

OPERATION PRESERVATION

WWII MUSEUM FULFILLING SACRED MISSION TO HONOR, MEMORIALIZE GREATEST GENERATION

An SBD-3 Dauntless launches off ENTERPRISE's deck. A few seconds later, another Navy dive bomber joins the hunt for Japanese Zeroes.

Soon, they'll engage their Axis counterparts in firefights during the Battle of Midway. Their mission is perilous but pivotal. The United States' naval warfare innovation after the attack on Pearl Harbor helped turn the tide against the Japanese. Success in naval aviation proved to be a critical component in the U.S.'s victory in the Pacific Ocean theater during World War II.

This development is spotlighted in the National World War II Museum's Road to Tokyo exhibit. The New Orleans, LA, museum's immersive displays insert visitors into the action. The Road to Tokyo exhibit includes a display replicating ENTERPRISE's flight deck. Images of planes barreling off the carrier headed for aerial combat flicker off a floor-to-ceiling video screen. Three momentous naval actions—the Doolittle Raid, Coral Sea and Midway—are highlighted in the carrier exhibit. The contributions of the submarine community are also memorialized in this area.

Naval Academy alumni are featured prominently in the museum's documentation of the Pacific campaign. The stories of less-heralded heroes such as Rear Admiral Wade McClusky '26, USN (Ret.); Rear Admiral Robert Dixon '27, USN (Ret.); and Vice Admiral Charles Lockwood, USN (Ret.), Class of 1912, are intertwined within the exhibit with familiar names—Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, USN (Ret.), Class of 1905; Fleet Admiral William Halsey Jr., USN (Ret.), Class of 1904; and Fleet Admiral Ernest King, USN (Ret.), Class of 1901.

Jeremy Collins, the museum's director of conferences and symposia, said the exhibits, which also include the Road to Berlin, were intentionally crafted to give visitors a glimpse of the environments and conditions sailors, soldiers, aviators and Marines faced during the war.

"As you walk through our European gallery, you'll walk through the Atlas Mountains of North Africa or the forests of the Ardennes during the Battle of the Bulge," Collins said. "In our Road to Tokyo exhibit, you'll be on the deck of ENTERPRISE and watch actual footage from the Battle of Midway. In the Guadalcanal exhibit, you have the canopy of trees hanging over you.

"We want to give people a sense of what they were seeing and hearing during their experiences overseas."

The museum celebrates and memorializes the Greatest Generation from Honor of Medal recipients who made the ultimate sacrifice to the courageous citizen soldiers who volunteered to defend liberty. The Naval Academy Alumni Association and



Foundation is partnering with the World War II Museum to deliver exclusive WWII-themed travel offerings this year.

The travel programs include WWII in the Philippines (16-24 March), D-Day 80th Anniversary Cruise (29 May-8 June), Easy Company (25 June-7 July), Italy 1944 (7-13 October) and the Battle of the Bulge (11-19 December). One of the museum's missions is preserving the stories from WWII to ensure future generations understand and appreciate the service, sacrifice and leadership exhibited by Americans during World War II.

"One of the best ways to really learn about it, other than coming to the museum,



is to go these battlefields and sites,” Collins said. “We’re delighted to have the partnership with the United States Naval Academy Alumni Association to get some of you down here or overseas. When it’s alumni groups, it’s always great because they always come with a sense of mission that matches our mission at the museum.

“When you’re going through on our tours, you’ll hear from these individuals—either read their words or hear their accounts through our oral histories—but you’ll also visit those sites and pay your respects at the cemeteries and visit the memorials to these units to these men and women.”

Above: The National World War II Museum in New Orleans features the Boeing Center's George H.W. Bush Aviation Gallery which includes a B-17 Flying Fortress, an SBD Dauntless and a P-51 Mustang.

Right: The National World War II Museum provides visitors an immersive experience that includes interactive exhibits and more than 10,000 personal oral history accounts.





The museum's aviation gallery also features photos of American Medal of Honor recipients from World War II, of which 28 are Naval Academy alumni.

Honoring and Preserving Legacies

From King to Nimitz to the 28 alumni who were awarded the Medal of Honor for their service in World War II, the Naval Academy's impact on the war is undeniable. The museum includes an interactive exhibit on the Balao Class submarine TANG which was under the command of Lieutenant Commander Richard O'Kane '34, USN. TANG sank 33 Japanese ships during five war patrols including 13 ships in its final patrol.

Each visitor to the TANG exhibit is given the name of an actual submariner on the final patrol. They are assigned a post and through audio and video elements experience what the crew's final moments might have been like. At the end of the experience, visitors can learn whether their submariner survived.

Lieutenant Colonel John Curatola, USMC (Ret.), military historian at the Jenny Craig Institute for the Study of War and Democracy at the National World War II Museum, said while it's impossible to replicate the harrowing conditions of war, the museum seeks to deliver an experience that goes beyond dates and names.

"You try to get a sense of what it must have been like," Curatola said. "We do the best we can to try to give you an understanding of these environments and how difficult they were to operate in."

The National WWII Museum features six buildings including the Liberation Pavilion which opened in November 2023. The museum was originally launched on 6 June 2000 as the D-Day Museum. New Orleans was home to Higgins Industries which produced more than 20,000 Higgins Boats that were

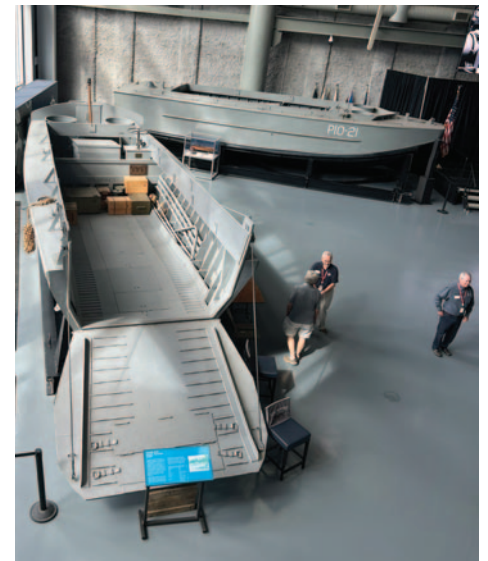
used in amphibious landings during WWII. The museum has grown exponentially over the past two decades and welcomed nearly 5 million visitors in 2022.

