Museum Vehicles Get Facelift

Among the most impressive components of the museum’s collection of more than 25,000 three-dimensional artifacts are the 75 “macro” pieces on exhibit either in or around the museum. Among these “macros” are artillery pieces, water buffalos, a bulldozer, helicopters, jet fighters, armored personal carriers, combat engineer vehicles, jeeps, trucks, a half-dozen tanks and an Honest John tactical nuclear missile.

Needless to say, this large, impressive and diverse population of “big stuff” is very popular with museum visitors. Getting to stand in front of such massive examples of military hardware is instructive and awe inspiring.

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Volunteer of the Quarter: Brian Chapman

Brian Chapman is leading the team that is restoring the Korean War vintage F84 Thunderjet that is destined for display in the museum’s great hall in the near future. Brian is a professional aviation technician with a long-standing love for historic warbirds. He first got involved with the museum when he won a contract to...
Museum Vehicles Get Facelift, continued

This is even more the case when one ponders the teamwork necessary to maintain and operate this equipment in a battlefield environment, the enormous industrial and scientific capacity of the nation that designed, developed, built and deployed these weapon systems and the endless hours of training that went into teaching soldiers or airmen how to take care of and use them.

For the museum, having these fascinating pieces of history in its collection is a real benefit. It helps tell a story as well as attract visitors. But macro artifacts also bring challenges. Nearly 50 of the museum’s 75 large objects live outdoors. That means they are subjected to all the extremes of climate and temperature that Central Texas can inflict upon them: searing heat, bright sunshine, rain, hail, bitter cold, occasional ice or snow and high winds.

It goes without saying that none of those conditions is ideal for the preservation of historic artifacts. Hammered by the weather, materials of rubber, cloth and vinyl disintegrate, paint fades and metal rusts. When all of this equipment was in frontline use, it got the constant attention of the soldiers or airmen assigned to use it. That sometimes meant dozens of men looking after a single vehicle or aircraft. However, once that equipment is removed from the inventory and assigned to the museum as “historic” property, the caretaker tasks falls to the museum’s three-person staff and its corps of volunteers.

Happily, the museum does not face this challenge alone. Thanks to the efforts of Garrison Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Les Davis, and Deputy Garrison Commander, Colonel (ret) David Madden, arrangements were made with the Combined Support and Maintenance Shop #2 on Camp Mabry and the Maneuver Area Training Equipment Site (MATES) at Fort Hood to paint all the vehicles and weapons systems on outdoor display.

These two officers and sergeants Patricia Garcia and John Taylor then took the lead in doing the maintenance necessary to get several of these vehicles up and running so that they could be loaded onto transports and taken to the facilities where work would be done. The staffs at both CSMS #2 and MATES also poured a lot of effort into moving this equipment before doing an expert job painting the vehicles, applying the appropriate markings and doing repair work necessary to make each of them look ready to take the field. About 40% of the museum’s outdoor vehicles have now been painted and placed back on exhibit, with others being worked on currently and the rest waiting their turn.

**VOLUNTEER OF THE QUARTER: Continued**

construct a custom-made dolly to move the Huey helicopters on Camp Mabry’s parade ground to the maintenance facility on post, which would paint and do maintenance on those historic airframes.

Brian’s design was intricate, innovative and impressive. From there he volunteered to give his expertise and hard work to the F84 project, including tracking down missing instruments on the internet so that the cockpit can be fully restored.

Needless to say, without Brian, the restoration would be an impossibility, hence his designation as our Volunteer of the Quarter. If you are interested in being part of Brian’s crew on this important project, drop us an email at txmiluseum@gmail.com and we will put you in touch with Mr. Chapman.
The arrival of 2015 gives us a chance to look back on the preceding year and mark the progress the museum has made. We can be very proud of reaching a new high for yearly visitation – 39,006. That success is directly attributable to the fine work done by our volunteers, interns and staff. The museum’s programs for the public continue to receive kudos and increased attendance. Our constantly improving and expanding exhibits are marveled at by visitors. The Texas Military Forces Historical Foundation continues to grow and evolve into a force to be reckoned with in terms of fund raising and supporting the museum.

All of these things are visible to the public eye. They create a positive impression of the museum and lead to the best advertising any institution can have – “word of mouth.” Happy and impressed visitors tell friends, family and co-workers “you’ve got to check this place out” and large numbers of them do. The result is steadily increasing visitation despite our inability to spend any meaningful amount of money on promoting the museum.

None of that would be possible if it were not for the solid foundation of support the museum enjoys from the Texas Military Forces. A few years back, when the state budget was lean and getting leaner, it looked like the museum was going to be shuttered for lack of funds. It didn’t happen because the Adjutant General and his commanders thought the museum too important to go away and they found savings in the rest of the budget to keep us going.

Now that the economy is better, they are seeking to secure additional staff positions and a modest annual operating budget for the museum. Whether we get these badly needed resources or not depends on how the legislature works through the complex task of budgeting all the state’s needs and revenues. But whether we get all, some or none, of what we are shooting for, it is most notable that the effort is being made on our behalf. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Adjutant General and his command staff for that.

