

The Ship's Bell

Placer County Council,
Navy League of the
United States
Auburn, CA



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

President's Message.....	2
Memorial Day 2025.....	3
2024 NSCC/NLCC Annual Unit Awards.....	5
Yuba City High School Awards Ceremony.....	6
The Battle of Castle Itter.....	8
Lemoore.....	14
Rose Hoepfer Scholarship.....	15
Congressional Art Contest Winners.....	16
Placer High School Awards.....	19
Travels with Natalie.....	20
Travels with Natalie Pictures.....	27
Community Affiliates.....	42

President's Message

By Rebecca Dunavent

It is truly hard to believe that half of 2025 has already passed! The months of May and June are filled with so many things that it seems like every day has some kind of activity. May started out with the BIG DAY OF GIVING and thanks to you - our wonderful Navy League members – the Placer County Navy League received over \$2,000 in donations! Your incredible support is what allows us to help fund our adopted units and youth groups.

Many of these awards and scholarships are able to be given in person such as Don and Nancy Goard travelling to Vallejo to present the John Paul Jones sword at Cal Maritime and Don and Mona Anderson presenting the Rose Hooper Scholarship at Foresthill and the Theodore Roosevelt awards to the Shasta Sea Cadets. And also a huge thank you to Bonnie Potter, as she ensures that all of our adopted active duty units receive certificates for their quarterly awards when we can't present them in person. We literally get to personally acknowledge more than two dozen young people each year!

I also had the honor of presenting the Theodore Roosevelt award at the Yuba City High School NNDCC. After all of the awards have been presented, each one of the graduating seniors says a few words about how the program has changed their lives. By the end, there isn't a dry eye to be found as the cadets tell their stories. What incredible young men and women! The end of May is always a somber time as we remember our fallen at Memorial Day. Our Luther Burbank NJROTC unit was the color guard for the ceremony at the New Auburn Cemetery. The weather was absolutely perfect as Bonnie so eloquently helped us remember what this day means and as the Gold Star families were recognized and memorial wreaths were laid.

June brings Flag Day, June 14, when in 1777 the Continental Congress adopted the U.S. flag although it wasn't formally adopted as a national holiday until 1949. June also brings Father's Day, a day especially meaningful to my Navy career as it was my dad, CDR Leon Lewis, that encouraged me to consider joining the Navy and swore me in and pinned my ensign "butter bars" on me in 1987.

Please take care and enjoy this wonderful summer!

2025 Memorial Day Ceremony

By Bonnie Potter

Organized by Placer County Council of the Navy League, Auburn area veterans, residents and local dignitaries observed Memorial Day on Monday, May 26th at the New Auburn Cemetery. Members of the Auburn Area Honor Guard, American Legion Post No. 84, American Legion Auxiliary Unit 169, American Legion Riders Chapter 84, Veterans of Foreign Wars Placer Foothills Post 904 and their Auxiliary, Knights of Columbus Mother Lode Assembly 2778, and the Placer County Navy League combined to remember and pay tribute to those who died in our nation's service. I was honored to serve as the Master of Ceremonies.

Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, is a day of remembrance for those who paid the ultimate price in defense of our freedoms, and a time to recognize the contributions and sacrifices made by their family members. Scout Troop 13, assisted by Placer County Navy League, American Legion Post 84 and other volunteers placed flags at veterans' graves on the Saturday prior to Memorial Day. The ceremony included the Luther Burbank High School Navy Junior ROTC Color Guard, the National Anthem sung by Placer High School students Kaelyn Cobabe and Olivia Hollingsworth, the Pledge of Allegiance led by Angelina Chandler of American Heritage Troop 522, and invocation and benediction by American Legion Auxiliary Unit 169 Chaplain Bonnie Bradbury. Speakers included Congressman Kevin Kiley, Mayor Sandra Amara, and Placer County Supervisor Cindy Gustafson. Flowers were presented to Gold Star family members, and there was a beautiful wreath provided by our council which was placed at the War Memorial by two Gold Star Daughters, escorted by a Gold Star Son. The Auburn Area Honor Guard rendered honors for our departed comrades with Taps played by Placer High School students Joel Aviles and Kevin Reyes.

Following Taps, there was a release of white doves. Brief ceremonies with remarks by me, a wreath laying and the rendering of honors followed at the Old Auburn, Newcastle and Maidu Indian Cemeteries.

2025 Memorial Day Ceremony



Top Left: Wreath laying at Newcastle Cemetery for 2025's Memorial Day Ceremony

Top Right: Rear Admiral Bonnie Potter as MC at New Auburn Cemetery's 2025 Memorial Day Ceremony

(Photographs by Bonnie Potter).

Below: The Color Guard at New Auburn Cemetery's 2025 Memorial Day Ceremony (Photograph by Janelle Kershaw).



2024 NSCC/NLCC Annual Unit Awards

By Rebecca Dunavent

The national awards board of the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps received and verified the 2024 inspection scores from national headquarters. There are over 400 Sea Cadet units and our own Sacramento Division/TS California won multiple recognitions!

2024 MORGAN L. FITCH, JR. AWARD - TOP NLCC TRAINING SHIPS IN THE NATION

2nd Place: TS California (Sacramento Div)

2024 GEORGE S. HALAS AWARD - TOP COMBINED UNITS IN THE NATION LIST

4th Place: Sacramento Div / TS California

2024 Chairman's Award for Recruiting/Retention (TOP 20% OF ALL ELIGIBLE NLCC UNITS LIST)

1st Place: TS California (Sacramento Div)

2024 Top Unit in Each Region

Region 12-5: Sacramento Division

Certificate of Honor: TS California (Sacramento Div)

Certificate of Merit: Sacramento Division

Also, a big BRAVO ZULU to the MATTHEW AXELSON DIVISION for receiving recognition for being among the most improved units from the previous year for raising their annual inspection score by more than 20%!

Congratulations!!!

Yuba City High School Awards Ceremony



Above: 2025 Yuba City High School National Navy Defense Cadet Corps Theodore Roosevelt Youth Medal Recipient Lieutenant Avery Barr (Photograph by Rebecca Dunavent).

Below: Yuba City High School National Navy Defense Cadet Corps Rifle Team (Photograph by Rebecca Dunavent).



Yuba City High School Awards Ceremony



Above: Yuba City High School Senior Naval Science Instructor LT Maury Casteneda with his graduating seniors (Photograph by Rebecca Dunavent).

The Battle of Castle Itter

By **Natalie Brennan**

I am quite sure that we all know that May 8th of 2025 marks the 80th anniversary of V-E Day, or Victory in Europe Day, where Germany officially surrendered to the Allied Powers (or May 9th for the USSR). However, I am going to discuss an event that occurred just a few days prior, which might just be one of the strangest battles fought in World War II. This is the story of the Battle of Castle Itter, where enemies joined forces to defeat the Waffen SS so as to protect the very important prisoners held within the castle walls.

The date is May 5th, 1945. The Nazi leader of Germany, Adolf Hitler, has already committed suicide and his beloved Third Reich is crumbling fast under the combined Allied powers of the United States of America, Great Britain and its commonwealth, Free French, and the Soviet Union pressing in on all sides.

