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National Museum to Tell the Army Story

Connecting American people with the Army

This month, former Army Capt. William Swenson received the Medal of Honor for his courageous actions during the 2009 Battle of Ganjgal Valley. However, his historical action is just one thread in the larger fabric of the Army's history.

The Army's history – woven over more than four centuries – has shaped the very society the Army protects. Yet, the Army is the only military branch that does not have its own national museum. This will change soon. We will soon be able to share the story of the American Soldier, like Capt. Swenson, in the National Museum of the United States Army (NMUSA).

The current Army museum system, an idea conceived in the midst of strife, tells a fragmented story of the nation's largest and oldest military branch. In 1814, with the country still embroiled in the War of 1812, Congress directed the Secretary of the War and the Navy Department to collect, preserve and display "flags, standards, and colours" in public place.

Half a decade later in 1854, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point opened its museum to the public. Today, the Army has museums and holdings worldwide, but each of these museums focuses on the history of one of three areas: the installation; a branch of service; or a particular unit. Originally intended to serve as schools to inspire an esprit de corps among a specific group of Soldiers, these museums only tell a portion of the Army's story.

Now, more than ever, our nation needs to understand the American Soldier and how they have helped to shape and advance American society.

According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, public understanding of the role and importance of the military has decreased by six percent in as little as four years. As more installations close and the Army draws down, it is likely that the public's understanding will continue to decline unless action to educate the public is taken.



Our nation needs its Army. With millions of veterans, our Army needs the understanding and support of its nation. Today – with less than one half of one percent of the U.S. population serving in the armed forces (the lowest levels since 1940) and only 109 military veterans serving in Congress – the Army must tell the Army story and be an effective champion of the American Soldier. Since the early militias, our Soldiers have defended our borders, developed cutting-edge technology, provided critical disaster relief and even stood on the front lines for the battle of equality. After 12 years of war, the American people need a new way to hear this story.

The Army Historical Foundation (AHF) is raising money to build a museum that tells this story and connects the American people with their Army in a new way. The AHF will fund the construction of the NMUSA campus through their Capital Campaign Plan and gift the museum to the Department of the Army. This state of the art museum, spanning more than 193,000 sq. ft., will be located on Fort Belvoir – a place where the father of our Army, George Washington, once walked. The museum will house 1,700 artifacts ranging from Gen. Winfield Scott's Congressional Gold Medal to a model of the Wright Flyer – which is currently on loan to the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum's Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center. Additionally, the museum campus will feature a parade ground, amphitheatre, memorial garden and a Medal Honor Garden which will honor Soldiers such as Capt. Swenson that were awarded our nation's highest commendation for valor. Their stories will finally have a home.

The Army story is closely intertwined with our nation's story. More than any other American institution, the Army reflects the character of this nation. Our nation needs to know how Soldiers helped shape a new nation in 1776, preserved the Union, made America a world power and continue to protect America from global threats on battlefields far from home. Our nation needs to hear the Army story.

To learn more about the NMUSA Project visit www.thenmusa.org.

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