On a day-to-day basis, however, it is the Garrison Command at Camp Mabry who facilitates so much of what we do. The museum staff is subordinate and works directly for the garrison commander. We have always been blessed to have outstanding people in those positions – men who believed in us, supported us, lobbied for us and did everything they could to help us. None have done this better than the current Deputy Garrison Commander, Colonel (retired) David Madden and the outgoing Garrison Commander, Colonel John “Les” Davis. They are constant advocates and promoters of the museum – always looking for ways and means to help us grow and do better. Many of the kudos the museum staff receives and much of the success the museum has enjoyed are directly attributable to them.

Colonel Davis has completed his tour as garrison commander and is moving on to be Deputy Chief of Facilities and Maintenance for the Texas Military Forces. Colonel Madden will remain as Deputy Garrison Commander under our incoming boss, Major Paul Mancuso. I would like to take this occasion to thank Colonel Davis for the outstanding support he has given the museum. The extent to which he cares about this place and its mission is evident to anyone who has ever had the privilege of speaking to him. He and Colonel Madden have helped us make great progress over the last three years. We wish Colonel Davis the best of luck in his new post and welcome Major Mancuso to his new job; we look forward to working for him and helping him, help us, make the museum bigger and better in the years ahead.
Better late than never! It has been quite a while since our last newsletter, and as always, it has been very busy here at TXMFM. We have more groups scheduling tours, more regular families and tourists visiting and more members of the Texas Military Forces making use of our facilities for change of commands, promotions, retirements, etc. We almost reached 40,000 visitors in 2014. Just a few short years ago we had fewer than 20,000.

This spring and summer we will begin to take apart the current Texas Air National Guard exhibit and build a new one focused around an F-84E jet which we will be bringing inside the museum! Helping with this transition will be our spring interns: Colleen, Brooke and Justina. They are all continuing on with us. We like to move them to different areas so that they learn new things each semester.

Volunteers and docents continue to be the backbone of the museum as they work every day to educate the visitors to the history of the Texas Military Forces. 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.

Be sure to visit our gift shop. We are always adding items. We continue to take donations of documents and artifacts related to 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.

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Every so often it occurs to me that museums become a little insular, that we must make an effort to relate to and be known by the other museum institutions in the greater Austin area. This year the interns and I had the good fortune to visit the Bullock during the teacher’s conference this year. The event brought us into contact with many local museum organizations including those at the Capitol.

For the interns, who will be looking for jobs soon, this networking is invaluable for the museum it brings us a greater presence and more respect in the general community.

Often times it’s the small things we ignore and let slip by, like the monthly happy hour of the Austin Museum Partnership, or their coffee meetings. Often times in this direct exchange of ideas, more than one museums interests could be served.

Knowledge and ideas flow for knowledge sake and the combined brain-power of the museum community can be brought to bear on problems that seem overwhelming to an individual alone.

My hope is that the interns will learn this subtle lesson, that we have more to gain by working together in any situation, than we gain by petty empire building or misering of institutional resources.

Collections/Education Report, continued

Two items came from a Civil War soldier with Jones Texas Battery and are tied to the Battle of Palmetto Ranch. They are a D Guard knife and a 12-pound cannon ball. These items are all on exhibit next to the Battle of Palmetto Ranch diorama.

Also received was a collection of photographs related to the early history of the Texas Military Forces, including this image of Lt. Willie S Bower, with Company L, 2nd US Volunteer Infantry (Texas) from the Spanish American War. Bower joined the Texas Volunteer Guard in 1892 and continued to serve until 1910.
Dancing as Fast as We Can

With the 2015 WWII Sweetheart Dinner-Dance in the rearview mirror, I am now reminded that the Texas Military Forces Museum staff and the Texas Military Forces Historical Foundation still have quite a bit to do this year. However, I also remember some sound advice from Foundation Board member Bill McMeans who has wisely pointed out that from time-to-time we need to pause to reflect on what we have accomplished rather than on what we have yet to achieve. Advice well-taken.

In recent years, the Texas Military Forces Historical Foundation has taken the time to sift through its records and reorganize them for ease of showing compliance with non-profit legal requirements. Boring but important. The bylaws have been painstakingly reviewed and revised to streamline operations, and rules and policies have been put into place to comply with some of the best practices borne out of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002. Proxies and meeting notices have been reviewed and revised, and a newly updated strategic plan has been proposed and is going through the final stages of review prior to adoption. Grant requests have been successfully pursued and required after action reports submitted. Membership categories have been reconsidered and redrafted, and await additional improvements prior to implementation in conjunction with a membership drive. The museum website has been overhauled with the financial backing of the Foundation, and a more recognizable website presence for the Foundation itself is anticipated in the near future. The Foundation funded museum intern program continues to provide much needed support personnel for the museum, and a walk through the museum can be a tour of Foundation contributions to the ever-evolving exhibits and the physical infrastructure needed to contain them.