Castle, or Schloss, Itter dates its beginnings back to the thirteenth century and is located on one of the many mountains in Tyrol overlooking the Brixental valley in Austria. Prior to the war, Castle Itter already had what historian Stephen Harding described as “massive walls, steep-sided ravines on its west, north, and east sides, and what was essentially a dry moat on its south side, it required only the addition of strategically placed tangles of concertina wire and a large intricate lock on the front gate.” During World War II, such a castle with its natural and man-made defenses worried the Allies due to the potential for the Germans to retreat into and rain death down on any assault troops, similar to the bunkers of the Normandy beaches or the high mountains and structures of Monte Cassino. While Itter’s cellars were not meant to serve as living quarters, they were still vast and deep, and could possibly serve as an adequate bunker to hold out an artillery barrage. However, in 1943, Castle Itter was not housing German high command officers during the war; rather, it held VIPs (very important prisoners) within its walls, and became part of the Dachau concentration camp network.

The high profile prisoners who found themselves in Castle Itter were mainly French generals and political officials. They included Édouard Daladier, the former Prime Minister; Maurice Gamelin, former Commander-in-Chief of the French Army; Michel Clemenceau, the staff officer in the military intelligence agency; and Paul Reynaud, the Former Prime Minister of France—the one who surrendered to Germany in 1940. Other prisoners included labor leader Léon Jouhaux and his colleague Augusta Bruchlen—the latter of whom volunteered to be arrested; General Maxime Weygand; the tennis star Jean Borotra, famed “Bounding Basque”, who was arrested for not supporting the Nazis despite the fact that he joined the Vichy government; and former key member of the Vichy government-turned resistance fighter

François de La Rocque.

By 1945, the Germans, who were retreating from all fronts of the war, found themselves in Austria, where the far more die-hard Nazis and Wehrmacht troops chose to stand firm and fight to the end. Oftentimes these die-hard units imposed their will on the other beleaguered units, not giving them much of a choice but to stand and continue the fight under the possible threat of execution or arrest.

However, there was one particular group that chose to not fight the Allies, which were members of the Austrian Resistance. Since the annexation of Austria in 1940, the resistance could do little more than oppose the Nazi regime through non-violent means. But by 1945, the resistance knew that now, since the Allies were overrunning the Germans, they could finally act. They provided the Allies with vital intelligence about the German defenses as well as spearheading advances throughout Austria's rivers and valleys. The ultimate goal of the Austrian Resistance, however, was to protect the Austrian civilians from the wrath of the Waffen SS. Many times, Austrian citizens would hang white flags or even the Austrian flag outside of their houses, and the SS would not hesitate to publicly kill them because the SS saw them as defeatists. Throughout the war's history there is overwhelming evidence of Germans, namely the Waffen SS and certain parts of the Wehrmacht, taking reprisals out on the civilian populations, from the entire Eastern Front and Balkans campaigns, to the towns and villages like Oradour-sur-Glane in France. Because of these atrocities, for the prisoners in Castle Itter, there was a very real fear that their SS guards would simply kill them rather than surrender them to the Allies.

However on May 4th, after the commander of the Dachau concentration camp committed suicide, and the SS commander of Castle Itter disappeared, the castle was all but devoid of any guards. The castle was so empty of guards that Reynaud and Clemenceau were able to walk out of the castle gates and into the town of Itter itself before having to turn around due to the fact that the village was still crawling with German SS soldiers who were setting up roadblocks and machine gun nests to repel any enemy force.

Since the prisoners of Castle Itter knew that it was only a matter of time before these SS troops remembered their existence, they came up with a plan. The first phase of the plan was to sew together a French tri-color banner to hang inside of the castle's inner wall so as to alert Allied planes that they were there—and also to most likely avoid a repeat of what happened at Monte Cassino (that's a story for another day, so stay tuned). The second phase of the plan was to make contact with the Austrian underground resistance and their leader, who ironically enough was an SS Captain: Kurt-Siegfried Schrader.

Something to note about player number one in this battle, SS Captain Schrader: he very easily could have fit the stereotypical SS officer that the Waffen Schutzstaffel certainly made for themselves. He was a decorated soldier and had even served as a body guard for Hitler's headquarters for a time. However, after he was badly wounded in France, he decided to break with the Party, defect, and joined up with the Austrian resistance.

While Schrader swore to help the prisoners, he knew that his help could only buy them time that they might not have for long. For example, if any higher-up SS officer decided to storm the castle and kill everyone in it, Schrader's rank of captain would not be enough to stop the massacre. All it might get him would be a lot of dead prisoners and possibly him being put in prison at best. Schrader decided to try and make contact with the American troops who were closest to the castle. He sent out his Czech cook to do the job. The reason Schrader did not go himself is very likely because at this point in time, if he had, he would have probably been shot dead with no questions. This was due to the brutality that the Waffen SS displayed towards Allied troops and POWs, and the fact that the Allies were past having mercy for them as a result.

While near the town of Wörgl, the cook was almost caught by a patrol, but was saved by the next player in this event: German Major Josef Gangl. Unlike Captain Schrader, Gangl was a career soldier in the regular German infantry, the Wehrmacht, since 1935. He was involved since the war's beginning in 1939, seeing action in Stalingrad, Normandy, and Bastogne. Gangl had seen it all and, like Schrader, became disillusioned by 1945, choosing to betray his oath of loyalty to the National Socialist German Worker's Party. It is worth noting that at this point in time, it mattered little how these very highly decorated German officers endeared themselves to the Austrian Resistance; what mattered was protecting the prisoners of Castle Itter from the SS. So, Gangl and the Czech cook raced off to try and find the Americans, succeeding when they spotted a few Sherman tanks in a village some miles away. Gangl, still wearing his uniform, stood up in the car and put his hands up in surrender. He was taken to the third and final player: twenty-seven-year-old Captain John "Jack" Carey Lee of B Company of the 23rd Tank Battalion in the 12th Armored Division.

When told of the plight of the prisoners at Castle Itter and the imminent danger they were in, Lee ordered his men to ready themselves for a rescue mission, following Gangl with seven Sherman tanks, including his own: *Besotten Jenny*. However the number of tanks would go down to four when the wooden bridge they were using to cross a river gave way, leaving three behind. This did not deter Lee, so he and his column kept on rolling. Upon reaching Wörgl, the Americans were joined by the Austrian Resistance, and several German soldiers

who were loyal to Gangl. Leaving two of his tanks in Wörgl to help the resistance repel any renewed attack by the SS, *Besotten Jenny* and the tank *Bosch Buster* continued on until they came upon a bridge that was wired for detonation. Leaving *Bosh Buster* behind to guard the only way in and out of Castle Itter, Lee, a dozen Americans, and *Besotten Jenny* followed Gangl and his dozen or so German troops towards the castle. Upon arrival, *Besotten Jenny* was turned around to block the gate while the men went inside the castle. *Sabaton History* channel historian Indie Nidel summed up the image that the strange sight that this motley crew presented: an American tank captain, a German Army Major, and a Waffen SS officer, all planning to risk their lives protecting French prisoners from die-hard Nazis inside the walls of a medieval Austrian castle. One can only imagine how odd this must have looked.

While discussing what was to be done, Schrader warned Lee and Gangl that he had seen several Nazis nearby Itter with machine guns and anti-tank guns, which would prove a problem. Since Lee knew that the American reinforcements were not far away there was a chance their rescue mission would be successful. The officers ordered the French prisoners to go into the castle's keep for their safety while the American and German soldiers guarded the castle walls. Even though the Americans and Germans were lightly armed with sub-machine guns and rifles as compared to the SS weapons outside of Castle Itter, the firepower that *Besotten Jenny* provided could give them a good chance at coming out of this endeavor alive. However, there still was the difficult issue of trust amongst these new allies, who hours before, were sworn enemies. Would these former enemies really be able to successfully join forces against an even greater enemy?

