

The Ship's Bell

Placer County Council,
Navy League of the
United States
Auburn, CA

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

President's Message.....	2
December In Review.....	3
Victory Village.....	4
USS <i>McCampbell</i>	6
Sea Cadets & NJROTC Happenings.....	7
The Flaws of Burma's Defense (1941-1942).....	10
DeWitt History Museum.....	14
WWII Tour for High Schoolers at DeWitt Museum.....	17
Community Affiliates.....	18



President's Message

By Rebecca Dunavent

2025 got off to a wonderful start on January 6 when Representative Kevin Kiley (R-CA) released the following statement after his bill to rename the Auburn VA Facility after World War II veteran and Navy Lieutenant Commander Louis Conter, the last survivor of the attack on the USS Arizona at Pearl Harbor and a Grass Valley native, was signed into law.

“Lt. Commander Lou Conter was the final survivor of the attack on the USS Arizona at Pearl Harbor. On that fateful day, he heroically evacuated shipmates who were blinded, wounded, or burned, even restraining some of his fellow shipmates from jumping overboard into the burning sea,” said Rep. Kiley. “He continued to serve our country for decades following Pearl Harbor; winning the Distinguished Flying Cross and serving in the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson White Houses. Following his passing in April, there could be no better way to honor Lt. Commander Conter’s enduring legacy than naming a veterans’ health care facility in his memory. I am grateful to my colleagues for their bipartisan support, and pleased to see this measure signed into law.”

We are so fortunate that Lou was part of our Council and was so deserving of this recognition! Rep. Kiley’s office will announce details for a ceremony at the Auburn Clinic at a future date.

January continued to be busy with the Martin Luther King holiday, the presidential inauguration, and our dinner meeting all occurring on the same day! Our speakers, Nichole and Jason Mulford from Victory Village, provided an informative presentation on the services that their organization provides to veterans. For more information on the incredible work that Victory Village provides please visit their website: vvvets.org.

Although we have been enjoying lovely spring-like weather, the horror of the southern California fires reminds us that we are in fire country ourselves. I reached out to the Pacific Southwest Region contact for the Navy League and he said he would keep us posted if there is anything we can do to be of assistance.

In February, we have the Super Bowl to look forward to, although I dare say that without “our” team playing we may not be as excited as we would be. Not to worry, because our February meeting (2/17) will be the very next day when we have a fabulous presentation on the Auburn Symphony—complete with a few musicians putting on a performance!

I had the opportunity visit three of our youth groups this week. I truly feel that the future of America is in good hands with our young people! Thanks to your generous support, we are able to provide much needed financial support to help them in their endeavors. Be sure to mark your calendar to attend our March 17 dinner meeting when we focus on our youth groups.

As I conclude my first month as your new president for the Placer County Navy League, I cannot help but continue to realize how blessed we are to have had Bonnie Potter be at the helm for so many years! I wish to publicly say “thank you” to her for her leadership, friendship and unwavering continual support to this Council and our community! She is truly an inspiration!

Here is to a wonderful 2025!

-Becky Dunavent

December 2024 Review

By Bonnie Potter

We enjoyed having special visitors at our December meeting. Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus attended our meeting thanks to Carol Ann Hackley. She saw a post on social media last fall about the 25th of the month being special, and asked if the person posting was Santa Claus. And guess what ... he was! She found out that he works with Matthew Vidosh, the Toys for Tots Southwest Placer Coordinator. We always collect unwrapped toys at our December meeting and this year we were delighted to invite Santa and Mrs. Claus, and Matthew Vidosh to speak about the Toys for Tots program.

Toys for Tots is a program run by the United States Marine Corps Reserve which distributes toys to needy children. Working with the Salvation Army and other organizations in our local community, in 2024 Matthew and his team of volunteers, including Santa and Mrs. Claus, distributed 28,672 toys to 12,335 children in Placer County. And we were delighted to donate hundreds of of toys collected at our meeting!

Thank you Placer County Navy League members for your generosity, and thank you Toys for Tots for supporting the children in our community!

Below Left: Santa & Mrs. Claus pay a visit to the Placer County Council's Navy League as part of the Toys for Tots drive (Picture by Alicia Wilbur).

