

Students fascinated by WWII speakers

Survivor of USS Arizona and WWII pilot share exploits

By Sara Seyyidin Journal Staff Writer --

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Commander Francis Ferry, left, shows E.V. Cain Charter Middle School eighth grade students Ben Stoll, middle, and Moises Labrador, right, a replica of the airplane he piloted in World War II, the SB2C Curtiss Helldiver.

E.V. Cain Charter Middle School students circled around World War II veteran Commander Francis Ferry as he shared his war stories — namely co-leading the team that sunk the Japanese warship YAMATO at just 25 years old. The eighth grade students who are working on their

annual heroes project lean in as he talks and ask questions about his medals. In all Ferry has won a Navy Cross, a Silver Star, two Distinguished Flying Crosses and five Air Medals.

Suzanne Scotten, who created the heroes project and assigns it to her students each year said her students are tasked with finding people who have overcome great adversity or done something to benefit the planet and sharing their story with others through multimedia.

“To get kids excited at the end of the year, I think I could die happy,” Scotten joked. “These kids are going to be the next generation and we want them to do amazing things.” Lou Conter- On of 13 remaining from USS Arizona The speaker series kicked off with Lou Conter, 91, Wednesday. Conter is one of 13 remaining survivors who were on the USS Arizona during the bombing of Pearl Harbor. He is credited with helping to save the lives of other men on the ship, along with others on his deck.

For many years Conter said he and other World War II veterans seldom shared their experiences. At their 50th anniversary, the veterans decided it was time for the next generation to learn about their acts of heroism and sacrifice.

“No one hardly talked about Pearl Harbor until the 50th anniversary,” Conter said. “It was just our job to do.” Just weeks before the bombing of Pearl Harbor Conter got his orders to go to flight school in Florida, something he pushed for that ended up saving his life. “If he hadn’t have he would have been killed on the Arizona below decks,” said Don Goard, president of the Placer County Navy League and an attendee at the series.

Goard said people stayed on decks according to their ranks and prior to that his rank would have put him toward the bottom of the ship. Conter said while he is glad to share his story with the students just before Memorial Day, the holiday is about remembering those who sacrificed their lives.

“Memorial Day is really set up for the 1,200 core men who didn’t make it, who gave the ultimate, gave their lives,” Conter said. “They didn’t get to have children and grandchildren. We got to come home and have children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.” Ryan Maberry, a student in Scotten’s class, said he is working on his Heroes project about Conter. “I was interested on doing a project for Pearl Harbor because I am interested in it,” Maberry said. “It’s just amazing that he is still able to walk like he does and tell people his story.”

Commander Francis Ferry

Students were similarly fascinated by Ferry’s exploits in Japan in World War II. During his presentation he shared about going AWOL for a few days to marry his sweetheart Genevieve. She said during World War II she made a decision not to worry, despite knowing what danger her husband was headed into. “We knew everyday might be the last day. You just live day to day,” Genevieve Ferry said. “There is no point in worrying about it. Destiny just takes over I guess.” After the war, Francis Ferry became a teacher in Redwood City and stayed in the reserves for 33 years.

Ferry helped lead a mission to sink the Japanese battleship Yamato during World War II and was a pilot on other important missions throughout the war. He said he still cries on the anniversary of the sinking of the ship because despite the circumstances, many young people lost their lives. “I think he is very fascinating, how he told the story. It’s nice to have that perspective,” said Moises Labrador, who is highlighting Ferry’s accomplishments in his heroes project. Ben Stoll, who is working on the project with Labrador, said he was excited to learn more about the subject. “I have always been interested in this kind of stuff and I have never talked to a veteran before,” Stoll said. “This is pretty big.” Reach Sara Seyyidin at saras@goldcountrymedia.com, or follow her on Twitter @AJ_News.

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