At 04:00, Lee and the others were awakened to the sounds of gunfire from an MG42 attacking the main gate while *Besotten Jenny*'s cannon replied with the same ferocity. The American and German soldiers on the west wall were able to see SS troops armed with grappling hooks trying to seek a way into the castle, but the gunfire had spoiled the element of surprise. Schrader, Gangl, and the German soldiers fired down on the SS from the castle windows and walls while Lee and the Americans defended the gatehouse with *Besotten Jenny*. It was at this point during the fighting that the aforementioned question of trust between former enemies went out the window, because everyone now knew that their own survival depended on trusting each other.

By 08:30, the fighting escalated. The Americans and Germans both spotted a German 28mm anti-aircraft cannon and an 88mm cannon near the castle's northwest wall, followed by trucks filled with SS troops. The 88mm fired, the shell striking the castle walls, causing

the entire structure to shudder under the impact, tailed by the Waffen SS's 20mm shells peppering the walls. From the main gate, *Besotten Jenny* bucked and was blown back as a shell slammed into its front. Seeing that the tank was on fire, the crew jumped for their lives, fleeing the burning hulk seconds before another anti-tank shell put down the Sherman tank for good.

Now that their armor was gone, and their chances of victory—let alone survival—had dwindled to below fifty percent, the French prisoners took up arms themselves and went to help the defenders at the gatehouse. Paul Reynaud, an elderly man at this point, fired his MP43 through an open window, unaware that a sniper had him in his sights. Gangl raced over to help the former French Prime Minister, but wound up intercepting the sniper's bullet meant for Reynaud. The German Major who saw the war in Europe from the beginning, had been killed just three days before its end.

Mourning Josef Gangl would have to wait, however, because the 88s continued to smash the castle walls and SS troops swarmed up the slopes. With their radio shot to pieces, Schrader managed to phone the Austrian Resistance, ordering them to help at once or the castle would fall, before another shell cut the phone lines. The French, Germans, and Americans were fighting for their lives in what now seemed like a losing battle. With Gangl dead, their ammunition running low, and the wounded piling up, it seemed that the end was near. Moving the wounded from the castle walls into the relative safety of the keep, the defenders readied themselves to meet their fate as the SS brought in several panzerfaust to blast what was left of *Besotten Jenny* and the gatehouse to smithereens, allowing them to storm the castle and kill everyone in it.

However, just when hope seemed lost, there was a rattle of gunfire from the woods. The American cavalry had stormed in on their Sherman tanks just in the nick of time. With this renewed firepower and reinforcements, the SS troops scattered into the woods. The castle was saved, as were the lives of the French prisoners, thanks to the unlikely alliance between former enemies in what might just be one of the strangest events in World War II.

After the castle was liberated, the body of Josef Gangl was eventually interred in Wörgl's municipal cemetery. To this day he is regarded as an Austrian national hero for his anti-Nazi resistance movement, and there is a street in Wörgl that bears his name. Captain Kurt-Siegfried Schrader, because he was a Waffen SS officer, was arrested. Fortunately for him, a note signed by all of the French VIPs held at Castle Itter ensured that his sentence would be short. He was released in 1947 and rejoined his family in Germany, passing away in the mid-1990s. Captain John Lee tried to become a candidate for the Democratic nomination for county sheriff in his home state, but did not win the election. He worked a series of odd jobs

throughout the rest of his life, which unfortunately was a short one. Captain Lee died at the age of fifty-four from asphyxiation, “likely as the result of acute alcohol poisoning,” according to Stephen Harding. A few months before his death, when asked about his feelings on the Battle of Castle Itter, Harding writes that Lee, “the hero of ‘the Last Battle’ thought for a moment and then replied. ‘Well, it was just the damndest thing.’”

Unsurprisingly, I had heard about this event through my favorite band *Sabaton* and their additional YouTube channel *Sabaton History*. Watching their history video on the Battle of Castle Itter, I cannot help but agree with the historian: why and how on earth has there never been a movie about this event? I know that it might be hard to believe, but the truth is oftentimes stranger than fiction, and this event is one such example.

Sources:

Harding, Stephen. *The Last Battle: When U.S. and German Soldiers Joined Forces in the Waning Hours of World War II in Europe*. Hachette Books, 2020.

Sabaton History. *The Last Battle—The Strangest Fight of WWII—Sabaton History 085 [Official]* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PX9y7z1qndQ>



Left: Castle Itter, where the Last Battle took place.

Center: Major Josef Gangl of the German Wehrmacht.

Right: American Captain John Lee.

(Photographs found on <https://theunravel.com.au/the-battle-for-schloss-itter>).

Placer County Council Awards Sailors of the Quarter at Naval Health Clinic, Lemoore

By Bonnie Potter

Naval Hospital Lemoore (NHL) was commissioned 1 July 1968 as a 67-bed hospital by the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED), Washington, D.C. The command provides quality health care to 32,000 eligible beneficiaries at Naval Air Station (NAS) Lemoore, California and NAS Fallon, Nevada. The command also provides dental care and medical administrative support to Navy, Marine Corps and international students at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), Defense Language Institute and the Center for Information Dominance in Monterey, California.

Naval Hospital Lemoore's current hospital building was dedicated on 12 May 2000. It is a 150,000 square foot facility that, at that time, included 16 inpatient beds, 4 operating rooms, in addition to several primary care and specialty clinics. **On 30 June 2014**, NHL closed its inpatient units as well as its 24-hour urgent care clinic following extensive reviews by BUMED. Obstetrical deliveries and gynecologic, orthopedic and general surgery cases requiring inpatient stays are now performed by NHL Navy surgeons via an external resource sharing agreement with Adventist Medical Center-Hanford. **On 30 September 2017**, Naval Hospital Lemoore was renamed Naval Health Clinic Lemoore to align with its outpatient surgical model of care. Additionally, an Urgent Care Clinic was opened to re-establish after-hours acute care for beneficiaries.

On January 1, 2020, Placer County Council of the Navy League officially adopted Naval Health Clinic Lemoore and has been providing Sailor of the Quarter and Sailor of the Year awards ever since. We recently sent awards for the Sailors of the Quarter for 1st and 2nd Quarter FY 25 which were awarded by the Commanding Officer, Captain Aaron Werbel, MSC, USN.

THE ROSE HOEPER STORY

By Bonnie Potter

Rose Hoeper was born December 7, 1921, in Kansas City, Kansas, the third of four children. After graduating from high school, she went to work for Southern Pacific Railroad. Rose's life was forever changed on her 20th birthday, when Pearl Harbor was bombed and the United States was thrown into World War II. On that "Day of Infamy," Rose decided future birthdays would no longer be a day of celebration for her; instead, they would become days of remembrance of what her nation had endured.



Rose met her first husband, Ralph Oyer, while they both worked for the railroad. They moved to California and eventually settled in Foresthill, where Ralph worked as a butcher at the local grocery store and Rose stayed home to raise their three children. After the passing of her first husband, Rose married Ralph Hoeper. During World War II, he had served in the U.S. Navy as a radio technician on a submarine in the Pacific Theater. Shortly after they were married, Rose went to work as the office manager for the Foresthill Telephone Company, which Ralph owned. Rose helped her husband run the company, continuing a few years after his death. Although Rose did not attend college, she was very business-savvy and believed in a strong work ethic, both of which contributed greatly to the success of the business. In 2005, Rose sold the telephone company.

