Texas Military Forces Museum Opens Major New Exhibit

From Gonzales to Appomattox and Beyond: The Texas Military Forces in the 19th Century

On November 11, in honor of Veterans Day and in commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the American Civil War, the Texas Military Forces Museum at Camp Mabry opened a major new exhibit detailing the history of the militia and volunteer military units of Texas during the 19th Century. Entitled From Gonzales to Appomattox and Beyond, this 3,600-square-foot exhibit tells the story of the Texas Revolution, the Texas Navy, the military

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VOLUNTEER OF THE QUARTER: Chris Hunt

Chris is the wife of our museum director and one of the true unsung heroes of the museum. In addition to photographing museum events, participating with the living history detachment and being a jack-of-all-trades volunteer, Chris, a professional graphic designer, has created virtually all of the museum’s flyers, pamphlets,
struggles of Texas as a Republic, and the role of Texas troops in the Mexican-American War, War Between the States, Spanish-American War and Philippine-American War. This dramatic, new, state-of-the-art exhibit has been in planning or under construction for nearly two years and is now a permanent feature of the museum.

Highlights of this 3,600-square-foot tribute to the militia and volunteer units of Texas as a Republic and State include:

• More than 100 original artifacts used by Texas troops between 1823 and 1901
• 28 original or reproduction flags carried by Texas troops during the Texas Revolution, the Mexican War, the War Between the States and the Spanish-American/Philippine-American Wars
• Four interactive exhibits that allow guests to hear the haunting strains of the Duegello at the Alamo, vote for or against the secession of Texas in 1861, learn how to fire a Civil War musket or artillery piece, listen to Civil War-era bugle calls, or discover the role of the Texas Brigade at the Battle of Gettysburg.
• A life-size cross section of the gun deck of a Texas Navy warship, circa 1842.
• A full-scale reproduction of a Civil War artillery emplacement, complete with a six-pounder smoothbore cannon.
• A recreated sharpshooter’s position in Devil’s Den on the battlefield of Gettysburg.

New Exhibit, continued

• Dramatic dioramas of the battles of the Alamo, San Jacinto, Galveston and Sabine Pass.
• More than 70 interpretive panels detailing the role Texas troops and units played in the Texas Revolution, the struggle for the frontier, the Mexican War, the War Between the States and the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars.

Major funding for the exhibit was provided by the Texas Military Forces Historical Foundation, the Texas Navy Association, the Army Community of Excellence Program, the Texas Military Department, the Sons of Confederate Veterans, and numerous individuals who want to ensure the heritage of today’s Texas Military Forces are remembered and honored. Among those making significant personal financial contributions to the exhibit is Texas State Senator Leticia Van de Putte.

“Whether you are an adult, parent, student or young child, a hard core history buff or new to the subject, there is something in this exhibit for everyone,” says Jeff Hunt, director of the Texas Military Forces Museum. “We have dioramas and actual historic artifacts you can touch, period music, interactive computers that let you explore topics more fully, life size environments that virtually take you back in time, as well as in-depth interpretive panels for those who want to immerse themselves in the details of this period of history.” Uniforms, flags, weapons, equipment, newspapers and even examples of soldier rations from the Civil War are all on display in this one of a kind exhibit. “No state has a more fascinating and inspiring military history than Texas,” according to Hunt, “and nowhere else in Texas will you find a museum that lays out that saga as fully and as dramatically as the Texas Military Forces Museum.”
There is an old saying in Texas that goes “It ain’t bragging, if it’s true.” I think that phrase sums up the current state of the Texas Military Forces Museum quite nicely. The past twelve months have been a watershed year for the museum. Visitation has hit an all-time high — exceeding last year’s numbers by more than 6,000 people, and our previous all-time high by more than 5,000. That has been accomplished without significant marketing other than our website and Facebook page, the electronic sign on MoPac, and an ad in the Central Texas Field Trip Guide for teachers. Therefore, most of that increase comes from the success of the museum’s living history program and the remarkable improvements to our exhibits and facility. Both impress visitors and lead to the best kind of advertising — word-of-mouth.