Whether it has been participating in museum events, helping to acquire artifacts, lending a hand on day-to-day operations, or just spreading the word about the museum and its dedicated staff and volunteers, the work of the Foundation has been a reliable source of support for the Texas Military Forces Museum. In addition, the Foundation Board members continue to look for ways to make a difference. In just the last few months, the Foundation has begun exploring the next phase of its development through the use of a non-profit consulting company to objectively review Foundation operations, relationships, and opportunities with an eye toward making the Foundation an even more visible and effective resource for the museum. Along these lines, the membership database and a related membership drive are expected to be a major focus of the upcoming year. The committee system which was revisited last year will once again become a focal point for more efficiently handling a growing work load. Task forces and working groups will undoubtedly become more a part of the Foundation’s approach to challenges, and efforts will continue to include more of the community in ongoing projects.

Putting on events like the WWII Sweetheart Dinner-Dance requires a tremendous amount of energy and work from the museum staff, interns, and volunteers. To pull off a successful event, the financial commitment from the Foundation is substantial and some serious networking is needed. The various moving parts for such a production are many, and a considerable amount of effort and attention must be dedicated to the project to make it work. The museum staff and key volunteers do most of the heavy lifting, and the excellent results are evident to those who attended. Ultimately, as in years past, the 2015 WWII Sweetheart Dinner-Dance will be judged a success. While it may not have filled the Foundation coffers, it will have added to them. While it may not have made the entire state of Texas aware of the museum and how important it is, it will have created some new ambassadors and a few more enthusiastic walking, talking advertisements for a learning destination in the heart of Austin, Texas that truly inspires like few others.

From what I have seen, we have all been dancing as fast as we can to make the museum a long-lasting and impressive memorial in honor of the men and women of the Texas Military Forces. There are many more songs to dance to and more room on the dance floor. We can do more if you will join us by becoming actively involved, making a financial contribution, renewing your membership, or just taking the time to tell someone about the museum and what it means. To become a member of the Texas Military Forces Historical Foundation, renew your annual membership, or become a Life Member, go to www.texasmilitarymuseum.org or contact the museum at 512.782.5659.
The Texas Military Forces Museum received a high honor on February 24 when it was given a Texas Star award by the Texas Living History Association. Museum Director, Jeff Hunt, accepted this prestigious honor at the association’s annual conference, held in Dallas Heritage Park. Hunt also gave a talk during the conference on the Rewards and Challenges of doing 20th Century Military Reenacting.

The Texas Living History Association is a statewide organization of professional and amateur historians who believe that living history is one of the most effective means of connecting people with the past, as well as an instructive method of doing research and a rewarding hobby. The good work they do across Texas and Southwest is evident from the praise their efforts draw from visitors to a host of historic sites and public events. The association seeks to promote excellence in the field of living history interpretation and assist its practitioners by sharing skills, connections, insights and lessons learned.

The Texas Star award is presented by the association to an organization or historic site for “outstanding contributions” to the field of living history in the state of Texas. The Texas Military Forces Museum was given this year’s award in recognition of the fine work done by its more than 50 living history volunteers since 2007 at events such as Muster Day, Hands-On History and Close Assault 1944 at Camp Mabry, as well as programs and presentations they have put on at a wide variety of events and locations across the country. Congratulations to our living history volunteers for this impressive achievement!

**New Tank on Exhibit**

The latest addition to the museum’s outdoor exhibit of armored vehicles is one of the rarest of World War II tanks – an Australian Sentinel AC1 (Australian Cruiser tank Mark I). This is the only tank designed, developed and produced in Australia during World War II. Only four are known to exist. The tank has a 2-pounder main gun and two .303 Vickers water-cooled machine guns (hence the oddly shaped gun mantlets in the bow and turret – each designed to encompass the water jacket of a Vickers). Once the U.S. entered WWII, work on the Sentinel was abandoned because it was easier, quicker and cheaper to equip Australian units with the American-made Sherman tank. Only 65 Sentinels were built and none saw combat or deployed outside of Australia.

The Sentinel on display at the museum was purchased from a private collection by Wargaming, Austin which is part of the company that produces the popular World of Tanks and World of Warplanes multi-player online games. They placed the vehicle on loan to the TXMF Museum in October 2014 for an initial period of six months with the option to renew the loan as many times as they liked. We hope and expect that the Sentinel will be with us for quite awhile. But if you want to make sure you get an up close look at this unique and remarkable piece of history, come visit us before it goes away!
Museum Contact Information

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- Director – Jeff Hunt 782-5770
- Deputy Director – Lisa Sharik 782-5394
- Deputy Dir. for Exhibits – Edward Zepeda 782-5467
- Photo Archives – Bob and Jean Gates 782-5797
- Foundation 782-5282
- Email txmilmuseum@gmail.com

Upcoming Events

- Muster Day/Texas Military Forces Open House: April 18-19
- Central Texas Air Show: April 2-3
- Close Assault 1944: May 23-24
- Hands on History Night: July 25