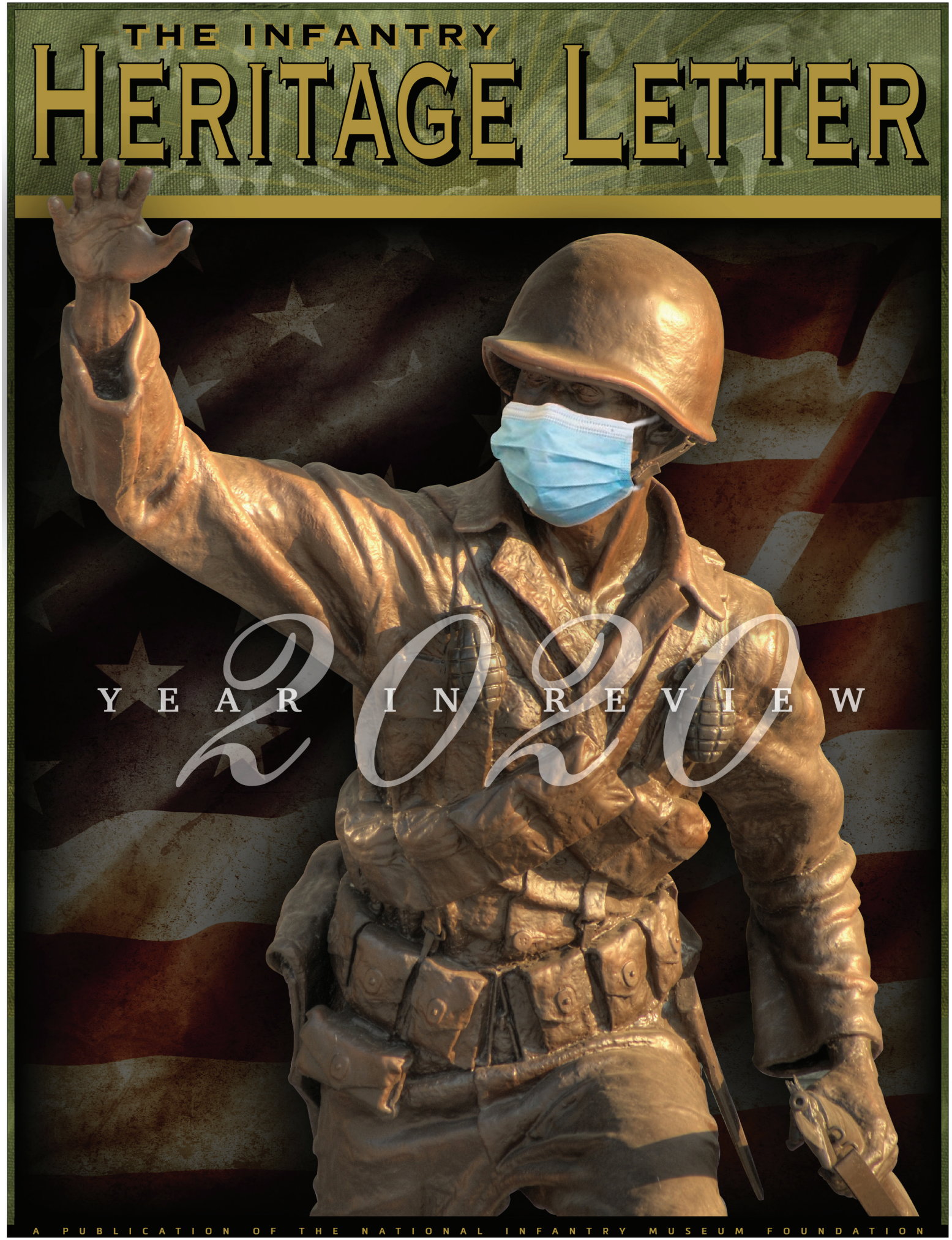
THE INFANTRY

# HERITAGE LETTER



## YEAR IN REVIEW 2020

A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL INFANTRY MUSEUM FOUNDATION

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## *Message from the President*

