

# A Remembrance

## Prof. Steven J. Byzek (1917-1996)

by George Arrington

Just over 54 years after a young soldier was overflown by Japanese Zero's at Pearl Harbor, retired U.S. Army Major Stephen J. Byzek's casket was saluted by a formation of four U.S. Air Force F-15 Eagles.

Professor Byzek, Hachidan and student of Professor Okazaki passed away on Saturday, January 6, 1996 at Walter Reed Army Hospital in Maryland. He had been in poor health for several years. He is survived by his wife Madeline, his daughter Bonnie and his grandson Alexander. His son Steven was killed several years ago.

Byzek was born in Waltersburg, PA on July 11, 1917. At the age 18, he joined the Army and was stationed at Ft. Howard in Maryland. Two years later, he was assigned to Ft. Derussey on the island of Oahu in the Territories of Hawaii. It was at this time (1937) that he began his Jujutsu training with Professor Okazaki. During his training, his personal instructors were Richard Rickens and Marion Anderson. He graduated from the Kodenkan on May 15, 1941 (in the same class as Sig Kufferath and Bill Ah Moo). At this time graduation, Byzek received a 9-foot long scroll called a Mokuroku (catalog) of the Jujutsu techniques he had learned.

On December 7, 1941, Steve Byzek was witness to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. At this time, there was much suspicion that an invasion was imminent. In this hysteria many Japanese residents of Hawaii were arrested, questioned and even imprisoned at the detention camp on Sand Island. Since Byzek had been a close associate of Professor Okazaki, he too was questioned. He recalled that during the inquisition, "One of these men tried to rough me up, but I wouldn't have any of that." He was one of several students, in fact, who assisted in releasing the "Old Man" (Professor Okazaki) from prison.

Later, Byzek was transferred to a combat unit that was fighting with OSS in northern Africa. During this time, he was wounded by a land mine and spent a long period of time in an Algiers hospital. This is where he met his future bride, Madeline, who was his nurse. They were wed in Algiers in 1943.

In 1947, the Byzeks returned to Hawaii. While there, Steve continued to train in and teach Jujutsu. His classes were held at the Ewa Marine Base. He was among a group of Okazaki black belts who attended a special Okugi class in 1948. At this class, he was awarded the title of Shihan from Okazaki. (This class was also included Sig Kufferath, Wally and Bernice Jay, Jack Wheat, Bill Ah Moo and Carl Beaver among many others.)

Byzek retired from the Army with the rank of Major, but continued in government service with the CIA. Among

his varied experiences, he was involved in the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1962. He was also very active in training U.S. servicemen in self-defense tactics. He and Madeline settled in northern Virginia suburbs of Washington DC.

In 1994, Steve Byzek's rank was adjusted from 4th dan to 8th dan Professor in recognition of his many years of service to Danzan-Ryu Jujutsu. He was also recently recognized as Jujutsu Patriarch by the Jujutsu America organization and inducted in the Jujutsu Hall of Fame by the American Jujutsu Institute.

In a service befitting the former WWII combat veteran, Steve Byzek was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery on January 24, 1996. After a brief service at the Ft. Myer chapel, a horse-drawn caisson was led to the grave site by a full Army band and honor guard. While eight members of the U.S. Army's "Old Guard" held a taut American flag over the grave, seven riflemen fired three shots each in the traditional 21-gun salute. After selections from the band and the benediction was read, the flag was folded with meticulous care and presented to Steve's widow Madeline with words of thanks from a grateful nation.

In the words of Madeline Byzek, "Steve was a brave man who loved his country very much."

Personal note: I was introduced to Steve Byzek two years ago when Wally and Bernice Jay were in the DC area for a seminar. Steve has since welcomed me several times into his home to share his experiences about Okazaki, Jujutsu and life in general. He was also generous enough to visit my class and pass on Kokua to my students.