Below Right: The Christmas tree surrounded by all of the donated toys for the Toys for Tots drive (Picture by Alicia Wilbur).



A Message From Victory Village

By Nicole Milford

It was nice to meet you at the Navy League meeting! Here is the history of Victory Village and its founders. I know you may need to shorten it, that's okay...

The founder of Victory Village, Jason Mulford, grew up in Amador County. He joined the Marine Corps after graduating high school early in 1995 and served for 5 years on active duty. Jason was severely injured during operations on the Southern Iraq border. He spent an additional 3 years on the Marines Temporary Disability Retirement List, where he underwent over 40 surgical procedures so he could walk again; he returned home to Jackson in late 2004 with an honorable discharge.

He met his wife, Nichole, in 2010. The same year, Jason's adjustable-rate mortgage increased, and they were not able to afford the increase which led to them losing their home. After some research, Jason found there was a gap in services, not only in Amador, but across the entire Northern California Foothills. Jason presented this information to Nichole, and they decided their mission in life was to create an organization where they could help every veteran access the services they need, including learning how to navigate VA healthcare, which they have learned from personal experience.

Nichole completed her AA in Business Administration at NNU in 2018; and at Liberty University- completed her Bachelor's in Health Sciences & Business Administration in 2019, Master's in Business Administration (non-profit) in 2020, and a Master's Certificate in Business Management & Leadership in 2023. She currently supervises 3 managers, 20 employees carrying out the mission in five programs focused on housing, social services, employment, and training. Jason earned his bachelor's Degree from Northwest Nazarene University and is in his second year of graduate business school. He will complete my Master of Business Administration next year from Columbia Southern.

The organization currently serves nine counties: Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, El Dorado, Amador, Alpine, Calaveras, Tuolumne, and Mariposa, with two office locations, two veteran transitional housing facilities, and one affordable housing complex. Over the last 13 years, Jason has worked at the executive level with Victory Village and various state and federal councils and committees; he has been a staunch advocate for veterans' legislation in Sacramento and Washington, DC. His leadership in a nonprofit corporation as a housing developer and general contractor has resulted in the design, acquisition, and development of multiple properties totaling 45 housing units with federal funds. Victory Village has housed over 150 homeless veterans and their family members in Jackson, originating from various counties, and almost 1,000 veterans with various services throughout the 9 counties over the last 13 years.

Veterans do not have to be homeless to receive assistance, they do not have to live in our service area to receive answers. Our staff are trained to find solutions to the problems veterans are facing so that they can continue moving forward and not give up.

Nichole Milford
Executive Director of Victory Village, Inc.
(209) 223-2286
<http://www.vvets.org/donate>

ARE YOU A HOMELESS VETERAN?

ARE YOU AT RISK OF LOSING YOUR HOME?

The Supportive Services for Veterans Family program can help!



The SSVF Program provides temporary financial assistance and services to help secure and maintain housing for veterans who are currently homeless or would be homeless without this assistance. The goal for veterans in the SSVF program is to remain stably housed after this assistance ends.

Services Offered

Supportive services available to SSVF participants include:

- Outreach services
- Case management
- Assistance obtaining VA benefits
- Assistance obtaining other public benefits
- Additional temporary financial assistance including:
 - Rental assistance
 - Utility-fee payment assistance
 - Transportation
 - Childcare and other qualifying services

Eligibility

- Veterans may be single or part of a family in which the head of the household, or spouse, is a veteran.
- Discharge status must be under conditions other than dishonorable.
- Very low income: making less than 80% of the area median income (AMI).
- Housing status:
 - Currently residing in permanent housing and at risk of losing housing and becoming literally homeless but for SSVF assistance or
 - Currently homeless, scheduled to become a resident of permanent housing within 90 days pending the location of permanent housing or
 - Has exited permanent housing within the previous 90 days in order to seek housing that better fits with needs.