Rose was an ardent supporter of youth programs, Navy League of the U.S. and her beloved community of Foresthill. When she died in 2018, she bequeathed an endowment to the Placer County Navy League. With that bequest, the Placer County Navy League created a scholarship in her name, memorializing her hard work, quality of character and steadfast dedication to her country. Rose Hoeper will live on through the scholarship, that supports deserving youth from Foresthill High School, helping them to pursue their dreams through training or higher education.

This year there were two recipients of the Rose Hoeper Scholarship – Alyssa Kalb and Zoe Ordway. They were selected following a rigorous application process developed by our Council, with the final interviews being done by Don Anderson, Shirley Paris and Don Goard. Alyssa plans to pursue a career in Pediatric Nursing. Zoe plans to pursue a career in Agricultural Advocacy for rural communities. The checks for \$1000 each were presented by Placer County Council Board members Don and Mona Anderson at the Foresthill Night of Excellence. Congratulations Alyssa and Zoe and best wishes for continued success as you pursue your dreams!

Congressional Art Contest Winners

By Don Goard

For several years I have been invited to be one of the judges for the Congressional Art Contest. Each representative solicits youth within their district to submit a painting/drawing representing a patriotic theme. The winner from each district has the work displayed in the Capitol for a year. The winner and a parent are also flown to Washington D.C. for a ceremony acknowledging all the winning art.

Although Congressman Tom McClintock, due to redistricting, is no longer my representative, he still invites me to participate as a judge from Navy League. All his judges are veterans, so theme tends to outweigh artistic expertise. This year, the winner and runners-up excelled in both categories.

A reception was held at the Congressman's office on May ninth. Artists were introduced and ribbons were awarded by the Congressman.

First Place: Anya Gaddam, *Fighting for Family*, Vista Del Lago High School—El Dorado County

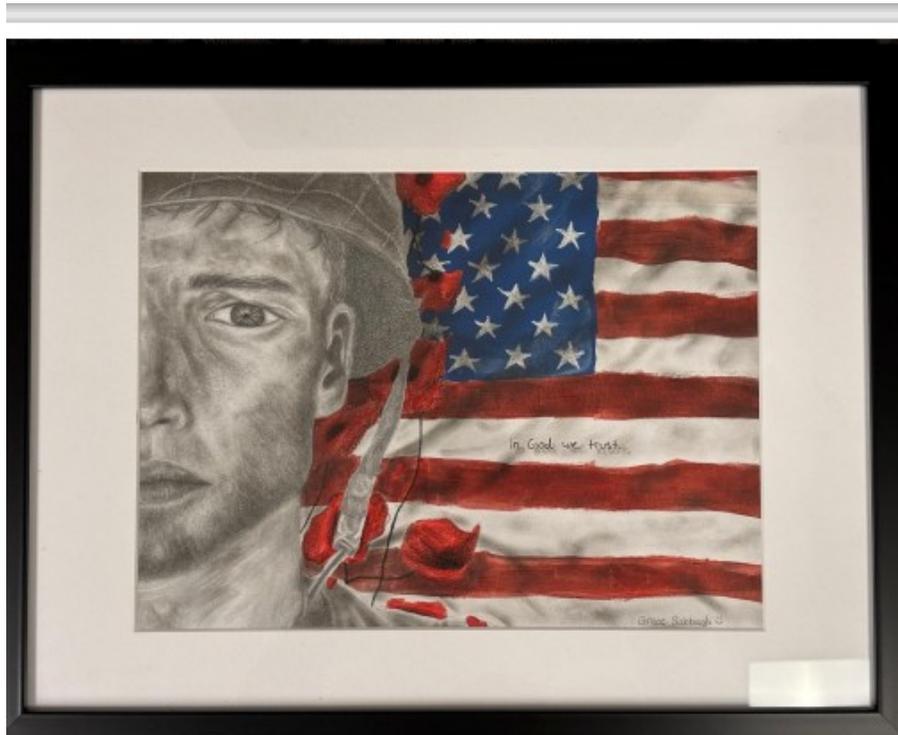


Fighting for Family

Description: This piece was inspired by the practice of the Military Tap Out. I thought it was a very interesting ceremony for a military family, for the Air Force, and for our Nation, which is our big family. I drew a US Air Force graduate getting his Tap Out by his daughter to further push this idea. I added a fighter plane and also a stitched US Flag on his uniform to demonstrate how ingrained America is to him, as if it were stitched on to his identity while simultaneously being dependent on his family by portraying the close bond between the graduate and the daughter.

Medium: oil paint

Second Place: Grace Sabbagh, *Sacrifice*, John Adams Academy— El Dorado County



Sacrifice

Description: In my art piece, the soldier represents the sacrifices they made and make for our great nation. The red poppies is a symbol of remembrance of the fallen soldiers. They were the first flower to bloom on the battlefield, and the red color represents the bloodshed. The American flag represents our freedom. I included "In God we trust" because while trusting God in battle, you're not just fighting for yourself.

Medium: Graphite, paint, color pencil

Third Place: Hadley Easley, *In God We Trust*, Minarets High School—Madera County



"In God We Trust"

Description: Bald eagle, American flag, Rose, Stars. All elements of Good Ol' America.

Medium: Acrylic paint

*All photos and descriptions were courtesy of Don Goard
and edited by Natalie Brennan*

Placer High School Awards

By Bonnie Potter

Last fall the Placer County Council of the Navy League approved a new benefit for becoming a Community Affiliate. The dues to become a Navy League Community Affiliate are \$460, half of which is returned to the Council as a rebate. The board created a \$200 scholarship to be awarded to a Placer High School student each year that our Community Affiliates renew their membership, beginning with the graduating class of 2025. On May 19th, Lassila Funeral Chapel Community Affiliate member Greg Chapman presented the first awards! Sophie Moser was awarded the Lassila Funeral Chapel Navy League Scholarship, Abigail Labrecque was awarded the Chapel of the Hills Navy League Scholarship, and thanks to an additional donation of \$300 donation by TGH Aviation Community Affiliate member Rich Anderson, Lillian Huber received a \$500 TGH Aviation Navy League Scholarship. Congratulations to Sophie, Abbie and Lily!!



*Above Left: Sophie Moser receiving the Lassila Funeral Chapel Navy League Scholarship from Greg Chapman
Above Center: Lillian Huber receiving the TGH Aviation Navy League Scholarship from Greg Chapman
Above Right: Abigail Labrecque receiving the Chapel of the Hills Navy League Scholarship from Greg Chapman
(Photographs by Bonnie Potter).*

Travels With Natalie

By Natalie Brennan

Since I succeeded in getting my Master's degree in World War II Studies at Arizona State University in 2023, I went on a trip to New Orleans with my parents for the National World War II Museum's Celebration of Graduates during the first week of June this year. The following is a recollection of what we did during the 81st anniversary of D-Day and the museum's 25th anniversary.

