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New Museum to Showcase Soldiers' Personal Wartime Experiences

By PETER ROFF

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America's wartime past is about to come alive, just outside the Washington Beltway--22 miles from the nation's Capital.

In an area once rich in farm land, organizers of the new American Wartime Museum plan to develop a 70-acre facility alongside Interstate 95 in Virginia's Prince William County where the stories of those who served in all branches of the U.S. Military and on the American home front can finally be told.

[Read more about the military.]

Spanning the period from World War I to the present, the museum's centerpiece is an extraordinary collection of more than 100 working, vintage military vehicles presently in private hands--some of which were recently put on display during a late August "open house" during which people were given the opportunity to ride in some vintage armored vehicles and to see others in action.

Organizers say the museum's purpose is to provide visitors with the opportunity to learn about the "personal wartime experiences" of those who have worn the nation's uniforms and to give all those who come there a sense of "the realities of war and the sacrifices made by Americans in order to preserve our nation's freedoms."

Utilizing what they call "a unique approach" to the presentation of history, organizers say the museum will:

- Cover all major conflicts of the 20th and 21st Centuries and include all branches of the U.S. armed services;
- Emphasize personal wartime stories from the battleground and the home front;
- Incorporate a large collection of operational military vehicles from WWI forward, both on display and in demonstrations and reenactments;
- Allow visitors to hear, touch, and experience military vehicles, aircraft and naval vessels;
- Provide a firsthand view of vehicle restoration in the Renovation Hangar.

The museum's collections and activities, organizers say, "will provide a backdrop for the stories of American men and women who have served their country in all branches of the military and at home since World War I" through the skillful implementation of what they are calling "Landscapes of War," an effort to show servicemen and women at work alongside operational tanks and aircraft, live-action demonstrations, and interactive exhibits that provide a meaningful context to the narrative of America's wartime experience.

The museum will also be home to the National Veterans Visitor Center--a place where veterans can hold reunions and record their wartime stories.

Efforts are currently underway to raise the $50 million the organizers say are needed to bring their dream to life, with the grand opening planned for Veterans Day 2014. Meanwhile organizers are inviting people to share their own wartime stories--whether experienced in uniform, by a family member, or on the home front--through the museum's Web site.

Peter Roff is a contributing editor at *U.S. News & World Report*. A former senior political writer for United Press International, he is currently a senior fellow at the Institute for Liberty and at Let Freedom Ring, a non-partisan public policy organization. His writing has also appeared on Fox News' Fox Forum.