical presence, the park's historical photos, items from the museum collection, educational publications, management documents, and park brochures are now available to the public in the new War in the Pacific NHP WWII website and on-line museum.

With generous funding provided by the Arizona Memorial Museum Association and the Guam Humanities Council, War in the Pacific began planning the WWII website in July 2003. With the museum collection inaccessible to the public, it became apparent that action needed to be taken to provide veterans, school children, the residents of Guam, and off-island visitors with information and images about the Pacific Theater of WWII and the occupation and liberation of Guam. The 60th Anniversary of the Liberation of Guam, only a year away, provided a deadline.

Truly a community and Pacific islands endeavor, the site represents the efforts of scholars, professors, and historians from the US Armed Forces, Guam, Hawaii, and Micronesia. Complimenting the numerous stories and publications that detail the events, campaigns, and people of the Pacific Theater of WWII, are almost 700 historical black and white images which include: Pearl Harbor images obtained from the USS Arizona Memorial; photos that document the events that occurred in the Micronesian Islands (Saipan, Tinian, Enewetak, Chuuk, Kwajalein, Majuro, Peleliu) acquired from the Micronesian Seminar in Pohnpei; Pacific Theater action, including Doolittle's Raid, Midway, Cape Gloucester, Okinawa, Leyte, Iwo Jima, and Tarawa, collected during a joint NPS/ AMMA trip to the United States Marine Corps Historical Center and the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, MD in March 2004.

In addition to the photos from different areas of the Pacific, a large quantity of the War in the Pacific NHP's museum collection photos were scanned and, for the first time ever, made available to

the public through the new website. Many of these images were from recent donations to the park's museum collection.

The site includes not only information and images on those who served, including women, African Americans, and Native American Code-talkers, but also explains how the war affected the Chamorros of Guam and thousands of other Pacific Islanders who found themselves in a war they knew nothing about. While the site looks at the events and the people of the war, it also includes stories on Nose Art, the USS Indianapolis, and information on historic WWII sites both on-land and beneath the ocean.

On July 18th, 2004, at 5pm, the new War in the Pacific website officially emerged into cyberspace ... and just in time.

Attending the 60th Anniversary of the Liberation of Guam ceremonies were, among others, twenty-four American veterans who had stormed the beaches of Guam sixty years earlier. An additional fifty people from the island, including many Chamorros who were forced to endure the two and a half years of Japanese occupation from December 8th, 1941- July 21, 1944, were also in attendance. All were visibly touched by the images and accounts of a war that many can recount with a startling, sometimes nightmarish clarity.

The feedback from the public has been tremendous. Emails have already come in praising the site as a "virtual museum"; a place where the history of this sometimes forgotten battleground can be appreciated from anywhere in the world.

The mission of the new website, and of the War in the Pacific National Historical Park, is to honor those who fought, lived, and died in the Pacific during World War II. It is a place where anyone, no matter where they live, can come to remember, or to learn.

The new website can be viewed by going to the In-depth portion of the www.nps.gov/wapa. Click on any of the icons on the left to enter the site.

Special thanks to all the people that helped make this site possible including AMMA, an NPS web volunteer from Seattle, Harry Butowsky, and June Jones.