# Good Riddance, 2020

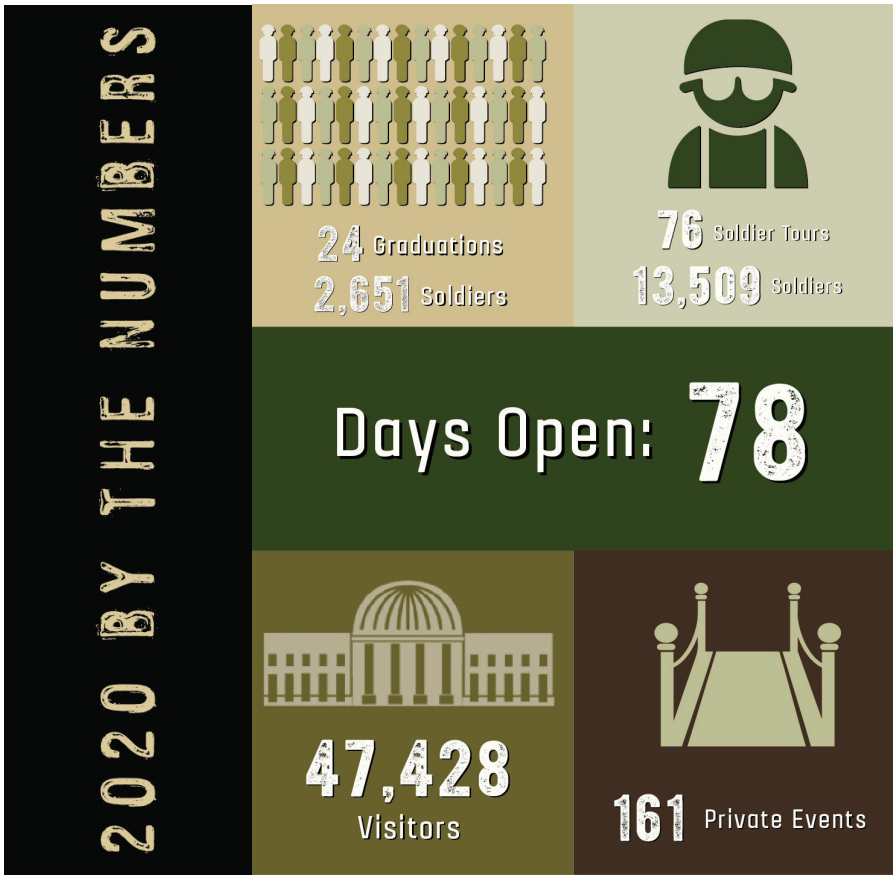
BG (Ret) Pete Jones
President and COO

2020 was a year we'd all like to forget. But we shouldn't. We learned a lot about ourselves and our neighbors. Many of us suffered heartbreaking losses of livelihoods and loved ones – not only personal family members but also NIM supporters and volunteers. We also unfortunately watched Americans resort to violence against fellow Americans. All in all, it was a horrible year. All we can do as we enter the new year is remain steadfast in our resolve to make 2021 better.

Like many small businesses and non-profits, the NIM has had its ups and downs but has remained resilient throughout the COVID pandemic. Through fundraising, spending cuts and a grant from the government, we have maintained our operations without any layoffs or furloughs. Our resiliency will pay off going forward, having learned how to do more with less and to always have one eye open for unknown threats and opportunities.

We would not be in this position if it were not for our generous donors. Although their futures were as precarious as anyone's, they stood up to share what they could to keep the museum alive. The same goes for our staff and volunteers, who've been called on to do more – and at greater risk – to protect the museum and serve our Soldiers.

While closed to the public for the majority of 2020, having Soldiers return to the NIM for their heritage training was a blessing. It kept us focused on our mission and allowed us to continue training the next generation of Infantry Soldiers. We appreciate not only their service to our Nation, but their generous support of the NIM. And we look forward to seeing them again in '21, along with the civilians and veterans that made us USA Today's Best Free Museum for the second time in what was otherwise a dismal year. As we close 2020 and open 2021, God bless you all and thank you for your support.



# Oh, what a YEAR!

The staffers who run our attractions did not sign on to be refinishing furniture during their workday at the NIM. But then, none of us is doing what we thought we'd be doing this time last year. The pandemic created all kinds of challenges for the museum, not the least of which was avoiding layoffs and furloughs. Our staff is like family to us, and we were determined to protect their jobs. So, we found other work that had to be done: Staffers polished woodwork, scrubbed monuments and pavers, painted exterior doors and interior walls, and even refinished the wood trim on theater lobby tables. Our housekeepers rolled up their sleeves for multiple deep cleans. We hated closing our doors to the public, but we are spit-polished and ready for their return!

## We love our Soldiers

Not even a global pandemic can stop the United States Army from training the next generation of Soldiers. So, with a little creative thinking and negotiation with the commanders at Fort Benning, we found a way to continue their heritage training at the NIM. The Soldiers could resume their tours if we agreed to remain closed to the public. That way, they could stay in their bubbles, protected from spread of COVID-19. It's been great having them back in the museum! And they enjoy it too, as evidenced in this photo on Treats for Troops Day. As soon as everyone gets vaccinated, we'll look forward to welcoming their friends and families back for graduations, too!

