



Happy Birthday Joe!

Below is an article in Sunday's Honolulu Star Advertiser honoring our founder RADM Lloyd R. "Joe" Vasey on his 100th birthday. Pacific Forum will officially recognize this occasion at our annual Board dinner on March 15th. To purchase tickets or make a donation, click [here](#). To sponsor a table, click [here](#).

'Old Sailor' is determined to honor fallen veterans by Allison Schaefer

This PacNet originally appeared in the Jan. 29, 2017 Honolulu Star Advertiser, and can be found online [here](#).

There is not much that retired Rear Adm. Lloyd R. "Joe" Vasey hasn't accomplished in his first 100 years.

Vasey, who became a centenarian today, now has his sights set on the creation of a Pacific War Memorial at Pearl Harbor. "There is no recognition of well over 150,000 brave Americans who were lost in the Pacific War," Vasey said. "They are resting on the bottom of the Pacific Ocean somewhere, or their remains are scattered across the South Pacific islands. We need to honor them, and their families need a place to mourn."

The late US Sen. Daniel Inouye had planned to introduce legislation authorizing the National Park Service to design and build the Pacific War Memorial, Vasey said. Last Wednesday, US Rep. Colleen Hanabusa agreed to pick up the mantle. "I'm hoping that it can be accomplished in honor of Admiral Vasey's 100th birthday," Hanabusa said in a phone interview. "I will try to push it through on the House side, and I'm hoping Sen. John McCain will move it forward on the Senate side. I first became aware of this effort from Sen. Inouye and I want to see it done."

Vasey envisions the memorial would occupy about a 30-square-yard circular site on the Pearl Harbor waterfront between the visitor center and Bowfin Park. The memorial would become part of the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument, which is home to the USS Arizona Memorial.

The Pacific War Memorial, which would be surrounded by a lava rock wall, features a center tile mosaic map of the Western Pacific that notes locations of the major battles and campaigns. The mosaic would be surrounded by about 20 podiums that provide visual and electronic informational displays of these key historical moments. On the outside, there would be a 12-foot-wide walkway with six podiums, noting the contributions of the US's wartime allied nations.

"The memorial meshes beautifully with the ongoing WWII Valor in the Pacific National Monument and fills an

important niche that is not getting the priority attention that it deserves," Vasey said.

Hanabusa said the Pacific War Memorial would be an important monument addition. "The plans are very well thought out. The admiral has put his whole heart and soul into them," she said.

Vasey, who served on a submarine during World War II, said he gets "very emotional" about the memorial because he's doing it for "my old buddies." The casualties were high among US submarine forces, which sank 30 percent of the Japanese Imperial Navy, including eight aircraft carriers, and destroyed 60 percent of all Japan's merchant ships.

Vasey made it home to marry a school principal named Lilian and have three daughters, Kristine, Karla, and Kari. He went on to reach career highlights such as chief of strategic plans and policies at US Pacific Command headquarters, secretary to the Joint Chiefs of Staff; deputy director of the US National Military Command Center in the Pentagon; and chief of staff for the commander, 7th Fleet.

Vasey learned about the value of doing your homework and accepting responsibility for your actions under his boss, President Harry Truman, who had to make the agonizing decision to use the atomic bomb. But it was his experiences aboard the USS Gunnel submarine, which was commanded by US Sen. John McCain's father, Jack, that inspired him to promote peace in later life.

"They were dropping bombs (depth charges) for 36 hours. That's why I can't hear on one side. As we were waiting to come up, some of our sailors were gagging for air. I thought to myself there must be a better way to solve these international problems," Vasey said. "If I survived, I thought I would try to do something about it."

Vasey comes from a long line of patriotic Americans with similar can-do attitudes. His grandmother, Kansas America Carson, was the niece of American frontiersman Kit Carson. Vasey recalls she and her husband, H.P. Vasey, who later became the first sheriff of Canadian County, Okla., were part of the great land rush.

"He rode ahead on a pony and she road in a buckboard followed by two horses," he said. "Three thousand people came from back East to stake a land claim. The settlers were pretty tough people."

His mother's father, Charles Anderson of Sweden, mined for gold in Alaska.

His father, Robert Vasey, was a US naval officer, whose career took the family around the world.

Vasey, who graduated from Los Angeles' Belmont High School, said he went to 12 different schools, including one in

the Philippines. Vasey said he most enjoyed his time in California, where his Uncle Lloyd Vernon Hamilton, a popular comedian of the silent-film era, once made him part of his act.

“Here I was a little kid trying to imitate him. There were 3,000 people in the audience and they just roared,” he said.

Despite his acting stint, Vasey was drawn to military service. He became a 1939 graduate of the US Naval Academy, where he was a champion swimmer. Fellow students dubbed him “Cuddlesome” because he was a hit with the ladies; however, he proved his mettle as a fierce fighter during WWII. “We sank a lot of ships. I was attacked 21 times by Japanese forces,” Vasey said.

Vasey was sent to Yokosuka, Japan, after the war. “When we landed it was like a ghost town,” Vasey said.

On the second night, he encountered a Japanese captain who invited him back to his submarine to complete the exchange of power. “He tried to give me his sword. I gave it back to him because I didn’t feel right taking his honor,” Vasey recalled.

Now Vasey sits among stacks of news clips that line his dining table and the computer desk, where he stays up late writing op-eds on military strategy. His work has appeared in the Wall Street Journal and the Christian Science Monitor among others. Vasey hopes his latest messages reach President Donald Trump, who he said needs seasoned advice on handling issues like terrorism and the nuclear weapons buildup in North Korea.

“I think business and the economy will be good under him, but I don’t think he has the foreign affairs background,” said Vasey, whose WWII experiences led him to found the Pacific Forum, a foreign policy think tank affiliated with the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Ralph Cossa, a successor to Vasey as president of the Pacific Forum, said hundreds are expected to show Vasey their appreciation and wish him a happy 100th birthday during the Pacific Forum’s 2017 Board of Governor’s Dinner on March 15 at the Sheraton Waikiki.

“You can’t come away from a meeting with Joe Vasey feeling depressed about America. They talk about the WWII generation being the greatest generation. You understand it, when you talk to him,” Cossa said. “If you sit down with him, it’s like getting a three-hour credit in American history. But he’s a visionary, too.”

Cossa said Vasey advanced Hawaii’s relations with China when he brought the first Chinese leadership delegation here in the 1980s. “He was told, ‘Why are you wasting your time? China is a third world country,’” Cossa said. “The mayor of Shanghai visited at the time. His name was Zhu Rongji and he later became premier of China.”

Georgette Almeida, who was Vasey’s executive assistant at the Pacific Forum before he retired, said he is still dearly loved there both for his continued accomplishments and his humble disposition. “Every time he won some kind of award or got praise for something good,” Almeida said, “he would say, ‘I’m just an old sailor.’”

HAPPY 100th BIRTHDAY, ADMIRAL VASEY

Annual Board of Governors’ Dinner Pacific Forum CSIS will celebrate the 100th birthday of the organization’s living founder and World War II veteran, retired Rear Adm. Lloyd R. “Joe” Vasey. Dinner will feature a keynote speech from Joseph Nye, a foreign policy expert and Harvard professor. The event will be held from 7 to 9:30 p.m. March 15 at the Sheraton Waikiki Hotel, 2255 Kalakaua Ave. Tickets may be purchased for \$175. Call 521-6745 or email development@pacforum.org.