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FORT LAUDERDALE | WORLD WAR II REMEMBRANCE

Pearl Harbor Day, WWII memorial stir sad, grim memories

GRIM REMINDERS OF WORLD WAR II REMAIN FOR ITS AGING VETERANS, BUT THEY CANNOT, AND WILL NOT, FORGET

Posted on Fri, Dec. 07, 2007

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BY ANI MARTINEZ
armartinez@MiamiHerald.com

In 1943, Eugene Campbell couldn't wait another year to fight for his country. So he changed the date on his birth certificate and enlisted in the U.S. Navy during World War II.

He was just 16.

Today, Campbell recalls his military career with honor -- and sadness.

"Truthfully, the war is something I try to forget because there are so many bad memories. Today is about remembrance and sadness," said Campbell, 81.

"We remember how lucky we are to be alive, the battles we fought and the men we lost."

On Thursday, the Broward County Council of the Navy League celebrated the 63rd anniversary of the Battle of Leyte Gulf in the Philippines, the largest naval battle during World War II.

On Friday, the Navy League will host a ceremony recalling another famous battle of World War II, Pearl Harbor, at the U.S. Coast Guard Station in John U. Lloyd Beach State Park.

Campbell and George Makris, both from Fort Lauderdale, are veterans who served at Leyte Gulf. They attended the memorial service at the Fort Lauderdale Coast Guard Station.



CANDACE WEST / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

Eugene Campbell and George Makris, who fought at Leyte Gulf, and the crew of USS Leyte Gulf mark 20th anniversary of USS Leyte Gulf's commissioning.

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During the war, Campbell, a machine mate, helped rescue survivors, and Makris coordinated Army, Navy, Marines and the Coast Guard troops as a sergeant in a special forces unit.

The League also celebrated the 20th anniversary of the USS Leyte Gulf battleship, which is usually docked in Norfolk, Va., but was at Port Everglades this week. The battleship -- the first ship ever commissioned in a civilian port -- was commissioned Sept. 26, 1987 at Port Everglades.

As Campbell spoke about his experience during the Battle of Leyte Gulf, his eyes swelled with tears. He glanced away from the gun-metal gray ship to gather his thoughts. "There was never a battle like that ever before," said Campbell. "Hopefully, there never will be one like that again."

The Battle of Leyte Gulf, also known as the Second Battle of the Philippine Sea, occurred Oct. 23-26, 1944 in the area surrounding Leyte, a Philippine island.

The battle marked the first use of kamikaze aircraft. Japanese pilots crashed their planes into American battleships, jeep carriers, destroyers and cruisers, destroying anything American.

Retired Navy Chaplain Mark Jumper and his wife, Ginger Jumper, came from Illinois to see the battleship Thursday. Jumper, now a pastor in Illinois, led the veterans, members from the Navy League and crew members in prayer during the memorial service.

Looking at the ship from across the inlet, the couple recalled how they fell in love.

The two met in 1990 -- two weeks before Jumper sailed on the Leyte Gulf into the Persian Gulf War. They had a long-distance courtship for six months while he was away at sea.

They married two months after he came back. Nearly a year later, they baptized their first of seven children inside the ship's bell, where her name is still engraved.

"This ship is so special to us. I started to cry when I saw the ship and the crew members," Ginger Jumper said. "Being here is like falling in love again."

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