## Short but sweet reopening

The Army's decision to allow Soldiers to go home for Holiday Block Leave opened a window for the NIM to reopen to the public. It was only a three-week window, but it was enough time for locals to bring visiting relatives in for visit, and for museum lovers to enjoy their favorite activity.

The Conductor returned for traditional Polar Express screenings in the Giant Screen Theater. With families sitting together but carefully spaced from other moviegoers, we were able to fill about one-third of the theater's capacity at each showing.

On the 76th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge, visitors enjoyed learning about the artifacts and equipment used during World War II. Living historians dressed in full period uniforms offered presentations and answered questions.

## Heading HOME SWEET HOME

# Still the Best!

They say lightning doesn't strike twice, but after winning the mantle of America's Best Free Museum **for the second time**, we might argue that!

USA Today readers first voted the NIM #1 in 2016. The contest returned in 2020, but a second win seemed unlikely. But in the closing hours of the vote, our fans made their voices heard. This time around, we were also nominated in the category of Best History Museum, and won an impressive and unexpected third place finish.

Having been pitted against some big name museums, these are some pretty significant bragging rights. But, of course, you already know we're the best. Just keep telling everyone about us and we'll never get knocked off the throne!

## What's New?

In those few weeks we reopened the museum to the public, our visitors discovered something new. In our temporary gallery was a traveling exhibit honoring warrior dogs. A collection of exquisitely carved wooden figures tell the story of how dogs serve in combat, and how their own sacrifices mirror a human warrior's. In this picture, military dog trainers brought their own veterans with them to see the exhibit.

It was also the first time the public got to see our brand new Soldier Store! It has gift items (and even some necessities) for everyone. Look for great souvenirs of your visit to the NIM, like the custom-made holiday ornament shown here! Or shop online at www.infantrygifts.com.

## 2021's "What's New"

In just a few months there'll be a whole new gallery for visitors to explore. What used to be called the Sole Superpower Gallery -- chronicling Infantry history from the post-Cold War period to the present -- is becoming A Global Presence. The overhaul was dictated by the many changes that have occurred since the gallery was first designed in 2007.

Visitors will walk a timeline from Panama and Somalia through Iraq and Afghanistan. One exhibit will tell the story of Rick Rescorla, hailed as a hero on 9/11. Before Rescorla saved thousands of Morgan Stanley employees in the terror attack, he was a U.S. Army officer in Vietnam. During his service he learned The Soldier's Creed, which includes the promise to "never leave a fallen comrade." That value was clearly ingrained in him when terrorist-controlled planes struck the offices in his charge.

# 40 More Names to Remember

Loved ones of the war's fallen came from across the country for the annual redication of the Global War on Terrorism memorial. Forty new names were added to the memorial's granite panels, bringing the total to 7,030. Each, a Soldier, Sailor, Airman or Marine killed in service since 9/11.

Guest speaker and Maneuver Center of Excellence MG Patrick Donahoe told more than 350 Gold Star family members "Let these hallowed grounds always be a home for you, where you can feel the love of our Gold Star community, and the endless gratitude of our nation."

At a dinner the night before the rededication and on the museum grounds the day of the ceremony, family members shared stories, tears and hugs. Kevin Graves (pictured right), Kristin Weber and Kisha Patterson were guest speakers, sharing their own perspectives on loss.

All will be invited return on September 10 and 11 this year, for the 20th anniversary of 9/11 attacks on our nation. Turnout grows considerably each year as more families learn of this inspirational and healing event. The National Infantry Museum Foundation appreciates donations and sponsorships to help show our support for Gold Star families.

# Final Farewells

*We lost many good friends and heroes in 2020. Among those to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for their friendship and support are (left to right):*

**Bob Poydasheff - Retired Army Colonel, Former Columbus Mayor** Bob was one of the museum's biggest fans, proud of what this shining monument to the Infantry meant to the Columbus community he loved. He served in Vietnam then spent most of his military career in the Judge Advocate General Corps. He died September 24 at the age of 90.

**Carl Fedde - Retired Army Major, NIMFVolunteer** Carl devoted 7,000 hours of his time during his 11 years as a volunteer at the NIM, driving trams and golf carts for guests, giving guided tours of World War II Company Street and manning the information desk. As a dog handler in Vietnam, he walked point with his beloved German Shepherd "Charlie Brown. He died December 21 at the age of 78.

**Frederick Kroesen - Retired Army General, NIMF Advisory Board** GEN Kroesen died April 30 at the age of 97. He was the first graduate of Officer Candidate School to reach the rank of four-star general, and survived the Baader-Meinhof Gang's RPG anti-tank rocket attack on his armored car. An exhibit honoring his service welcomes visitors to the NIM's OCS Hall of Honor.