Contact Victory Village:

530-900-1717

11990 Heritage Oak Place, Ste. 1B, Auburn, CA 95603

Victory Village:

530-900-1717

11990 Heritage Oak Place 1B
Auburn, CA 95603

Victory Village:

530-900-1717

11990 Heritage Oak Place 1B
Auburn, CA 95603

Victory Village:

530-900-1717

11990 Heritage Oak Place 1B
Auburn, CA 95603

Victory Village:

530-900-1717

11990 Heritage Oak Place 1B
Auburn, CA 95603

Victory Village:

530-900-1717

11990 Heritage Oak Place 1B
Auburn, CA 95603

Victory Village:

530-900-1717

11990 Heritage Oak Place 1B
Auburn, CA 95603

Victory Village:

530-900-1717

11990 Heritage Oak Place 1B
Auburn, CA 95603

Victory Village:

530-900-1717

11990 Heritage Oak Place 1B
Auburn, CA 95603

News about the USS *McCampbell*

By Bonnie Potter

The USS McCampbell (DDG 85) is an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer that is named after Captain David S. McCampbell, a naval aviator who distinguished himself as the Navy's leading fighter pilot during WWII. The ship was commissioned in August 2002 and the Placer County Council has been a sponsor of the ship since its commissioning, providing Sailor of the Quarter and Sailor of the Year awards.

McCampbell was stationed in San Diego until 2007, when she was forward deployed to Yokosuka, Japan. In 2020 she relocated to Portland, Oregon to undergo midlife modernization, fortifying its warfighting capability. Last March McCampbell returned to Yokosuka, Japan to Region Commander, Destroyer Squadron 15.

The Placer County Council continues to provide Sailor of the Quarter and Year awards. Recently the Council sent Sailor of the Year awards for Fiscal Year 2024 to Senior Sailor of the Year IT1(SW) Kevin Rose, Sailor of the Year STG2(SW) Kayla Giles, Junior Sailor of the Year GM2(SW) Wendy Correia and Bluejacket of the Year SN Estrella Eyler. Each award Recipient was sent a brass sundial clock/compass in a wooden box and a Certificate of Achievement.

Congratulations to the USS McCampbell Sailors of the Year!



Above: USS McCampbell circa 2008 (Image found https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_McCampbell).

Sea Cadet & NJROTC Happenings

By Rebecca Dunavent

Thanks to the support of its members, the Placer County Navy League actively supports three Sea Cadet units and two NJROTC units. These young people are truly amazing in what they are achieving and will truly be the leaders for tomorrow. Here are some pics of what they have been up to recently:

Matthew Axelson Division/TS Randy Goodman U.S. Naval Sea Cadets Yuba/Sutter

Fleet Week in San Francisco, 2024

Doesn't San Francisco look great with these wonderful young men and women in their uniforms? (Photographs courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent).



*Veterans Day Parade 2024, Marysville, CA
(11/11/2024)*

The bad weather couldn't dampen the enthusiasm as they proudly marched down the streets of Marysville! (Photograph courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent)



CAPT Randy Goodman Visits Namesake Unit



11/9/24: Matthew Axelson Division/TS Randy Goodman Sea Cadets honor the namesake of the Troop Ship Randy Goodman. CAPT Goodman is a retired Navy captain and SEAL to mention but a few of his military accomplishments. He grew up in Marysville, CA. The Captain, his wife and father spent the entire day with the unit and shared many stories (Photographs courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent).



Below: Matthew Axelson Division/TS Randy Goodman Sea Cadets.

Right: 12/14/24 Chief's Pinning for Connor Simpson with Becky Dunavent (CAPT, USN, ret) and LT Jason Smith, USNSCC Region 12-8 Commander (Photographs Courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent).



LUTHER BURBANK JROTC SACRAMENTO, CA



(Photograph courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent).

The Flaws of Burma's Defense (1941-1942) & What it Meant for the British and Colonial Troops

By Natalie Brennan

Like several previous newsletters, this one contains another paper I wrote for my graduate school's capstone project. This one details the flaws of Britain's defense in Burma during the early years of the war, and what it subsequently meant for the British and their colonial forces. This might not be my greatest paper, and was a struggle to write, but for what it's worth, I hope you all enjoy reading what I had to write about for my Global War class.

