

Custer County Historical Society Monthly Program

Lois Wells – Program Director

Rachel Nepper -- Recorder

“On the Hunt for WWII Artifacts”

Ms. June Stender Johnston– June 4, 2016

Following the 15-minute refreshment period, June Johnston, was introduced as the day’s speaker. She got interested in World War II history because she had an uncle in that war. Her uncle had been at Okinawa and then she heard about the Battle of Peleliu (pel-la-loo) in 1944. She has gone there six times covering the island with its jungle, ridges, cliffs and caves. During the war the Marines were to take over an airstrip there, and it was to only last 3 to 4 days for the combat, but lasted a month. The topography was awful she said and the battle became controversial due to the amount of casualties (1500 lost in 4 days). The Japanese were protected in caves, bunkers and pillboxes. If the Marines could drive 50 yards in a day, it was considered good. The Army came in and bombed with napalm. The last Japanese holdouts (34) finally came out in 1947 (they had pilfered supplies from the Navy during that time). There had been 15.7 million rounds of ammunition fired – that came to an average of 1589 rounds of ammo to kill one soldier.

Mrs. Johnson said that there were less than 500 natives on this island in the Palau’s. There are two memorials in the jungle. People coming to the island can only take photographs but nothing else can leave the island in order to preserve the integrity of the battlefield. There are American and Japanese artifacts and skeletons. She felt it was an unnecessary blood bath since the Japanese could have been starved into submission.

Mrs. Johnson told of the wildlife in the island – some alligators, snakes, lizards, crickets, spiders, and crabs. She said that this is a US Trust Territory but has its own government. She and her son are looking for Cave #10; some caves were cemented shut. One must be aware that there is live and unstable ordinance still on the island while exploring. She figured she would be going back.

Mrs. Johnson’s slide show was a no-go because the laptop brought by her assistant did not work and when he went to find another cord, did not return for the program. Mrs. Johnson answered many questions from the audience

and everyone felt it was very interesting and informative and she was invited back to show her slides besides doing her talk again.