Day 1-June 4:

We awoke at 02:30 and flew out of Sacramento to Houston, then to New Orleans. We arrived in New Orleans at around 13:30 and stayed in a hotel a couple of blocks away from the museum. Having been to New Orleans once before in September 2021, being there in June was a whole new, somewhat unpleasant, experience. It was excruciatingly hot and humid to the point where my shin-length trousers were practically stuck to my legs within five minutes. We had drinks at a bar that had a deuce-and-a-half in the back patio, then went to a Mexican restaurant near our hotel for dinner. Bear in mind, we were unable to go into the French Quarter this year, as we were staying in the warehouse district where the museum is located and it would have been an uncomfortable mile-long walk to and from.

Day 2-June 5:

We relocated to the Higgins Hotel right across from the museum, where we were able to get a discount due to my attending the Graduation Ceremony on the 7th. The hotel is beautiful, filled with old propaganda and war bond posters, a bar called Kilroy's that had the table lights made of tank driver helmets. My father and I immediately went to the museum to explore the special exhibits and the new pavilion.

First thing we did was stop on the second floor of the Memorial Pavilion (building #1) where a model of the USS *Arizona* sat. The next thing we did was go into the special exhibit that was all about the Aleutian Island campaigns, which is an oftentimes overlooked theater of the war due to its initial occupation being mostly a diversionary tactic by the Japanese. It was there we learned about the Battle of the Komandorski Islands—the last gunfight between the Americans and Japanese—which occurred on March 26, 1943. Two American cruisers and four destroyers under Rear Admiral Charles McMorris went out to intercept a Japanese convoy in an attempt to block the supply line and kick the Japanese off of the island. McMorris was

not expecting to sail right into a large group of Japanese ships, consisting of two heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and four destroyers under the command of Vice Admiral Boshirō Hosogaya. Despite being outnumbered, McMorris threw caution to the wind and began a gunfight. The cruiser *Salt Lake City* endured multiple hits until finally being struck in the engine room, rendering her dead in the water. However, Hosogaya misinterpreted the American smoke screen for enemy aircraft and withdrew his force minutes from victory, allowing McMorris to achieve a crucial victory and enabled the Americans to return to the island of Attu.

Then we went down into the Forbes Gallery's Voices from the Front, a newer addition to the museum's exhibits where we saw personal artifacts including a map with every single American military patch, a bridal gown made entirely out of parachute nylon, to Paul Tibbits' bomber jacket. Another thing to note about this gallery is that it has two stations where one can interact with Artificial Intelligence interviews of veterans and civilians who were affected by the war, ensuring that their stories will be immortalized long after they have gone. While watching George Takei's interview, my father remarked that it would be interesting to know if Lou Conter ever did an interview for this. No sooner had he said that, we heard a voice—who turned out to be a bomber pilot—that sounded eerily like Lou's. In all honesty, we were thankful that Lou never made an official appearance anywhere in the museum because we would have all been blubbing messes; being there during the D-Day weekend with veterans and Holocaust survivors was already emotional enough—having Lou's face and voice thrown into the mix would have put us over our emotional limits.

We then went into the new Liberation Pavilion, which had not been completed when we went to the museum last time. This one was an emotional roller coaster of a gut punch because the first thing one sees is a wall of dog tags and portraits of soldiers, with words stating that during WWII, 16,000,000 Americans went off to fight, with 400,000 not coming home. Then it transitions into the post-war aftermath with all of Europe and Asia in complete ruins and how the people had to pick up the pieces. Then it goes into the Holocaust, showing just how premeditated the genocide was with the book burnings, Kristallnacht, public humiliation of Jewish people, and the Wannsee Conference—where Germany created a literal quota of how many Jewish people lived in each country that they planned to conquer, and how many would be killed. Then it goes into a replica of the Secret Annex where Anne Frank and her family hid, a projector screen showing photographs of her and a voice reading over parts of her diary. Alas, Anne died of typhus in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp days before the camp was liberated; only her father Otto Frank survived. The Liberation Pavilion's Holocaust section went through

the deplorable hardships that the prisoners endured as well as the unit patches of the American divisions who liberated the camps. There was a small theater that showed a four-part short film that consisted of testimonies of camp survivors and liberators. I think I went through two pieces of tissues throughout this section due to the overall tragedy, but also the fact that I can't watch old people cry because of how contagious their tears are.

Exiting the Holocaust section, where we are exposed to the absolute worst of humanity, the exhibit changes to how soldiers kept their faith in humanity. The showcase figures for this subject were the Four Immortal Chaplains: Father John Washington, Rabbi Alexander Goode, Reverend George L. Fox, and Reverend Clark Poling. On February 3, 1943, the U.S. troop transport ship *Dorchester* was torpedoed by a German U-boat, sinking rapidly. These four chaplains—all of different faiths—tended the wounded and helped men into lifeboats, even giving away their own life preservers, which ultimately resulted in their deaths. After helping everyone escape, the four linked arms, sang hymns in their respective religious languages, as they rode the ship to the depths of the Atlantic.

Then the exhibit transitioned to the exploits of the Monuments Men and Women, who scoured the war-torn cities to recover and return missing and stolen art that was pilfered by the Germans for Hitler's Führermuseum. It showcased copies of some of the artwork that these art scholars, sculptors, artists, archivists, librarians, and educators rescued, including the Ghent altar piece and the Brugge Madonna and Child. It even had a call to action at the end of the exhibit, urging people to report to them if they have any ideas on where the still-missing pieces of art could be located.

Upstairs shows the struggles of homecoming, especially for the women and minority soldiers, who returned to a country that still viewed them as second-class people. It also contained the Nuremburg and Tokyo War Trials. One of the display cases contained the execution hood worn by Japanese Minister of War Hideki Tojo, and a cyanide bottle that was found with the body of Japan's former Prime Minister, Prince Fumimaro Konoe, after he committed suicide to avoid going to trial. The other displays in this final portion of the Liberation Pavilion included the occupation of Germany and Japan, the Cold War, the new technological advancements that were made, the fight for civil rights and gender equality, and how President Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms still apply to the world today as a result of the deadliest war in human history.

After touring the Liberation Pavilion, my father and I went downstairs to view the special exhibit titled "Fighting for the Right to Fight: the African American Experience in

World War II.” As one might expect, this exhibit detailed the history of African American soldiers throughout America’s history and the struggles they had to overcome due to the racism of a country that viewed them as less than second-class citizens before, during, and after World War II. Perhaps the most poignant artifacts of this exhibit was a Klan hood with photographs of KKK rallies behind it, and the Whites Only signs. It is one thing to see such things in photographs and footage, but it is a whole other thing to see it physically standing right in front of you.

That evening, my father and I went to the Memorial Pavilion to sit in on a conference with museum founder “Nick” Mueller, who discussed his new book *Preserving the Legacy*, where he talks about how he and Stephen Ambrose came up with the idea for the D-Day Museum, which eventually grew into the National WWII Museum. During the reception, I got to meet several classmates who went through the Master’s program, as well as two WWII veterans—one from the infantry and one from the Third Army. All in all, it was a good day.

Day 3-June 6:

We had to wake up earlier for this day due to it being the 81st anniversary of D-Day and the museum’s 25th birthday. We cheered as all of the veterans and Holocaust survivors walked into the museum, it was an awesome experience. Upon entering the museum, I went on an ASU Alumni tour of the Archives and Vault at 09:00. These artifacts included coveralls worn by a riveter, a mess kit from a POW in Japan, diaries of POWs in Stalag 4 in the Baltic region, to uniforms worn by an American Medal of Honor recipient, and a Luftwaffe pilot. There was even a letter written by a factory worker to her sister written on toilet paper of all things. Physically seeing these artifacts and being able to touch some of them really fired off the dopamine for my brain.