Beyond doubt, the most significant change to the museum in 2013 is our new, 3,600-square-foot exhibit, From Gonzales to Appomattox and Beyond: The Texas Military Forces in the 19th Century. You’ll find a lot of pictures of this spectacular exhibit throughout the newsletter and details concerning it on the first page. This is the largest, most expensive and most innovative exhibit we have done, and it really represents our vision for what the other exhibits in the museum will look like in the future.

A great deal of credit for making this gallery a reality has to go to the Texas Military Forces Historical Foundation and the Texas Navy Association, both of which contributed significant funding to the project. We’d also like to acknowledge the support we received from the Army Community of Excellence program and the Adjutant General’s Department, which also helped fund important parts of the exhibit. Naturally, there were a lot of private donors as well, and to each and every one of them, we extend our deep appreciation for their assistance in helping us tell this important story.

Another important person in bringing this exhibit to life was Mr. Gary Guthrie of Columbus, Texas. Gary is the beau idea of a Southern gentlemen and passionate about preserving our state’s military history and honoring Texans who fought in the War Between the States. Gary has put more than 50 original Civil War artifacts on loan to the museum for this exhibit and has made provisions in his will that these objects be donated to the museum upon his death. Beyond question, his items are the backbone of the Civil War portion of the exhibit. The museum couldn’t ask for a better friend.

An exhibit of this scale takes an enormous amount of planning and hard work. Edward Zepeda and Lisa Sharik once again proved their inestimable value to the museum by carrying the work load of ten people in putting this gallery together. Not only did Lisa continue to manage the daily operations of the museum’s docents, gift shop and collections, she did a lot of painstaking research into the objects going into the exhibit and wrote the display labels for each and every one of them. As usual, Edward’s meticulous planning — he created the entire exhibit gallery on the computer

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It has been very busy here at TMFM since our last newsletter — between Close Assault, our new 19th Century exhibit, a summer with school tours almost every single day, as well as afterhours events and lots of visitors. The 19th century exhibit was a massive undertaking and I’d like to say a big thank you to all who volunteered or helped make this exhibit happen. If you’ve not been by the museum to see it yet, what are you waiting for? It is well worth the trip.

Our fall interns are Rohaise and Lindsay. Lindsay is continuing; she started with us in the fall of 2012 and Rohaise has an interest in Military Aviation and is part of the flight team at her school. They both were very involved in helping Edward with the planning and building of the new 19th Century exhibit, in addition to helping me with cataloging and archival work.

Volunteers and docents continue to be the backbone of the museum as they work everyday to educate the visitors to the history of the Texas Military Forces. The new exhibit could not have been finished without a massive amount of assistance from our volunteers, some of whom worked until 5 a.m. the morning of our opening day! We couldn’t manage without these wonderful people and we welcome new volunteers. Contact me by phone or email if you are interested in working at the museum.

Don’t forget that our annual 1940s Sweetheart fundraising dance coming up on February 15, 2014. It is my favorite museum event, and since a large part of putting on the event falls to me, I am invested in making it a great success. We hope to see you there, but if you can’t attend, think about donating something for our silent auction.

Be sure to visit our gift shop. We continue to add new items and the used books section is always a treasure hunt as new books are constantly being donated. The museum continues to take donations of documents and artifacts related to the Texas Military Forces and Texas military history. I am happy to answer any questions about the donation process or the museum’s artifacts. You may call or email me at the museum.

We have had many donations and loans since the last newsletter, so this time I am going to focus on a few items which are part of, or will be part of, the new 19th Century gallery.