Throughout the history of the British Empire, the Crown called on its colonial soldiers to protect English assets throughout the world—World War II was no exception. However, each campaign in the war's early years, such as Singapore and Malaya, would end in disaster for the British and their colonies. The early Burma campaign of December 1941 to May 1942 would be another humiliating defeat. Believing that the unforgiving terrain of Burma was unconquerable, the British felt that the Japanese had no way of penetrating the sheer cliffs and dense jungles. Additionally, with the help of the colonial and Commonwealth troops, the British believed that they could defend any onslaught that the enemy launched. The British and colonial forces failed to defend Burma—a vital link to China—because of four critical flaws: failure to foresee Japanese capabilities in Burma's terrain, failure to adequately train their troops, racial prejudice in the propaganda and low morale of Allied forces. These failures in Burma mattered because they signaled to the Japanese and colonial forces that the British Empire's invincibility was a crumbling façade, placing Britain's colonial rule and territories at risk and having long-lasting effects on the Empire.

After suffering crushing and humiliating defeats at Singapore and Malaya in 1941—resulting in the British Empire losing two valuable colonies with rich resources to the Japanese—the British were determined to defend Burma and preserve the vital trade routes that the Allies held with China. Evan Mawdsley explains that while Burma had less economic importance than Malaya, it still contained “the last overland route from Europe and America to China.” The Japanese military wanted Burma, not only to expand its empire, but to knock China out of the war.

Additionally, China, with its rich resources and advantageous terrain, was to be incorporated into Japan's ‘Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere.’ Japan hoped that, with this Co-Prosperity Sphere, it would reign supreme over all of Asia in its own empire. When Japan began its renewed expansion during the interwar years, China was one of their first targets for repossession. Edward Drea argues that traditional assumptions underpinned Japan's strategy to achieve its Co-Prosperity Sphere. Its military strategy relied on the short-term war scenario to eliminate western bases in East Asia. Once they seized control of Southeast Asia's raw materials, they could successfully engage in a protracted war against China, which was not the Japanese military's initial intent. This is important in understanding why Japan began its expansion against European and American colonies, who were far more industrially and materially advanced. Being in a similar situation to Germany—where they, too, were unable to fight prolonged wars—Japan's military hoped that its alliance with the European Axis powers would allow them to take over the Southeast Asian colonies while the imperial powers were distracted. In doing so, they hoped to defeat China in a longer war because they would have the necessary resources, and the imperial powers of the Allies would be unable to assist China because of the war in Europe.

Since the Burma Road was crucial for transporting critical supplies to China, Japan needed to take it immediately to help their chances of defeating China. While the air route over the Himalayas, known as “the Hump,” was still in operation, the crippling defeats on the ground “highlighted the criticality of establishing air superiority” for the Allies. However, since Japan's military had relatively uncontested command of the air, the Burma Road was the main target. If Japan's army took the road, it could potentially force China out of the war and land Japanese troops right on the doorstep of the crown jewel of the British empire: India. Furthermore, if Japan took Burma, their intended next goal would be to take control of the Indian Ocean. Drea explains that this “would cut the line of communication from India to Great Britain, leaving the British... unable to resist the imminent German invasion,” which would make the U.S. less willing to intervene. The Japanese wanted to avoid a war with the industrially powerful United States for as long as possible, and they hoped that a defeat of Great Britain would result in the U.S. being the only power that had not been overtaken by the Axis. Therefore, Britain, with the help of the Commonwealth and colonial soldiers, would have to do all they could to hold the Burma Road and keep Japan away from the British Empire's crown jewel. However, they faced a myriad of challenges in the process.

One of the major factors that contributed to the colonial troops' failure to defend Burma in 1941-42 was the British assumption that the country's geography would protect them from the Japanese. Yasmin Khan explains that while Burma was rich in resources and links to India, it was "surrounded by natural barriers with no railways, no metaled roads and only three routes connecting it to India. It had scarcely been factored into the calculations of military strategists...." These natural barriers consisted of dense jungle, which, according to Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, "almost everyone had regarded as impenetrable a few months before," and was riddled with diseases, such as malaria, and sheer mountain cliffs. Khan states that the British strategists "placed too much emphasis on sea power and underestimated the Japanese ability to wage war on land. The British assumption that the Japanese would not be able to keep supply lines linked together over vast distances was proved wrong." This is crucial because these assumptions had also been made at Singapore and Malaya, which ended in British defeat because the Japanese outflanked the Allies by attacking the landward areas where the defenses were weakest. Because Britain still had a strong navy at this time, they utilized their biggest strength to build a strong defense along the coast. Unfortunately, defending the sea also inadvertently resulted in them neglecting their landward defenses because the strategists insisted the terrain was far too difficult to traverse. The Japanese readily exploited these assumptions and used it to their advantage.