At 11:00 was the D-Day Remembrance Ceremony, named after Dr. Hal Baumgarten, who was wounded five times on Omaha Beach—one of those wounds was where he almost got his cheek and jaw shot off. What was most poignant about the video that was played of Baumgarten’s interview was that he was saying the names of his comrades who were killed that day, saying that he has to speak their names so that they will not be forgotten. It was a beautiful ceremony, with live music, video screens displaying voices of veterans long gone, to welcoming the ones who are still here.

After the ceremony, we alumni and our guests went into the education sector of the museum where we had lunch and met fellow classmates for the first time and talked amongst

ourselves and the faculty. Bear in mind, throughout my education in this Master's program, I had only corresponded with some of these people through our discussions because the whole thing was online, so this was a wonderful experience to be able to put faces to names at long last. During an interlude, my parents and I went on a brief tour of the Road to Berlin exhibit, but I had to duck out in the middle of it to go to a workshop with my classmates and instructor. It was a nice little icebreaker discussion where we updated everyone on what we were doing now and how we were utilizing what we learned in the program. My folks and I had dinner at the Higgins Hotel's Rosies on the Roof bar and restaurant that night before turning in.

At 19:00 we boarded a shuttle bus to the Orpheum theater where we were treated to a symphony called *Eyes of the World: From D-Day to VE-Day*. It was a multimedia symphony with a live orchestra, Broadway stars singing songs, stories, artifacts, and photographs and footage. It followed Robert Capra, J.D. Salinger, Earnest Hemingway, and Leigh Miller as they experienced the war from the D-Day invasion to the end of the war in Europe. Now, I swear it must have been a ghost wink and that Lou Conter and my grandfather must have had a hand in this, but my folks and I were seated in the floor seats near the stage... two rows behind the WWII veterans and Holocaust survivors while the rest of my classmates were in the nosebleed seats. Either way I was not complaining.

The symphony contained Glenn Miller classics, and many other songs; one in particular was called "Tomorrow Belongs to Me," from the musical *Cabaret*. If you've never listened to this song, it is basically the Nazis declaring that the future is theirs; the song is eerily very upbeat and happy, but what the symphony did—which I thought was brilliant—was that while the song was being sung, the screen in the background showed images of all of the Nazi atrocities, from carpet bombing civilians in Warsaw, London, Copenhagen, etc., and Nazis rounding up Jewish people to cart them off to their deaths. The song's lyrics already make one feel uneasy, but the added photographs just solidified the discomfort.

By the time the last song of the first act rolled around, it was very tough to keep a dry eye. This was because the song was titled "Too Young To Say Goodbye," and it was accompanied by Robert Capra's infamous photographs of Omaha Beach. Knowing that 2500 Americans, some of whom were only eighteen years old, were slaughtered on the sands of the beach, the song and photographs made it felt like a knife was twisting my heart. The first piece after intermission was no help either: Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings*, with the transitioning photographs of Amsterdam, to an inconspicuous building, to an insignificant-looking bookshelf that conveniently opened to reveal a secret room. The end of

the piece was accompanied by a photo of Anne Frank and some passages of her diary. It was then that I could not hold in the tears any longer. The only other time I could not stop the tears and silent sobs was when it showed a picture of the 28th Infantry Division at the Hurtgen Forest receiving the coveted mail and Christmas presents from their families back home. The storyteller then said that this photograph was showing the last mail call for the men in the picture because a day or so later, they were all killed. As if that was not bad enough, the photographs then cruelly showed each individual from the last mail call picture close up. It was at this moment that I really wished that I was the Tin Man and didn't have a heart because it was shattered. For context, I am actually crying and choking down sobs while writing this and reflecting on the memories.

While there is a full length video of the symphony in the White House, it does not show the slideshow and mutes every so often. But here is a link of the brief overview of what this symphony was: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKZzExAZArE> Do take a look at it; it might be something we could try and raise enough money to bring these people over here.

Day 4-June 7:

At 09:00 my folks and I went on a guided tour of the Road to Tokyo exhibit where a military historian led us through the Pacific Theater. It began with a map of the whole theater, and the historian said that Japan never really intended to invade Hawaii or the mainland U.S., they just wanted to build a defensive perimeter around the resources they had 'acquired' from the British, French, Dutch, and Americans. Then it transitioned to Operation WATCHTOWER—the Guadalcanal campaign, before delving into the propaganda that both Americans and Japanese used to demonize each other. Due to the time constraints, we had to skip New Guinea and the China-Burma-India Theater. However, the historian tour guide went on to discuss the Gilbert Islands, namely the Battle of Tarawa, before moving onto the Battle of the Philippine Sea, Guam, Tinian, and the Great Marianas Turkey Shoot.

The guide then relayed the Battle of Leyte Gulf, which at the end of the day, was a battle that might not have really needed to happen. The reason is because the U.S. went with both MacArthur's and Nimitz's campaigns. Nimitz wanted to take the strategically valuable islands like Guam, Tinian, Saipan, and Kwajalein that would not only cut off Japan's resources, but enable the Americans to reach Japan's mainland for the carpet bombing

campaigns. Whereas MacArthur wanted to go retake the Philippines due to him promising to return after he was withdrawn from Corregidor. The Battle of Leyte Gulf was where the kamikaze attacks officially ramped up. This was especially because after the Marianas Turkey Shoot, Japan had practically lost all of its professional pilots. Japan was growing desperate to fend off the Americans in any way they could, and that included recruiting novice pilots, train them to only take off and keep the plane in the air so that they could crash into American ships.

Then we got to Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and these were the bloodiest battles in the Pacific. By this point Japanese troops no longer resorted to suicidal banzai charges, but digging an intricate network of tunnels to hide in. Iwo Jima saw the highest amount of American casualties, while around 12,000 Americans were killed on Okinawa. Such losses horrified American military planners, who knew that those numbers would only go up if Operation DOWNFALL—the invasion of Japan itself—occurred; that’s why the atomic bombs were dropped in the end (see the August 2024 newsletter).

After the tour we had a couple of hours to kill, so I went with my parents to finish the Road to Berlin exhibit. After having lunch I did a solo rapid fire tour of the D-Day invasion while my father took my mother to the Liberation Pavilion. Unfortunately it had to be a rapid fire tour due to me having to be at the graduation orientation at 14:15, and I am a chronic early bird, but at least I still got good pictures. After orientation, we alumni and graduates made our way downstairs to the backstage canteen where our commencement ceremony took place. Here is the link to the graduation ceremony if any wish to watch: <https://vimeo.com/1083657432> After graduation, we made our way to the American Sector Bar and Restaurant for a reception. I had an absolute blast talking to my classmates, getting into discussions with them, talking to one of the curators of archives who graduated with us, and making connections. I don’t think I have ever been so extraverted that many days in my entire life and I am still recovering from it. All in all, it was a magnificent trip and I hope to be able to continue attending them.