A commemorative medal issued by the National Association of Mexican War Veterans which belonged to Ansel C Heard. Heard served as a corporal with Company G, 2nd Texas Mounted Volunteers and as a private with Company G, 1st Texas Mounted Volunteers. This medal is one of the original 3,097 made in 1876-77 and is said to have been made from melted down bronze from a captured Mexican cannon.
Powder horn which belonged to Henry Woodland, who served with the Texas Army 1836-1837, as a Texas Ranger in 1839, and was part of the Mier Expedition in 1842 and held prisoner until 1844. He also served in the Mexican-American War 1847-1848, and as part Green’s Brigade during the Civil War.

On loan from Gill Eastland, a carte de viste album from a German family living in New Braunfels who were Union sympathizers. This picture from the album is of Union Brigadier General August Willich, who had been a well-known Prussian officer before he immigrated to the United States.

A Model 1860 Colt Army revolver, issued by the Union Army in March-April 1863, and which likely saw service during the Civil War.

On loan from Gary Guthrie, a Confederate D-Guard Bowie knife engraved with “8th Geo” for the 8th Georgia Regiment.
It is not an understatement to say that the museum has accomplished amazing things in this last year’s time, and even though I personally love to use this newsletter to indulge my need to be clever, today the need to be sincere is paramount.

Whatever the efforts of the staff to put together this new 19th Century gallery, the work of the volunteers and interns deserve the lion’s share of the credit for the execution of the project. This exhibit with no exaggeration is at least five times as complicated as our first, and the difference between setting the bar higher and exceeding that bar is not lost on me.

No matter what the challenge that was set for them our volunteers met it with cheerfulness and quality of product. The timetable for the exhibit was relentless and at the very end it came down to a question of endurance with several of the museum’s reenactors working through the single-digit hours of the morning to finish the project. They have my personal thanks for without the great effort of that last push, we would not have made our projected deadline nor would I have had any sleep that last night.

In the museum community, we often talk about exhibit installations as a marathon with a sprint at the very end; this exhibit was indeed a marathon but the ending was more like dragging a truck by a rope in your tightly clenched teeth across the finish line. For those who had both hands on the rope, I thank you.

This last year has been one giant blur that has yet to slow down in any way, shape, or form. There are new projects to plan as soon as the last project has it’s last lick of paint. The ambitions of the coming years stand proudly against those of the past, as we relocate the Lost Battalion gallery to join with the rest of the Pacific Island stories in an effort to prepare for the reinvigoration of the Air Guard gallery. The addition of the F84-e Thunder Jet to the Air Guard gallery is a long awaited welcome addition that is the cornerstone of what will be.

Looking forward into the new year, with the efforts of the last so tender in recent memory, I resolve to be home on time, take less work home with me, use more time off, and maybe let my boss enjoy our well earned triumphs for more than five minutes before pointing out the things we still need to fix.
before he swung the first hammer or made the first cut — paid off in time and money saved. His genius for creating exhibits was in full bloom, as was his cheerfulness, can-do attitude and ability to solve problems. Moreover, Ed remained extremely flexible throughout, open to seizing new opportunities that arose while we were constructing the exhibit to make it even better than envisioned. The amount of work and time he put into finishing the space during the week before its grand opening was little shy of heroic.

The museum’s interns and volunteers played a vital role in bringing the exhibit to life. Under Edward’s mentorship, Lindsay Davis and Rohaise Firth-Butterfield, have developed remarkable skills in exhibit construction, mount-making and design. Nicole Marquis and Ken Larsen did outstanding, invaluable, hard and tedious work in making the videos for our interactive computers, Marc Hobbs and Kevin Stork created a breathtaking diorama of the Battle of Sabine Pass, Preston Furlow sewed more than a dozen, magnificent reproduction flags for the exhibit, Doug Rucker crafted incredibly life-like, full size, recreations of Devil’s Den and an artillery earthwork, while Michael and Sheryl Elledge built the remarkable ship deck and gun emplacement in the Texas Navy exhibit. Chris Hunt painstakingly created over 70 exhibit panels as well as designed and created the graphics for all the interactive computers in the exhibit.