It was also believed that, because Burma's terrain would be so difficult for the Japanese invaders to navigate, the British would have enough warning time to organize their "loosely arranged defense forces." It is important to link this assumption to the broader context of what was going on during the Pacific War because when Burma was invaded, the Japanese had already successfully launched surprise attacks on various U.S. and European territories and colonies. Still, the British believed that the terrain's complexity would, at the very least, buy them enough time to organize. However, according to John Keegan, once Burma was invaded, "the campaign went wrong for the British from the start" because the British and colonial soldiers were "required to defend a wide front with few troops." Ian Toll explains how, during the early Pacific battles, "again and again, the pattern was repeated. The British lines quickly crumbled in the face of flank attacks or frontal attacks." Repeating mistakes was another vital error made by the British at this point in the war because it showcased their inability to change their defense tactics in order to effectively combat an enemy whom they had underestimated.

An additional factor that contributed to the colonial troops' failure in the early Burma campaign was propaganda and its racial undertones. This is because it not only denounced the Japanese as inferior fighters, but it inadvertently showed the colonial troops that race was significant to the British Empire. In some instances, propaganda portrayed to soldiers that to fight a war, "the enemy must be dehumanized, must be made threatening and evil." This form of propaganda was not only meant to repress the revulsion of killing another human being, but it also sparked a false sense of racial superiority against the enemy. Because of this anti-Japanese propaganda, the British believed "that the Japanese were small, myopic and with a level of military achievement below that even of the Italians." These prejudiced notions were fueled by "pseudo-scientific theories," which included the idea that the Japanese would make terrible pilots because of how their eyes were shaped. These examples of racial propaganda had a role in various critical flaws regarding Burma's crumbling defense—it contributed to the belief that the Japanese could not traverse Burma's terrain, and it incorrectly denounced the Japanese as inferior fighters based on racist and deceptive ideas.

One of the more constructive aspects of propaganda was to bolster support for the colonial subjects in fighting the war, but this was not always successful. Khan gives an example of how propaganda inadvertently demoralized rather than inspired the colonial troops:

"Propaganda aimed at an Indian audience... implied that the men had almost become indistinguishable and that race was now immaterial, with even the physical difference between men blurred in the conditions of war. While in Egypt..., 'The British troops were so tanned by the blazing sun from which there was no shade that they became as dark as the Indians, while the way in which all fraternized made this encampment in the desert a friendly and happy place.' Yet such propaganda also unwittingly revealed just how much racial consciousness of skin colour [sic.] and of difference still mattered."

Attempting to inspire the colonial troops was not a bad thing, but the racial consciousness that it unintentionally spread did not help boost any sense of camaraderie with the British and Commonwealth. It solidified that the colonial troops were not equal to the British but were still expected to fight for the Crown. This racial divide was detrimental to morale, which in turn contributed to the colonial troops' failure during the early Pacific campaigns of 1941-42, Burma included.

Another major flaw in the colonial troops' difficulty defending Burma was the various military failures, which included inadequate training for jungle warfare, weak fire discipline and poor roadway infrastructure. Richard Overy states that, in the early war years, the Allies were at a major disadvantage against Germany and Japan. The Allies' real weakness at Burma and other places in the Pacific was their dependence on the "quality of their technology and the fighting effectiveness of their forces." During the early years of the war, the British training and equipment used in Asia was better suited for fighting in North Africa and the Middle East, where the British would be able to utilize the wide open spaces to their advantage. The jungles of Burma, however, were on the opposite end of the topographical spectrum, and the fighting effectiveness that served the British well in the deserts would not do the same in Burma. Roy Kaushik explains that "training in jungle warfare was carried out in rather a half-hearted manner, owing to very little direction being given on the subject." One British veteran of Burma, lieutenant John Randel, wrote that all of the provided training and equipment "were designed for a war in open desert country..., against the Germans or Italians." While this manner of training for war in Burma can be tied back to the racial prejudice that the British felt towards the Japanese's fighting capabilities, there was another major reason for this lack of adequate training for jungle warfare: deciding which territory was more imperative to defend.