Travels With Natalie Photos

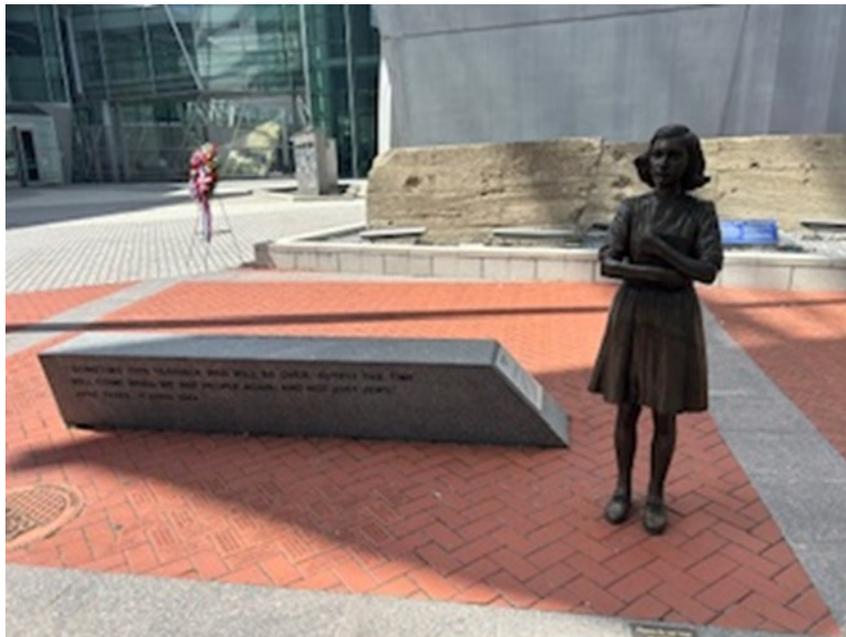
All Photographs were taken by Natalie Brennan at the National WWII Museum in New Orleans, LA.

Outside the Museum



Above: Fragments of the Atlantic Wall. Note the pockmarked craters from the Allied guns.

Below: Statue of Anne Frank. The plaque reads: "Sometime this terrible war will be over. Surely the time will come when we are people again, and not just Jews—11 April 1944."





Left: The War Dog and Handler statue to honor the courageous dogs who helped the Allies win the war.

Below: Lest We Forget: The Mission statue. This was a more somber statue to look at to honor the 88,000 US Airmen killed in the Second World War. You can clearly see that this is a briefing for bomber pilots on their targets for the day. However, the five desaturated figures represent the ghosts of their comrades who never returned from their mission. Gone, but never forgotten.





Above Left: Statue of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz.



Below Left: Statue of Supreme Allied Commander and President Dwight David Eisenhower.



Above Left: Statue of Chief of Staff George C. Marshall.

Below Left: Map and Patch Collection located in the museum's Forbes Gallery: Voices from the Front.

Forbes Gallery & Boeing Center





Left: D-1 jacket worn by Major Paul Tibbets.



Above: Wedding gown of Antoinette "Toni" Cilberti, made entirely out of parachute nylon.



Left: M-4 Sherman tank with the Rhino prongs attached to the front, which enabled the Allies to break out of the French hedgerow country.



Above Left: Natalie Brennan standing in front of a model of Lou Conter's ship USS Arizona.

D-Day Invasion



*Below Left: The dummy paratrooper of D-Day, "Rupert." The British dropped these dummies near the Pas-de-Calais to distract the Germans. These made an appearance in the film *The Longest Day*, though those Ruperts were far more detailed.*

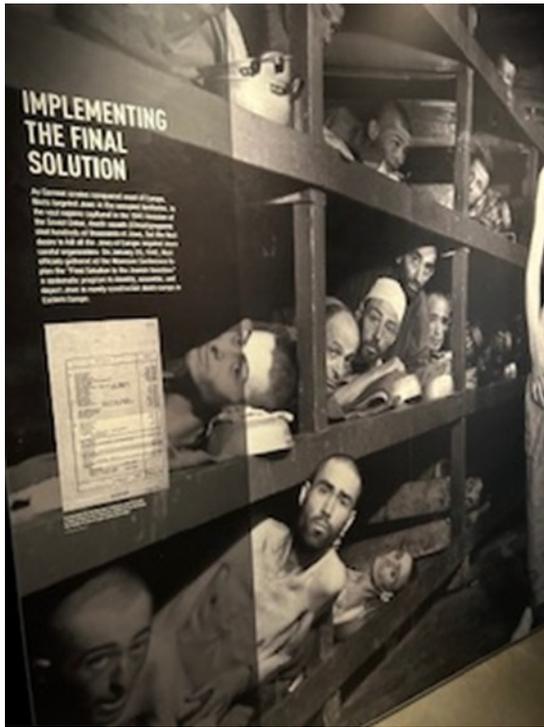


Above Left: Typical uniform of a German Infantryman in 1944.



Below Left: The uniform of an American Assault Infantryman during the D-Day invasion. Note the belt-like contraption around the waist. These were life-belts, meant to act as floatation devices for when the troops waded through the water. However, due to the fact that many troops were not instructed on where to place these Life-belts—which was supposed to be under the arms—they placed them around their waists. Upon hitting the water, when the life-belt inflated, the Americans would find their heads underwater while their bottoms and legs were sticking out of the water. These life-belts unfortunately killed more people than they actually saved.

Liberation Pavilion



Above Left: Photograph of Jewish prisoners and the deplorable housing conditions they were held in at the camps. On the left side is a copy of the Wannsee Conference, where the Final Solution was written.

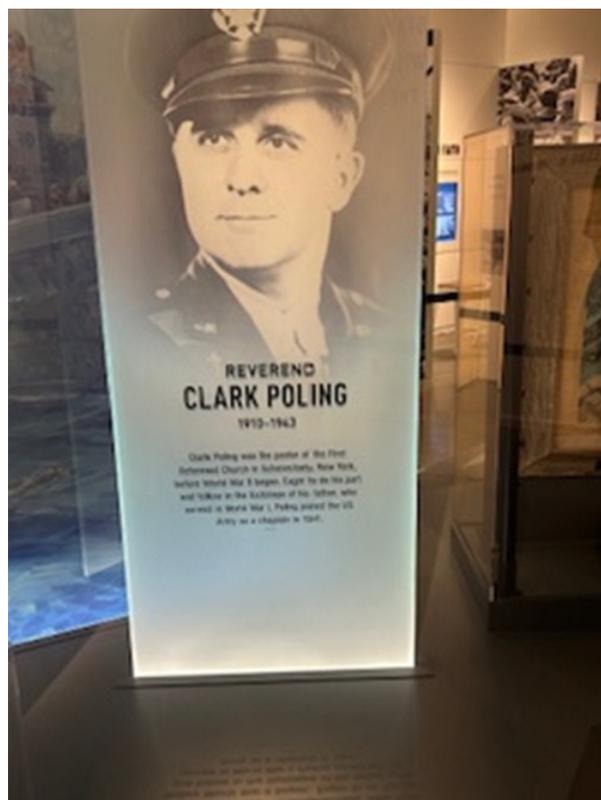
Above Right: The division patches of the American units who liberated the camps.

