
TOURING THE NATIONAL D-DAY MUSEUM

By Don Maddox

Armchair General recently had an opportunity to tour the National D-Day Museum in the city of



The National D-Day Museum in New Orleans, LA.

New Orleans. As you probably already know, the museum, which opened June 6, 2000, covers D-Day in great detail. From an overview of World War II's economic and political routes to the build-up and military mobilization of Allied Forces, the 70,500-square-foot museum presents a collection of personal stories, preserves important materials for research and scholarship, and inspires future generations to learn life lessons--teamwork, the value of democracy, unsung bravery--from the most complex military operations ever staged. What you may not be aware of is that the museum also covers the aftermath of D-Day and the fighting onto the end of war in Europe. The museum also covers the fighting in the Pacific in great detail and has much to offer for those interested in the Marine and Army landings in that theater of operations.

Admission to the museum is \$10 per person. Admission is \$6 for seniors or military members

with ID. Admission is free for military members in uniform.



World War II veterans giving a lecture in the main hall of the museum.

The museum was founded by Dr. Stephen E. Ambrose, University of New Orleans Boyd Professor of History, in 1991. Professor Ambrose was a well-known authority on World War Two and the author of numerous best-selling books including *Citizen Soldiers*, *Americans at War*, *Undaunted Courage* and *The Victors*. He is also well-known for his work with director Steven Spielberg as historical consultant for *Saving Private Ryan*, and the mini-series based on his best-selling book, *Band of Brothers*. Dr. Ambrose passed away at the age of 66 in October, 2002, but his dream of helping to preserve and restore Americans' memory of history is alive and well at the National D-Day Museum.

The museum is located in downtown New Orleans, Louisiana, and is both easy to find and to get to. Numerous hotels and restaurants are located near at hand.

The National D-Day Museum hosts numerous events throughout the year of interest to both history buffs and the general populace. The museum frequently serves as a location for authors to come and talk about their books, and for veterans to discuss their experiences in World War II. Various lectures, displays, and more formal events occur on a regular basis. While I was there, the museum was celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Normandy



German small arms weapons and artifacts

Invasion.

The museum is currently divided into multiple sections which cover the conflict using a wide variety of state-of-the-art, interactive displays.

These displays intermix oral histories from veterans, photographs and documents, artifacts and some rare weapons. In addition, numerous slide shows and short films covering the buildup to D-Day and the actual operation are placed at intervals as you walk along the main museum route. All of this is presented in a chronological manner that's easy to follow and does a great job of introducing the conflict to visitors who may be less familiar with the details of World War II.

Some of the exceptional exhibits include the display of German small arms weapons, the Higgins Boat, the animated map of the naval and land battles in the Pacific, and the section on the atomic bombs. The great displays are too numerous to mention here, and if you visit the museum expect to spend 2-3 hours just to walk along the main route. If you stop to watch all of the movies and listen at the audio stations, the tour will take considerably longer.

The Malcolm S. Forbes Theater is located on the ground floor of the museum and shows two movies several times each day. The first film is "Price for Peace," by James Moll. This film, in association with Stephen E. Ambrose and Steven Spielberg, chronicles the events in the Pacific Theater of WWII, from the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 to the defeat and occupation of Japan in 1945. The second film is "D-Day Remembered," which combines film footage and photographs from American, British and German archives with the voices of people who actually planned or participated in the invasion. Both of these films are very much worth seeing.



The planned expansion to the National D-Day museum will triple the current size of the facility!

Although the museum contains enough interesting material to keep you busy for a day or two, there is a lot more coming soon. While I was there, the museum had exhibits in the main hall detailing the plans to greatly expand the National D-Day Museum. The Congress of the United States recently designated the National D-Day Museum as *America's National World War II Museum*. This \$150 million dollar expansion will triple the size of the existing museum and add a great deal of new content over the next five years. The museum will cover all the services and theaters that played a part in the war and will create a center for research to study WWII. When completed in 2009, the National World War II museum will be a world-class facility that will no-doubt vastly increase visitation and interest in what the museum has to offer. *Discovery Hall*, just one of the planned expansions, is estimated for completion in 2005 and will be four stories high. Another addition will include a 400-seat dome theater that will showcase original documentaries and history programs. From what I could see, the new plans look very impressive indeed!

The National D-Day Museum just doesn't exist in order to preserve history, the facility also honors those who served in the conflict. The "Road to Victory" was initially began as way to honor heroes and to raise funds to pay for the completion of the museum. The bricks line the

halls of the museum as well as the sidewalks and walkways. The bricks honor WWII veterans and other heroes.

The National D-Day museum receives a lot of help from the volunteers who help to staff the museum and ensure that everything runs smoothly. The volunteers can help guide you to various sections around the museum, answer questions, and provide you with other helpful information.

The museum also contains a gift shop, which has all sorts of items ranging from t-shirts, pens, posters, figurines, jewelry and collectables. The shop also contains a small book store and has numerous videos and DVD



Staff volunteers Joyce Dunn and Jane Rogers. The volunteers at the museum keep everything running smoothly and answer questions.

tapes available for sale.

If you haven't yet visited the National D-Day Museum, you ought to consider doing so. There is enough to keep you busy for at least an entire day here, and with all the planned expansions there will be plenty more to see soon. You can find out more information by visiting the National D-Day Museum's official webpage (<http://www.ddaymuseum.org/index.html>), and there are some online displays there as well.

By Don Maddox
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