

National Museum of Americans in Wartime Open House, October 24-25, 2009

By Scott Taylor

The National Museum of Americans in Wartime held its 19th annual Open House on October 24 and 25, 2009 at the "Tank Farm," the home of the Virginia Museum of Military Vehicles in Prince William County, Virginia. The rolling grass and lush forest make a beautiful backdrop for viewing military vehicles.

This event is intended to raise awareness of the new National Museum of Americans in Wartime, which is intended to open on Armistice Day, 2012.

This museum will be a unique facility, spread over some 30 acres both indoors and out. Covering all major 20th and 21st century conflicts that the United States has fought in, the Museum will be constructed around replicas of battlefields that visitors will be able to walk through and, in many cases, actually interact with through reenactments. Simulators and operational military vehicles and aircraft will provide museum visitors with a taste what the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines



Lieutenant General Richard Trefry (ret.) is a member of the Museum Board as well as a 40 year US Army veteran, from 1943 to 1983. He is standing in front of the museum's M3 Lee.

◀ Allan Cors, Chairman of the Museum's Board of Trustees, Founder and President of the Virginia Museum of Military Vehicles and winner of this year's MVPA Bart Vanderveen Award, watches with the crowd as the tanks are put through their paces. Photo by Paul Bird.



The British portion of the motor pool included no less than 5 Dingo Scout Cars (four of which are seen here), as well as a trio of Ford-built Universal Carriers, a C15TA Armoured Truck, an M3 Grant tank and a Valentine Mark III Infantry Tank.



Not all of the vehicles on the track were tanks. This Dingo Scout Car hits a patch of mud at high speed.



The DC National Guard flew a UH-1 Huey into the event on Sunday. Photo by Paul Bird.

experienced in these conflicts. Although there were some last-minute complications with site selection for the museum facility, Museum President Craig Stewart said that a decision was imminent and an announcement would be made before the end of the year.

The over 3,000 visitors who registered for the Open House got a small taste of what the new museum would offer. At this event, members of the public could get up close with running military vehicles, see and touch real equipment, and interact with reenactors representing a variety of countries and eras. This was a completely different experience from the static presentation of most museums, which can show people what the vehicles and equipment looked like but cannot give a sense of what it's like to actually see a tank drive by, to feel the ground shaking or the heat given off by a flamethrower. This event was truly "living history."

The centerpiece of the Open House is being able to get up close to the more than 50 vintage military vehicles, many of them tanks, that are part of the VMMV's collection. Owned by Allan Cors, recipient of the Bart Vanderveen Award at this year's MVPA Convention, the VMMV has a world-class collection of military vehicles from all eras and around the world, with a "heavy" emphasis on armor. This event is one of the few places where people can see such



A few lucky visitors got the opportunity to actually drive an armored vehicle – a British FV432 APC – around the track. ▶

◀ Marc Sehring from the VMMV takes a break after putting the S-Tank through its paces. Photo by Paul Bird.



Always a crowd-pleaser! The flamethrower in action.

exotic vehicles as the Swedish S-Tank, the Swiss Pz-61, and Soviet AFVs on the move. Classic American-built armor was also on display, including one of the oldest M4A1 Shermans in the world, an M3 Lee, M7 Priest, and more. As well as vintage vehicles, more current vehicles such as the Mk 48 Logistics Vehicle System and a prototype of the new Marine Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle (both part of the Museum's collection) were also on display.

Despite threats of bad weather on Saturday, the rain held off until the mid-afternoon, allowing a ceremony to be held to honor the veterans present and the Open House and to present US Army veterans with Army Freedom Team Salute commendations. Each veteran was presented with a certificate of appreciation and a commendation letter signed by Secretary of the Army Pete Geren and Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. George W. Casey Jr. After that, visitors could explore the vehicles and encampments and watch vehicles be put through their paces. Some visitors got to go for a ride in an armored vehicle and a lucky few actually got to try their hand driving a British FV432 armored personnel carrier – not an experience they are likely to forget! The United States Marine Corps' Historical Company had a very nice display of Marine infantry uniforms and equipment from the 20th and 21st centuries, and also put on an





The DC National Guard flew a UH-1 Huey into the event on Sunday. Photo by Paul Bird.



An M274 Mule takes some happy folks for a ride around the motor pool area. Photo by Paul Bird.

impressive firepower display, firing a flamethrower and a Browning Automatic Rifle. Sunday's beautifully sunny weather allowed a UH-1 Huey from the District of Columbia National Guard to drop in for a visit and helicopters from American Helicopters, Inc. to take winners of the silent auction up for a flight around the area, as well as the RC Tank Combat had some small-scale tanks performing for the crowd, and a range was set up for young people to take shots at tank targets.

This is a fantastic event, and a very positive experience for both volunteers and visitors; in fact, both volunteers and visitors came from as far away as California and Canada to participate. For information on next year's Open House and news about the National Museum of Americans in Wartime, check the Museum's website at www.nmaw.org.



Postwar Soviet reenactors talk with visitors in front of a BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicle.



Members of the public examine the T-34/85 after its demonstration. Painted on the side of the turret is the name Mikhail Kalashnikov – Kalashnikov visited the museum several years ago and recalled how he had painted his name on the side of the T-34 which he crewed in 1941.



Strong volunteer support is critical to the success of this event. These folks are hard at work fitting the .50 calibre machine gun to an M20 Saturday morning before the public arrived. Beside the M20 is a rare M19 AAA vehicle.