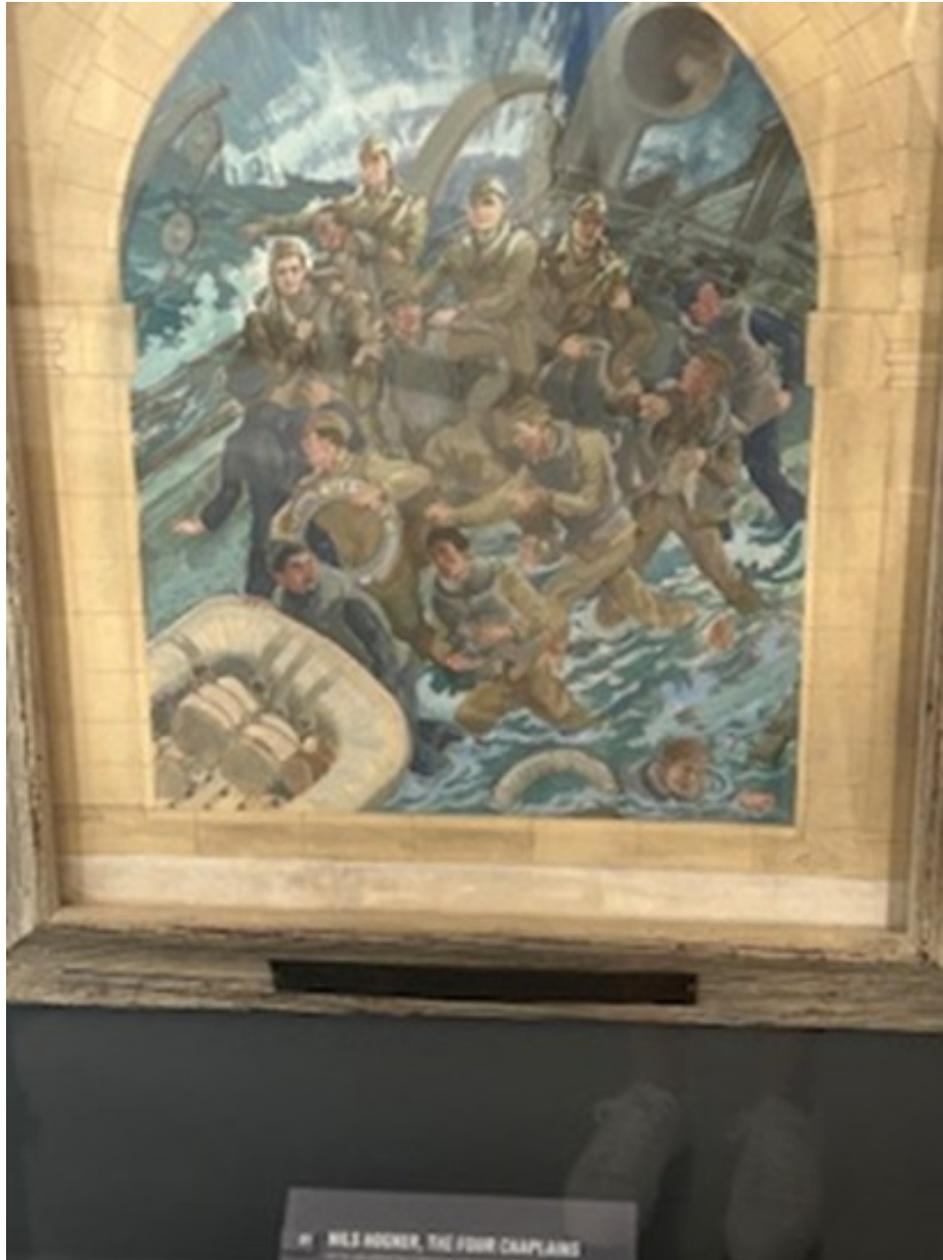
Below Left: Supreme Allied Commander Dwight Eisenhower at Buchenwald in April 1945. All of the evidence he and the press gathered would be used in the Nuremburg Trials.

Keeping Faith



Above & Below: The Four Immortal Chaplains.





Above: A drawing of the Four Immortal Chaplains and their final acts of selflessness aboard the Dorchester.

Monuments Men & Women



Left: Scale model of Hitler's Führermuseum, where he would display the stolen artwork.

Below Left: Cyanide vial of Prince Fumimaro Konoe.

Below Right: Execution hood of Japanese General Hideki Tojo.

The War Crimes Trials



Road to Berlin



Left: Messerschmitt Bf-109.

Center: Litter from the D-Day beaches; what war correspondent Earnie Pyle called a “long thin line of anguish.”

Below: The Battle of the Bulge exhibit.



Road to Tokyo



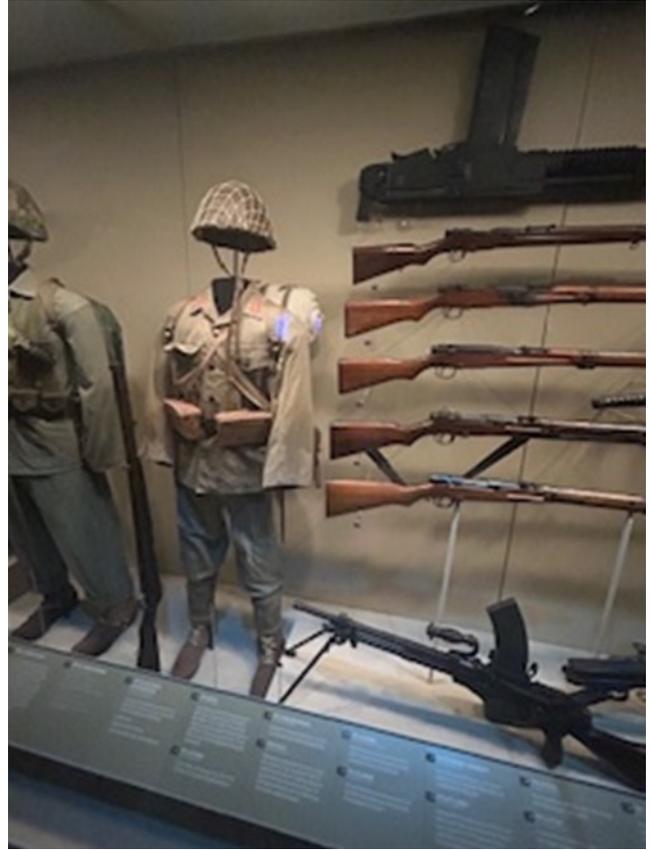
Above: A map of the Pacific Theater and the challenges that such a distance posed for the Japanese and Americans to supply their men.

Left: A 37mm anti-tank/anti-infantry gun used by the Americans.

Bottom Left: Various weapons used by the American units during the Pacific War.

Bottom Right: Uniform of a US Marine.





Above Left: Weapons used by the Japanese forces in the Pacific War.

Above Right: Uniform of the Japanese soldiers.

Left: Curtiss P-40 Warhawk, made famous by Claire Chennault's Flying Tigers of the American Volunteer Group.



Above: Natalie Brennan receiving her certificate of completion of the ASU/National WWII Museum's masters in WWII Studies. On her left is Dr. Jeffery Cohen, Dean of Humanities, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Arizona State University while on her right is Colonel Pete Crane, Vice President of the National WWII Museum.

Special Thanks to Our Community Affiliates

Special thanks goes to one of our Community Affiliates, Lassila Funeral Chapel, Chapel of the Hills, and TGH Aviation. Your partnership with the Placer County Council Navy League is most appreciated.



Placer County Council Navy League Board of Directors

Council President:

Becky Dunavent

First Vice President:

Bonnie Potter

Second Vice President:

Don Anderson

Secretary:

Mona Anderson

Treasurer:

August Anema

Directors:

Mike Holmes, Don Goard, Nancy Goard, Carol Ann Hackley, Janelle Kershaw, Natalie Brennan, Alicia Wilbur, and Greg Wilbur.

Newsletter:

Natalie Brennan

Thank You For Reading!

