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## From the Daily Journal archives

# Capturing the soul of the Veterans Building

By Jim Clifford  
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Photo gallery at Redwood City's Veterans Memorial Senior Center.

The walls at Redwood City's Veterans Memorial Senior Center, destined to be torn down to make way for a new facility, send a powerful message, albeit one limited to photos at a time when state-of-the-art visual aid devices are essentials for gaining and keeping an audience's attention.



A call went out for veterans to donate military memorabilia for display at the proposed new veterans center at Red Morton Park, a mission becoming more and more important as aged World War II GIs answer the final muster. The veterans were also asked to recount experiences in conflicts ranging from World War II to today's seemingly endless war on terror. Not an easy task, according to memorabilia expert Robin Van Auke.

For one thing, veterans of today's conflicts aren't as forthcoming as those from earlier wars, which is shown by the fact that today's battles aren't recalled in the current collection of photos that line the hallway wall at the center that was built in the 1950s. The photos and clips are overwhelmingly from World War II with a few from the war in Vietnam. The Korean War is barely noted, if at all, as though it was an inconvenient truth. It's as if World War II was the war America wants to remember, Vietnam is the war it wants to forget and Korea is the war it did forget.

Apples and oranges? Perhaps, but for those in combat, all war is hell. Nevertheless, as historian Ken Burns said, World War II was so vast and impacted so many lives that when one refers to "the war" everyone knows what you are talking about. The wall is testimony to Burns' summation. World War II dominates with photos from several battlegrounds, ranging from Europe to Asia. One shows a Stuart light tank — the kind that stands guard at Mezes Park in Redwood City — operating in a Pacific jungle. Bold headlines screaming about the end of the war jump out at people walking down the hallway.

"We believe that it is important to gather these stories, preserving them for generations to come," said Van Auken.

She, along with her husband, Lance, wanted to contact as many local veterans as possible, a job that can sometimes be bittersweet. For instance, a worn wooden box one would expect to see on an episode of Antiques Roadshow held medals for valor, among them a Bronze Star. These were abandoned when relatives of a deceased veteran sold the family home. Luckily, the medals found their way to Dee Eva, the dynamo who spearheaded the drive to erect the Veterans' Memorial at Sequoia High School. The memorabilia was given to Eva by a real estate who sold the home. When he asked the family what they wanted to do with the medals, "they told him to throw them away," Eva said. "He just couldn't do it, so he gave them to me because he knew I would find a home for them."



This wasn't the first time the Van Auken family encountered such an ambivalent attitude toward military history, Lance said, recounting how descendants of Confederate Maj. Gen. George Pickett, of "Pickett's Charge" at Gettysburg, showed little regard for his artifacts, including his "bloody coat." The family ended up selling them for "a relatively small sum."

Robin Van Auken said that this time the Korean War will be featured prominently in the new exhibit with artifacts, photos and stories.

"We are not forgetting it for sure," she said, adding that her father was a Marine gunnery sergeant in that war.