The exhibits include restored WWII aircraft in U.S. Freedom Pavilion and The Boeing Center's George H.W. Bush Aviation Gallery. That space houses a B-17 Flying Fortress, an SBD Dauntless and a P-51 Mustang. That hall also features a Medal of Honor Wall and interactive kiosk that allows visitors to search for honorees by branch of service, home state and a particular battle. Each honoree's citation is available to read.

"One thing we want to do at the museum is bring it back to that average service member who is the one who won the war for us," Collins said.

The museum's commitment to document the contributions and sacrifices of all Americans—from the Marines who landed on Guadalcanal to the millions of women who entered the workforce for the first time—is evident in the more than 10,000 personal oral history accounts of veterans, eye witnesses to the war and Holocaust survivors.

"We recognized the responsibility to make sure these stories—from both the great leaders and commanders and the individual citizen soldiers that joined up after Pearl Harbor or were enlisted prior to that—that they don't get forgotten," Collins said.



New Orleans was home to Higgins Industries which produced more than 20,000 Higgins Boats that were used in amphibious landings during WWII.

Curatola is the son of an Air Force officer and his daughter works as a foreign service officer. He said preserving this history is important, “not just for our generation but more importantly for future generations.”


“Democracy is always under pressure, it is our job to maintain it,” Curatola said. “If not, you can have a repeat of what happened in German in 1933, Italy in the 1920s and the same with Japan.”

Alumni Influence

The backbone of naval leadership in WWII came from the Naval Academy, Collins said. Curatola attributed the Allies’ victory, specifically the U.S.’ success in the Pacific to the agility and innovation of the American navy. Despite losing most of its battleships during the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. possessed its arsenal of aircraft carriers.

America transitioned to aviation becoming the primary striking component, Curatola said. He said several Naval Academy alumni were serving as admirals during the war and


Naval Academy alumni are prominently featured in the World War II Museum. Leaders such as Fleet Admiral William Halsey, USN (Ret.), Class of 1904, and Admiral Raymond Spruance, USN (Ret.), Class of 1906, are among the alumni who were instrumental in the U.S.’s success in the Pacific campaign.



William Halsey, Jr.

An aggressive and charismatic leader, Admiral William Halsey led a series of bold hit-and-run American carrier strikes against Japanese forces during the first months of the war and oversaw the first bombing assault on Tokyo, the Doolittle Raid. In October 1942, Halsey assumed command of Allied forces in the South Pacific and launched a series of offensives that severely depleted Japan's air and naval strength.

US Navy | Fleet Admiral
YEARS OF SERVICE: 1904–1959



Raymond A. Spruance

The quiet and modest Admiral Raymond Spruance commanded naval escorts for his old friend Admiral Halsey's carrier task force after Pearl Harbor. When Halsey became ill, he secured Spruance's appointment to command Halsey's carriers at the Battle of Midway. Although Spruance lacked any background in carrier aviation, his brilliant leadership played a crucial role in the battle and secured senior commands for Spruance from 1943 to 1945.

US Navy | Admiral
YEARS OF SERVICE: 1906–1948







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Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, USN (Ret.), Class of 1905, signs Japanese surrender documents aboard Missouri on 2 September 1945.

were responsible for developing America's ability to strike back at Japan's navy via aviation. Previously, aviation was used to scout where the enemy fleet was or to spot for naval surface forces.

Nimitz, who served as commander in chief, U.S. Pacific fleet, changed that.

"What (Nimitz) understands is the striking power of aviation carries a lot more lethality than it had before," Curatola said. "Nimitz is one of the people who recognizes this. He is instrumental in developing these fast carrier task course groups that are instrumental in taking on the Japanese navy."

Through maps and displays, the war in the Pacific is chronicled in detail through the Road to Tokyo exhibit. The actions by Fleet Admiral Halsey and Admiral Raymond Spruance, USN (Ret.), Class of 1906, proved pivotal. Halsey engineered the hit-and-run raids on the Gilbert, Marshall, and Wake Islands in early 1942 as the United States rebounded from the losses at Pearl Harbor.

Spruance earned accolades for leading Task Force 16 with two aircraft carriers during the Battle of Midway.

"To take the carriers he has and sink four Japanese aircraft carriers in one battle, basically shifts the entire Pacific from America being on the defensive to taking an offensive approach as early as June 1942," Curatola said. "You see these officers stepping up and embracing change in terms of naval aviation and naval warfare."

Curatola said Naval Academy alumni demonstrated their ability to integrate new technology and warfare tactics. They realized some strategies at play in Europe were not applicable in the Pacific.

The training and experiences at the Academy, enabled these alumni to adjust their orders to the new realities of war.

"It required different approaches and methodologies," Curatola said. "This takes time. It isn't just like a switch you flip. The United States and her allies learned exponentially faster than the Axis.

"The Germans, the Japanese and the Italians are constantly losing because they're not as adaptive and not as innovative. They don't have the equipment sets that the United States brings to the fight and the ability to coordinate all those equipment sets. It's not just that we have more stuff, it's how the Americans use it, coordinate it and project it over two oceans." 🚢

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