

A Bottle Collector's Adventures in Guam

By Jennings Bunn

In January of 1991, I signed on with an archaeological contracting company in Guam for a six-month contract. I stayed almost 14 years, surviving 12 typhoons..

In 2004, I was hired as the first archaeologist, cultural resources manager and historic preservation officer ever hired on Guam by the U.S. Navy. I also managed a small World War II museum in the village of Sumay on Guam as a collateral duty.

Sumay was most important in Guam's history. It was a prehistoric Chamorro village and is listed on very early Spanish maps. It was a port-of-call during the whaling days of the 1850s and '60s. It became important in U.S. history when the island was taken from Spain during the Spanish-American War. In 1903, the Trans-Pacific communications cable as laid from Hawaii to Manila, Philippine Islands and the cable station was located in Sumay.

In 1934, the Pan American Airways Station was located in Sumay and China Clipper service started from Alameda, Calif., to Manila via Guam. The Skyways Hotel was built and provided comfortable accommodations to Clipper passengers. ..

In 1921, the U.S. Marine Corps barracks was located in Sumay until it was bombed by the Japanese Dec. 8-10, 1941. The bombing did little damage and the Japanese took over the village, housing soldiers in the barracks and other buildings in the cable station. American personnel, including 157 Marines and a couple of hundred civilians, were taken prisoner and ultimately shipped to Japan as laborers where they stayed until the end of the war. .



A closeup of seals on the early A. Houtman case gins

With the purchase of many thousands of acres on the island by the Japanese in the early 1990s, hotels and golf courses were rapidly being built. Fortunately, Guam has one of the more strict systems of preservation law, heading off the Japanese preference for cultural destruction when not on



This pair of A. Houtman case gins came from the old Sumay dump.

primarily the men, in much the same manner as the Spanish did in Florida, or wherever they sailed in search of gold and slaves. For the next 370 years, the Spanish controlled the Marianna Islands until 1898 when the United States took control as a militarily significant area.

On December 10, 1941, the Japanese took control of Guam for the next 2-1/2 years. The Japanese and Chinese had been traveling to Guam for many years before World War II. On July 21, 1944, U.S. forces landed on Guam and declared the island "secure" within two weeks.

For nearly 500 years, Asians and Europeans have been depositing "stuff" on the Marianas, Palaus and surrounding islands. This had led to my having recovered many bottles, most dating from the 1890s through the 1940s.

The only thing left after being bombed by the Japanese in 1941 and the Americans during June and July of 1944, was the old Sumay cemetery,



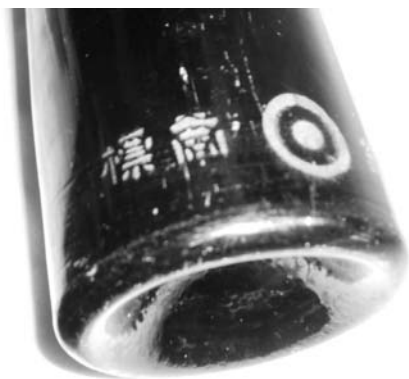
A group of seven crudely made Japanese medicines, circa 1940.

Japanese territory. As such, many areas were stripped bare, revealing the treasures buried beneath the surface.

Historically, the explorer Magellan "found" Guam, which led to the decimation of the Chamorro people,

1941. A wall surrounding the cemetery had been built of mamposteria (a type of mortar used by the Spaniards) in 1937 by the men of Sumay and over the years, a part of it had collapsed into the cemetery, covering several old graves.

In 1996, I applied for and received funds to do 100 percent restoration



Japanese characters or labels near the bottle's base.



A trio of Japanese whiskeys with crude tops, circa 1940.



A pair of gin bottles, probably dating to when Dutch were on the island.

of the wall. On cutting the old road bank which paralleled the cemetery and stood about 40 feet higher than the wall, the first scoop of the backhoe bought up bottles. I was monitoring the work from up on the road bank, not knowing of the old dump, when a Filipino worker held up a case gin bottle and asked, "Is this any good?" I said, "Hell, Yes, I'll be right down!" I was able to recover hundreds of bottles and other artifacts of old Sumay.

More bottles came from the old city of Agana dump. circa 1880-1940. During my time on Guam, I also visited Tinian many 30 times. On Tinian, I found hundreds of Japanese bottles in the jungles. On Peleliu, caves still contain Japanese bones, as well as ordnance that must be carefully avoided. In the "1,000-man cave" on Peleliu, one of 10 tunnels has so many bottles that it is impossible to walk without stepping on them. On some of the other islands, the people still use the large beer and saki bottles to store coconut oil. I have believed for years that World War II archaeology will be the next major focus.

I think my greatest adventure during my stay on Guam was greeting many American and Japanese veterans and being able to take them for a tour of the island, with the Navy's approval. I gave tours for six years for Military Historical Tours based in Alexandria, Va., when World War II veterans and their families were brought to Guam and several other islands. It was my honor to accompany World War II veterans to Iwo Jima four times, an honor I will soon not forget.

I also gave tours for the "All Japan War Comrade's Association," which came to Guam every other year. As such, I had the honor to meet several hundred "old warriors" and was able to learn many stories as all veterans have.

I lived in Guam for most of 14 years and will always remember with heart-rending fondness all the folks I met there.



A trio of Japanese beers, circa 1940.



A trio of Japanese whiskeys with crude tops, circa 1940



Three San Miguel (note monogram SM) beers



A quartet of Japanese beers, or could they have contained saki?