Another group that deserves a huge thank you is the museum’s living history detachment. Not only did a lot of them work on the exhibit over the two years it was in the making, many of them worked on it during the last night before it opened — some of them (Shane Meyers, Fred Yokubaitis, Glen Villoz, Richard Gruetzner) stayed up until 5 a.m., before putting in a long day’s work during our Veterans’ Day Close Assault 1944 program. Without their help we wouldn’t have been ready for opening day.

In addition to what our staff, volunteers, interns and supporters have managed to accomplish in terms of exhibits this past year, the museum has taken other significant strides forward. We recently managed to obtain an F-84 Thunderjet and VH-34 Helicopter for the museum’s collection. The F-84 was the aircraft flown by the Texas Air National Guard during the Korean War. The VH-34 is the VIP version of the famous CH-34 helicopter. This particular aircraft was operated by the Texas Army Guard to ferry President Lyndon Johnson around whenever he was in Texas.

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The F-84 will be restored and placed inside the museum as the centerpiece of a new and expansive Air Guard gallery. The VH-34 is currently being restored by the Combined Support and Maintenance Shop on Camp Mabry, under the direction of Master Sergeant Kirk Smith. When completed, it will be placed on display on the parade ground at Camp Mabry.

Future additions to our macro-collection include the forthcoming arrival of a HUMVEE and an M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle. We’ve also undertaken an aggressive program to paint all of our outdoor macro-artifacts, several of which have already been done by MSG Smith and his talented crew.

Important improvements to the museum were also going on behind the scenes in the form of installing additional compact storage systems to house the museum’s ever-growing collection of three-dimensional artifacts and provide state-of-the-art storage for our impressive assortment of historic flags. The relocation of the flags and our research files to these new systems will allow us to create a custom-designed space for our photo archivist office, which will in turn allow for the future expansion of the museum’s gift shop.

So, 2013 was a banner year. But this is no time to rest on our laurels. If anything, we’ve set the bar even higher for what we can and expect to accomplish in 2014. When you get the chance, come visit the museum and explore its new gallery, then plan to come back soon because one thing is for certain, the improvements and changes will just keep happening!
The more I learn about museums, the more I am reminded of a very basic bit of advice from my 8th grade art teacher. He essentially said, 

_When painting, use the whole canvas so that at any stage of your work in progress it will appear to the casual observer to possibly be complete. By utilizing the entire canvas it will also allow you to create a more cohesive work as you layer on and add more detail._

As I walk through the museum, I see what might appear to visitors to be a complete work, but after seeing the long-term plans for renovations and having watched ambitious portions of these plans become reality, I know that the museum is a “living” thing that is constantly evolving and improving. The staff, volunteers, docents, contributors, and Texas Guard give it that life by continually adding more layers and detail to the visible work while solidifying the supporting infrastructure upon which its future depends. It has been and will continue to be an exemplary and enthusiastic march forward on a labor of love — on a work of art — a work in progress.

The 19th Century exhibit is just the latest installment at the museum which illustrates the maxim of using the whole canvas and then adding incrementally to it as you go. The exhibit is visually compelling and even without one more artifact or exhibit enhancement, it stands on its own merit as a complete work; however, the staff continues to layer more on it every day. This ongoing museum development is not just limited to the 19th Century exhibit. It is in evidence in every corner of the museum to one degree or another. It is also evident outside the museum.

The signs that have recently been added to nearby thoroughfares not only inform travelers of the museum, but also turn them into museum visitors by directing them to its doors. The occasional pieces of advertising placed in print media and online are becoming more frequent and increasingly more effective. These efforts are a work in progress and are largely driven by the availability of funding. Along these lines, a noteworthy work in progress is the website of the Texas Military Forces Museum. Go to www.texasmilitaryforcesmuseum.org.

