June 26, 2010 - Chief Crazy Horse Memorial

Probably the most challenging and impressive artistic undertaking of the 20th and 21st centuries is the Chief Crazy Horse mountain sculpturing project. Started in 1948 as a joint venture between the Lakota Indian tribe and Boston sculptor Korezak Ziolkowski, who assisted the more famous Gutzon Borglum who was responsible for the Mt. Rushmore President's Heads.

What makes this project so extraordinary is that it is being funded without public money of any sort. While its eventual cost will be in the tens of millions of dollars, it is being constructed almost wholly from admission fees and souvenir sales from the more than the million visiting public who take the time to see this impressive undertaking annually. While much of the construction equipment, and even the dynamite used to blast away tons of rocks in an instant, have been donated by large corporations, no federal or state dollars have been accepted to date. And speaking of dates, no completion date has been fixed or even suggested. I know that it will not be completed in my lifetime, and perhaps not in my son's or even grandson's.

My visitation to the memorial, which is located a scant 10 miles from my Custer, SD operational base, was conducted on a clear, but cool mid-June summer day (daytime temps in the upper 50's). I took my Vespa motor scooter over to Thunderhead Mtn., located just a bit south of the Mt. Rushmore site. The $5 fee covered both my admission for the entire day, as well as parking. Quite a bargain, I say. This included a very informative 20 minute film showing the project's progress from its 1948 inception right up to date, with a lot of old photos, film and interviews with the sculptor, Korezak, his wife, and almost half of their 10 children who are still associated with the ongoing project.

As an added bonus while I was there one of the rare explosions was scheduled, and I was able to capture a photo at blast time. And between this blast and the evening spectacular light and laser show, there is a very complete museum of the American Indian people and their artifacts and handcrafts to wander through. I spent over 3 hours on site and found every minute fascinating and informative. The nighttime light show one of the best that I have ever seen with actual pictures and 3 dimensional laser animation projected directly onto the mountain's walls.

When finally complete it will be a full 360 degree, 3 dimensional rendering 563 feet high and 641 feet wide. It will then be the worlds largest man-made sculpture.

This monument looks entirely different when it is viewed from 600 feet above. Note the steep grade to the tunnel

Me and my Vespa at the Nature Gate entrance

The finished model with the actual sculptor behind

A rare dynamite blast occurred while I was there

The spectacular night time laser show alone was worth the very reasonable admission fee