Ranger's Ranger Brings Home Medal of Honor

Colonel (Retired) Ralph Puckett didn’t need a Medal of Honor to be seen as a hero in the eyes of the hundreds of friends who packed Cavezza Hall in his honor June 18. He is beloved by all who know him for his kindness, integrity and lifelong dedication to Soldiers, as well as his heroic actions in the Korean War.

But America’s appreciation for his selfless actions 70 years ago never faded, and the date was finally set to present Puckett, now 94, with the nation’s highest award for bravery. On May 21, President Joe Biden made the presentation and told the story of Puckett’s bravery on Hill 205 in 1951. Facing a withering attack by Chinese forces, Puckett crossed enemy lines at least three times to draw fire that would allow his fellow Rangers to move in and knock down the assault. He was badly wounded but refused to back down.

Always humble, Puckett told WRBL News 3 he shares the award with the Soldiers who fought alongside him. “Most soldiers will know I didn’t do that by myself. And I say that I hardly did it at all.”

(continued on page 4)
A HIGHLY Decorated Museum!

Ask any Infantryman...winning never gets old.
Or...you could ask US! The National Infantry Museum has won two more BEST MUSEUM Awards from USA Today. In 2021’s contest, we picked up our third Best Free Museum in America award AND a Best History Museum for the first time!

The readers’ choice contest ran for a month in April and May. While the NIM hovered near the top in the standings, winning was far from a sure thing. And then the standings were hidden for the last few days, leaving us completely in the dark. But as always, our fans came through and tipped the scales in our favor.

Nominees for the contest are chosen by national travel writers. The competition this time included such well known museums as the Marine Corps Museum in Virginia, the National World War II Museum in New Orleans and the Smithsonian Institution. That’s good company!

In addition to the USA Today awards, the National Infantry Museum is included in a CNN Travel article listing the world’s 12 best military museums. The NIM has also won a Governor’s Award for the Arts and Humanities and a THEA Award from the Themed Entertainment Industry. It’s rated #1 among attractions in Columbus on TripAdvisor, and has a rating that exceeds nearly every other attraction in the state.

As you can see, the NIM is a can’t miss destination. Start making plans to visit, and we’ll hope to see you just as soon as we reopen!

"This was by far the best museum I have ever been to and that says a lot since I have been to all the Smithsonian and live in Chicago. Each exhibit was over the top well thought out, clear and concise. Just beautiful in every way."

-Cynthia
Durango, Colorado
Waiting for the Green Light

Parts of the world are returning to normal, hoping the pandemic is in the rearview mirror. But other parts of the world are suffering setbacks, and the experts say we’re not out of the woods yet.

With an abundance of caution, Maneuver Center of Excellence Commanding General MG Pat Donahoe is keeping a tight grip on his trainees, protecting them from exposure to the coronavirus.

“You can’t train 64,000 Soldiers if half of them are on sick call,” he said at a State of Fort Benning address to the community. Trainees, who share open bay barracks with 59 others, are most vulnerable. “That’s just a hot house for contagious disease,” Donahoe said.

Donahoe can’t yet require Soldiers to get COVID vaccines because the FDA hasn’t issued full approval. But he is strongly encouraging them to do so. “It is critically important, not just to protect themselves; it’s to protect the team, which then enables us to protect the mission.” And if they need more incentive, Soldiers who’ve been vaccinated can now invite COVID-free family members to graduations at the museum.

“Finally! It’s awesome to see you here today!” That was how LTC Cory Roberts, 1-19 battalion commander, opened his remarks at Baker Company 1-19’s graduation. It was the first graduation in 15 months family members could attend. Up to four family members per graduate were allowed in the stands; others could watch it livestreamed on our Facebook page.

Bottom line, for now at least, the Soldiers will stay in a protective bubble, and the museum will remain closed to the public so the Soldiers can continue to receive their heritage training here. We’re just as anxious to reopen as you are; keep an eye on our social media sites for updates. Thank you for your patience!

Memorial Day at the NIM

Maneuver Center of Excellence CSM Derrick Garner talked about the significance of Memorial Day as the guest speaker at the Museum’s holiday observance and paver dedication ceremony on May 31. Afterward, those who recently purchased commemorative pavers honoring a loved one gathered on Heritage Walk to take pictures and make rubbings to take home.

The next paver dedication ceremony will be on Veterans Day. Call Ilene Kent at 706-685-5813 to learn more about how you can honor a loved one on Heritage Walk.

Millionth Visitor Returns as an Intern!

