

COMMUNITY

Collector hunts treasures of war

From Hitler's silver to samurai swords, he's got it

By DAVID DUSCHENE
The Northwest Herald

CRYSTAL LAKE — You might not expect a 47-year-old financial consultant to long for his childhood dreams of going on a treasure hunt for war artifacts.

But in a way, that's how James Dryden likes to spend his free time.

Dryden is fascinated by war memorabilia. When he is not out telling people how to run their businesses, he is hunting for daggers, sabres and other such war items.

He was at the Holiday Inn on Friday, looking for more items and drumming up interest in his soon-to-open war museum in Arlington Heights.

"All of us as kids wanted to go on a treasure hunt. Who didn't?" Dryden said. "That's why this is so intriguing. When you came in here, for all I knew, you could have been carrying an 800-year-old samurai sword, or something."

Dryden has been in the business — make that hobby — of war collectibles for nearly 20 years.

He got interested when his uncles gave him things they got in Japan during World War II. One gave him a Japanese samurai sword and the other gave him an

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James Dryden

war memorabilia collector

authentic German dagger.

From those small beginnings, a massive memorabilia collection has grown.

Dryden now claims to own about 100,000 war items, ranging from small German lapel pins to spiked helmets, daggers and battle swords.

But his favorite items are those that can be traced back to the infamous.

Dryden owns several pieces that can be traced back to Hitler's right-hand men and even the Fuhrer himself.

Dryden owns a complete silver service that belonged to Hitler. It amazes him to think that Hitler once drank from some of the cups he plans to display in his new

museum.

"It's not that I look favorably on Hitler or any of those people," he said. "But the younger generations don't have a tremendous handle on what went on during World War II. I want to bring that to them."

Dryden said he hopes to open his museum in the next three or four months. Then he will be able to move what he says is 4½ rooms full of collectibles to a public location and put them on display.

By that time, he hopes to have stumbled across a few more items to add to his collections.

He bases his "Midwest Military Museum" in Lake Zurich for the time being, although he travels nationwide in search of fine collectibles.

He is most intrigued by the craftsmanship that goes into some of the items.

And his best luck has come through contact with veterans and their families.

"Some of this stuff gets passed down from generation to generation," he said. "I get a lot from soldiers who found it during the war, or from the kids they passed it down to. That was the big thing during the war, to bring home souvenirs or send them home while the war was going on."