At this point in the war, Britain and its colonial forces were fighting multiple enemies in both Asia and North Africa, and they needed to prioritize which territories had more importance. Toll explains that in North Africa, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was poised to launch an offensive against Egypt and the Suez Canal. If the Suez Canal fell to the Germans, it would mean that Britain's fastest route to India would be severed. While Burma was also right on India's doorstep, the British had to decide which route to India was more important to defend. The Suez Canal was the primary objective to defend, but Burma was a secondary one and still needed some form of security. However, the British did not have adequate equipment for jungle warfare at the time and there was little time to train soldiers to fight in a different environment. Therefore, the difficult decision of which territory's defense took priority would ultimately result in troops fighting in the jungles while using ineffective training techniques and equipment.

Other common military problems that the British and its colonial troops faced in Burma were fire discipline and poor roadways. Tarak Barkawi explains that most troops who were new to combat would fire their weapons too soon, using up their ammunition too quickly and revealing their positions to the enemy. Additionally, because Burma had no metaled roads, this caused the Allies to get bogged down during the monsoon rains. Meanwhile, the Japanese were able to outmaneuver the British and colonial troops because they had trained for jungle warfare and thus, "were experienced, lightly-equipped and repeatedly outflanked the road-bound British, Australian and Indian formations by moving around them through the countryside." The British, Commonwealth, and colonial soldiers found themselves in an unfamiliar wartime environment in Burma, and their defeat signaled to everyone that Japan's expansion showed little signs of stopping now that the European colonies in Asia had fallen. These military failures would lead to a decline in morale for the troops, which would further impact their inability to defend Burma.

Another major factor that contributed to the poor performance of the British and colonial troops in the early Burma campaign—one that had long-lasting effects on the Empire—was the aforementioned low morale, especially during the retreat from Burma. This retreat and evacuation also solidified the reality that, for Britain, the sun was finally beginning to set on their empire. Bayly and Harper explain that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Alan Brook, felt that the British Empire was slowly decaying, but never expected it to fall apart as fast as it did with the defeats in both Singapore and Burma. Brooke was correct because, as it had been with Singapore and Malaya, the British Empire was now faced with its own mortality. Toll explains that with the defeat in Burma, the British now had to ask themselves "whether the population of India would regard the approaching Japanese as invaders or liberators." The British acknowledged that the invincibility of their empire was a crumbling façade, and this further stressed to the colonial soldiers that the fate of the colonies now hung in the balance. In turn, the colonial soldiers began to worry about whether their countries would be independent, or further subjugated by another power.

With the fall of Rangoon, the retreat and evacuation of colonial subjects revealed the explicit racial and class prejudice of the British, with priority for evacuation given to the Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Indians. While a large number of colonial troops managed to join the retreat, many others stayed behind in Rangoon to hold off the Japanese advance in order to buy time for those escaping. Bayly sums this sacrifice of colonial troops: "the honor of the British Empire was upheld by some of those most widely distained within its hierarchies of race and class." Khan further explains that "in the sudden evacuation from Burma, military men received scarcely better care than the refugees." This lack of care for the colonial troops showed that when the situation grew dire, the British would not help them escape

regardless of how well they served the Raj. However, during the early years of the war, colonial soldiers served with the eventual intention of gaining their countries' independence, citing that their new self-sufficient countries would need military professionals. Therefore, even after experiencing blatant discrimination during the evacuation of Burma, the colonial troops continued to serve the Raj during the remainder of the war.