**Bennie Adkins - Retired Command Sergeant Major, Medal of Honor Recipient** Adkins successfully maneuvered through Vietnam's mine fields under heavy fire from the enemy, but he couldn't beat the virus that has attacked our country. COVID-19 claimed his life on April 17, at the age of 86. The Opelika, Alabama, native received the Medal of Honor in nearly 50 years after his service.

**John Foss - Retired Army General, NIMF Advisory Board** GEN Foss died April 27 at the age of 87. His promotion to four-star made him only the third person in the Army to rise from private to General. He was a Ranger instructor at Fort Benning and West Point, served two tours in Vietnam and was Commandant of the Infantry School at Fort Benning.

**William Hartzog - Retired General, NIMF Advisory Board** GEN Hartzog is remembered for his efforts as TRADOC Commander to move the Army into a post-Cold War force that embraced information technology and digitized weapons. He died October 15 at the age of 79.

# "V" is for Virtual!

The pandemic taught museums -- and everyone else -- how to live online. Although we're all Zoomed out, we did discover that even if we're not in the same room, we can still be together.

So, in 2020, our Memorial Day observance was an online event. Sure enough, lots of our faithful followers joined us on Facebook. By August, conditions hadn't improved much, so we canceled our annual Salute to Soldiers gala, and held an online auction instead. Turns out, our supporters will shop with us, even if it's not in person!

The climate improved enough that we felt comfortable doing in-person events for the rededication of the Global War on Terrorism Memorial and our Veterans Day observance.

We also took some of our programming online, offering virtual tours and educational programs. While all could be considered successful, there's nothing like the face-to-face interactions we hope we'll get back to in 2021.

# Comings and Goings

Please join us in welcoming CSM (Ret) Martin Celestine to the staff of the National Infantry Museum Foundation. Martin recently retired as Command Sergeant Major of the Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning. At the NIM, he'll serve as Vice President of Operations responsible for the day to day oversight of building, grounds and systems maintenance and security. He is also the primary interface with Ft Benning units utilizing the museum and grounds for training and ceremonies. Martin is a native of the Virgin Islands. He served 30 years in the Army. Welcome, Freddy!

Martin is moving into the slot vacated by CSM (Ret) Steve McClaflin. Steve had retired as the Infantry School's Command Sergeant Major in 2012 and immediately came to work at the National Infantry Museum. But after becoming a grandpa for the first time, he decided to move back to Indiana to be closer to family. Thanks, Steve, for 27 years of serving your country and 7 more honoring Soldiers at the National Infantry Museum!

The NIMF also said goodbye to longtime Events Director Vickie Benton. Vickie had been with the museum since it opened and did an amazing job building the NIM events department. From elegant weddings to beautiful galas, she has transformed the museum with spectacular themes and decor throughout the years. We like to say we threw a huge birthday party for Vickie every year, but it was only because her birthday fell on July 4, the day she organized and executed one of our biggest events, Freedom Fest! Thank you for your hard work and dedication to the National Infantry Museum, Vickie, and we hope you're enjoying retirement!

# Diversity in Leadership

Three African American Soldiers exemplifying the Army's commitment to diversity are honored in a new exhibit at the NIM.

The Diversity in Leadership display recognizes the contributions of MSG Walter Morris, who served during World War II with the Army's first All-African American Airborne unit; MSG Davey Lockett, the first African American in Army history to serve as an instructor at Fort Benning's elite U.S. Army Ranger School; and LTG Gary Brito, the first African American to be appointed commanding general of Fort Benning.

At a ceremony unveiling the case, LTG Brito insisted the display did not honor individuals. "It is not in my mind an individual recognition. It's an opportunity to stand on the shoulders of many before me, some represented here today."

# GLOBAL THREATS SYMPOSIUM

Before the pandemic launched a new threat across the globe, the museum hosted a symposium called "Security in an Increasingly Dangerous World." Topics ranged from Russian election meddling to Chinese economic positioning to the spread of violent extremism.

Many thanks to our panel of experts, included retired Colonel John Stahl, retired Colonel Bob Wilson, retired Colonel Bill Carty, Dr. Alex Crowther, Colonel John Dee Suggs, retired Brigadier General Kurt Crytzer and National Infantry Museum Foundation President retired Brigadier General Pete Jones.

1775 Society
NATIONAL INFANTRY MUSEUM FOUNDATION

**By joining the 1775 Society, you are part of an exclusive, annual membership group that provides significant financial support to help the National Infantry Museum Foundation achieve its mission of honoring Soldiers – past, present, and future. To learn more about supporting your museum, contact Jane Bayer at 706-685-2604 or jbayer@nationalinfantryfoundation.org.**

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