I like the look of the new site even though it is not anything that I had personally envisioned. I like the comparative ease of navigation even though I certainly managed to get around the old site well enough. I especially like the photographs that remind me of the uniqueness of the museum and what it holds. The Chaffee tank in the snow is a personal favorite. It seems to me like it is in its natural habitat. All of the photos have some impact on me, and most tend to teleport me back to the museum for just a moment. I like standing in the Great Hall, and some of the website pictures put me there.

The website is a major work in progress. In consultation with museum staff about the needs and challenges presented by the outdated site, the Texas Military Forces Historical Foundation gathered funding and initiated collaborative efforts to overhaul the website. Not a particularly easy task due to the extensive and actively used archives linked to the site, as well as the site serving as a central hub for information on upcoming events. However, it was time to try an upgrade due to structural glitches underlying the older technology, which made regular maintenance and updating unnecessarily difficult. The need to continue conducting online transactions reliably was also a factor in the decision to go forward on website improvements.

Upgrading the website brings stylistic changes as well as purely technological ones. I’m sure I will like many of them, while others I might not even notice or be too excited about. The changes may not please everyone, but they will serve their purpose in providing the needed level of sophistication and professionalism for a modern website designed to get the job done. There will be aspects of the website that go up, and then are quickly replaced by something potentially more effective or appealing. The new website will not just appear one day in an entirely cohesive work. There has been and will be trial and error. It will remain a work in progress, much like the museum itself.

Every effort will be made to maintain essential core functionality of the website while adding and refining every nook and cranny of it over the months ahead. There are likely to be some odd problems with functionality as the website morphs into its final stages of development, but such problems are to be expected and will be manageable. For those that regularly follow the museum on its website...

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Record Breaking Attendance

In 2014 the Texas Military Forces Museum experienced record breaking attendance, with a total of 35,237.

In 2012, visitation was 28,261. The previous record for visitors was set in 2011 when 29,587 came through the museum. The graph illustrates the dramatic growth in visitation from 2010 to the present.

All of this has been accomplished without any significant marketing other than on the internet and in teacher resource guides. For the most part, the rise in visitation is the result of word of mouth spreading news of the museum and the remarkable changes that have taken place the facility since 2008.

From the Foundation President, continued

or check in from time-to-time, I think you will see a fairly complete canvas each visit you make to the site. Like the museum itself, it will always be a work in progress. The work continues. It remains a labor of love. It is with your help and support that this progress is made. There is a lot to be proud of.

To become a member of the Texas Military Forces Historical Foundation, renew your annual membership, or become a Life Member, go to the membership link at www.texasmilitaryforcesmuseum.org or contact the museum at 512.782.5659.

VOLUNTEER OF THE QUARTER: Continued

programs, posters and exhibit panels since 2007. The expertise and time required to develop each of these pieces is something you can’t understand unless you’ve done it or watched it be done. For example, each of the 70 exhibit panels Chris designed for the new 19th Century exhibit took hours to create – and more time if the panel included a map, each of which had to be created from scratch. For the new gallery alone, Chris donated professional services worth tens of thousands of dollars to the museum. The talent and meticulous detail that goes into all of Chris’ work is obvious to everyone who sees it. In honor of her contribution to the museum, Governor Rick Perry named Chris a “Yellow Rose of Texas” – a well-deserved award she received at the grand opening of the museum’s new 19th Century gallery.

Upcoming Events

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World War Two
Sweetheart Dinner & Dance

TEXAS MILITARY FORCES MUSEUM
CAMP MABRY • AUSTIN, TEXAS

FEB 15, 2014
6:30 PM

Dance to 1940s swing music by The Sentimental Journey Orchestra under the direction of Ted Connerly, and enjoy a romantic dinner surrounded by WWII history.

WWII Allied uniforms or 1940s attire welcome, but not required. Limited seating for 300. Proceeds benefit Texas Military Forces Museum.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TICKETS, VISIT
WWW.TEXASMILITARYFORCESMUSEUM.ORG
OR CALL (512) 782-5659