Bayly and Harper show the additional racial divides by explaining that on a typical ship from the Scindia Steamship Company, an Indian shipping company that was helping evacuate refugees, "800 deck berths were reserved for Anglo-Indians and 2,000 for Indians." However, this was "wildly out of line with the relative percentages of the population. Elsewhere..., Anglo-Indians themselves were consigned to their usual status of 'non-persons' in between 'proper whites' and Indians." The evacuation was a dire situation and brought to the surface racial tensions between Europeans, Indians, Anglo-Indians and many others. This vile treatment of colonial soldiers and refugees fleeing Burma would result in support for anti-colonial movements in India and elsewhere in the British Empire. Anti-colonial nationalist, Mahatma Gandhi, gave speeches that showcased the explicit racial prejudice shown to the Indian and other colonial troops and refugees, urging support for the 'Quit India' movement. He decried that thousands of colonial subjects and troops "on their way from Burma perished without food and drink, and the wretched discrimination stared even these miserable people in the face. One route for whites, none for the blacks!" Such racial and class discrimination amidst the retreat aided in the deterioration of morale for the colonial soldiers who were trying to help evacuees and fight the advancing enemy. These anti-colonial sentiments would be the driving force for various independence movements after the war.

The Burma campaign of 1941-42 was a failure for the British and, by extension, the colonial troops due to a myriad of factors. Underestimating Japanese forces' capabilities to fight in Burma's terrain, lack of adequate training, racial prejudice within the propaganda and the sharp decline in morale during the evacuation all had a role in this military defeat. With the fall of Burma, the message was sent to the British that their empirical reign was coming to an end; and with the abysmal discrimination faced by the colonial soldiers during the retreat, it encouraged anti-colonial nationalist movements to take effect throughout the colonies all the way into the postwar years.

Bibliography

- Barkawi, Tarak. "Culture and Combat in the Colonies: The Indian Army in the Second World War." *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 2 (2006): 325-55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036389>.
- Bayly, Christopher, and Tim Harper. *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941-1945*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Bhattacharya, Sanjoy. "British Military Information Management Techniques and the South Asian Soldier: Eastern India During the Second World War." *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (2000): 483-510.
- Brack, Nancy, and John R. Pavia. "Racism in Japanese and U.S. Wartime Propaganda." *The Historian* 56, no. 4 (1994): 671-84. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24449072>.
- Drea, Edward J. *Japan's Imperial Army: Its Rise and Fall, 1853-1945*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009.
- Mawdsley, Evan. *World War II: A New History*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Kaushik, Roy. "Retreat from Burma: 11 December 1941-20 May 1942." Essay. In *Sepoys Against the Rising Sun: The Indian Army in Far East and South-East Asia, 1941-45*, 160-208. Boston, MA: BRILL, 2016.
- Keegan, John. *The Second World War*. New York: Penguin Books, 2005.
- Khan, Yasmin. *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Overy, Richard. *Why the Allies Won*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995.
- Salmi, Derek M. *Slim Chance: The Pivotal Role of Air Mobility in the Burma Campaign*. Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, Air Force Research Institute, 2014.
- Toll, Ian W. *Pacific Crucible: War at sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2012.

Step Back in Time at the DeWitt History Museum

By Katy Bartosh—Curator of Education at Placer County Museums

History enthusiasts and curious locals alike are invited to explore the past at the DeWitt History Museum, located within the Placer County Government Center in North Auburn. Open every Wednesday from 12 to 4 p.m., the museum offers free admission and a unique opportunity to delve into our local history.

Knowledgeable docents help bring history to life, guiding visitors through photographs and artifacts that detail three significant eras of the site's history: its role as a World War II Military hospital, its use as a State Mental Health Hospital, and its present-day function as part of the County of Placer.

Constructed in 1943, DeWitt General Hospital was built as part of a strategic effort to care for injured military personnel. Its selection was the result of lobbying by local leaders who favored its ideal location—above the fog, below the snow, and its proximity to local transportation hubs and northwestern military bases. The hospital officially opened on February 27, 1944, with an Open House and Flag Raising Ceremony attended by 4,000 people. Named after Brigadier General Calvin DeWitt, a Civil War veteran and former Commandant of the Army Medical School.



Flag Raising Ceremony, DeWitt General Hospital Opening, February 27, 1944 – (Photograph courtesy of the Placer County Museums Archives).

The DeWitt Hospital was constructed so all buildings were interconnected through long corridors to minimize the spread of germs and maximize natural light. Patients arrived from battlefronts in both the Pacific and European theaters for care. Alongside their medical treatment service members received occupational therapy and had access to a multi-denominational chapel, theatre, post office, auditorium, cantina, and further morale-boosting activities. Notably, Hollywood star Dorothy Lamour visited the hospital, performing on stage and meeting recovering soldiers.



*Above: Patients in DeWitt Hospital Solarium
(Photograph courtesy of the Placer County
Museum Archives).*

After the war the hospital closed in 1946 and was repurposed as the DeWitt State Hospital in 1947. It served as a state-run mental health hospital until its closure in 1972 when Placer County purchased the property and converted it into the government center that stands today. Due to its state of preservation the district is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Must-See Exhibits

Housed in a historic farm cottage that predates the hospital, the DeWitt History Museum features a variety of interesting exhibits, including:

- Dog tags and a Good Conduct Medal belonging to Evelyn Frost, a Placer High School graduate who joined the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps after working as a nurse assistant in Sacramento.
- Civilian Exclusion Order No. 48 (copy) and accompanying instructions, which marked the forced removal and imprisonment of Japanese and Japanese American residents in Placer County during World War II.
- Military patches, including that of the 45th Infantry Division, or the 'Thunderbirds,' a World War II unit whose servicemen represented 50 different Native American Tribes.
- Cold War-era Civil Defense supplies, such as a gas mask and Geiger counter, which were stored at DeWitt for potential emergencies.



Interior photograph of museum (Photograph courtesy of the Placer County Museums).

Plan Your Visit

The DeWitt History Museum welcomes visitors every Wednesday from 12 to 4 p.m. at 2985 Richardson Drive, Auburn, CA 95603. Group tours for Navy League members and other interested parties can be arranged outside regular hours by contacting the museum office at (530) 889-6500 or museums@placer.ca.gov. The museum is fully wheelchair accessible.

Whether you're a history enthusiast or simply looking for a unique local experience, the DeWitt History Museum is a great way to spend an afternoon.

DeWitt History Museum WWII Tour for High School Students

By Natalie Brennan

As a volunteer docent for the Placer County Museums, I have spent some time at the DeWitt History Museum educating guests about Placer County's role in the Second World War. Since most of the curators for the county museums knew of my background as an aspiring World War II historian who got her Master's degree in World War II Studies, the curators of education, Kaitlin Grebe and Katy Bartosh, came to me with a proposal to create a tour aimed at high school students about the role Placer County, specifically the DeWitt hospital, played during the Second World War.

After collaborating and researching with the two of them, we have managed to come up with a rudimentary tour that discusses the roles of the county and its individuals, from the WACs, WASPS, veterans, and those who were killed in the war. We tested the tour on several museum docents to get their input earlier in the year of 2024, then on December 7, 2024, I presented the tour to several high school teachers from Del Oro, Woodcreek, Rocklin, and Placer schools. The reviews from both the museum docents and high school teachers were positive, and we might even think of expanding the tour to encompass more of the original DeWitt buildings that still survive, including the chapel, and museum archives for an in depth tour of the complex and the war. Only time will tell whether this tour will become official, but for the most part I and the museum curators are quite optimistic.

It might even tickle some of you to know that for our veteran's section of the tour, I talked about Dean 'Diz' Laird, Clarence 'Bud' Anderson, and former Placer County Council Navy League members Fran Ferry and Lou Conter. I even mentioned several men and women whose names are etched into the memorial wall at the New Auburn Cemetery: Betty Wood, Harry Wong, Richard Wittich, and Masa Sakamoto.

Hopefully by including all of their stories, they will never be forgotten.

Special Thanks to Our Community Affiliates

Special thanks goes to one of our Community Affiliates, Lassila Funeral Chapel, Chapel of the Hills, and TGH Aviation. Your partnership with the Placer County Council Navy League is most appreciated.



Placer County Council Navy League Board of Directors

Council President:

Becky Dunavent

First Vice President:

Bonnie Potter

Second Vice President:

Don Anderson

Secretary:

Mona Anderson

Treasurer:

August Anema

Directors:

Mike Holmes, Don Goard, Nancy Goard, Carol Ann Hackley, Janelle Kershaw, Natalie Brennan, Alicia Wilbur, and Greg Wilbur.

Newsletter:

Natalie Brennan

Thank You For Reading!