The Foundation staff got even more work done this summer, thanks to the help of six interns from Auburn University. Four of them -- Brian Nelson, Summer Padgett, Shawn McGinnis and Jackson Bowman -- worked on exhibits for the temp gallery and a Medal of Honor educational project for trainees that visit the museum. Thomas Sturdivant and Maddie Harris helped in the Events, Development and Communications departments.

We wouldn’t have made the connection if he hadn’t told us, but Thomas was already a star in the museum! Back in 2012, he and his family were showered with gifts and attention as the museum’s 1,000,000th visitor. He was just 13 years old at the time, and had insisted his family travel to the NIM from Birmingham during spring break because he had visited once before as a scout. It seems the NIM has made quite an impression on this young man, and as an intern he’s made quiet an impression on us!

Thanks to all of you for your dedication to honoring Soldiers, and best of luck as you enter the working world!
Puckett Awarded Medal of Honor
(continued from page 1)

The Medal of Honor ceremony, attended by COL Puckett’s family and closest friends, was livestreamed and shown in the museum’s Giant Screen Theater.

A few weeks after his momentous trip to Washington, COL Puckett was honored a dinner at the National Infantry Museum. More than 500 people filled Cavezza Hall. If space had allowed, hundreds more would have been there.

GEN Richard Clark, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command and guest speaker at the dinner, noted that COL Puckett is now one of the U.S. Army's most decorated Soldiers. The museum’s exhibit honoring COL Puckett is being updated to include the Medal of Honor. And COL Puckett has generously donated to the NIM the Medal of Honor flag presented to him at the White House.

State’s New Tourism Chief Tours NIM

Georgia tourism is going places! The state’s new Deputy Commissioner for Tourism recently brought some staff members to Columbus to see all the city has to offer.

National Infantry Museum Foundation Executive Vice President Andy Redmond gave them a quick tour, and naturally they were blown away. They were especially pleased to see how a state economic development grant was put to use in the new Global Presence gallery.

After a whirlwind tour of the city hosted by Visit Columbus GA’s Peter Bowden and Shelby Guest, Deputy Commissioner Mark Jaronski, Lori Hennesy and Brittney Gray met with members of the Presidential Pathways Travel Association for lunch. It was a pleasure having them all here and we can’t wait for them to come back.

Happy 246th Birthday, US Army!

Did you know the U.S. Army is even older than our country? It was established on June 14, 1775, by the Second Continental Congress. That makes the Army 246 years old this year. We celebrated with Charlie Company, 2d Battalion, 29th Infantry Regiment during their tour of the National Infantry Museum. In accordance with tradition, the cake was cut by the youngest and oldest Soldiers in the room. And then, cupcakes for all! Happy Birthday, Army!

Drill sergeants generously allowed the forbidden mid-cycle treats, but made some of the troops down their cupcakes in three seconds!
Landmark Date for GWOT Memzeiton Redication

The summer of 2001 was in some ways our last summer of innocence. On September 11 that year, terrorists unleashed their wrath on America and created a before-and-after mark on our nation’s timeline.

The event drove thousands of newcomers to the armed forces. More than 180,000 Americans enlisted in the ranks of active-duty service, and 73,000 joined the enlisted reserves in the following year. Many said it was 9/11 that inspired them to serve.

Since that time, more than 7,030 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines have given their lives in the fight against terrorism. Their names are etched in the black granite of the National Infantry Museum’s Global War on Terrorism memorial. Every year, the museum adds more names of those who’ve fallen in a rededication ceremony. That ceremony falls on September 11 this year, the 20th anniversary of 9/11.

The event, which will begin at 9:00 a.m. in the stadium, is open to the public. Gold Star families in particular are invited to attend, to connect with those who’ve suffered the same losses and to feel the warm embrace of support from the rest of the community.

If you’re a Gold Star family member and you have not yet received an invitation, please call Rachel Goodman at 762-359-0500. She’ll tell you all about the event and send you a special invitation.

Saluting the Aussies and Kiwis on ANZAC Day

If you happen to be on an early morning run around the museum on any April 25, don’t be surprised to hear the mournful but inspirational sounds of a bagpipe. April 25 is ANZAC Day, one of Australia’s most important national occasions. It marks the anniversary of the first major military action fought by Australian and New Zealand forces during the World War I. Soldiers and family members from Fort Benning gather at the 173rd Airborne Brigade’s memorial on the museum’s Walk of Honor for the dawn service and to share gunfire (spiked) coffee and biscuits. That’s the same meal consumed by nervous soldiers before storming the beaches of Gallipoli in 1915. Australia and New Zealand have been steadfast Allied of the United States, fighting alongside our forces in every major conflict for the last 100 years.

Summer Camp Maneuvers Around Restrictions

Thanks to loosened restrictions, the NIM Kids Summer Camp played out as planned this year. With the exception of physical distancing, mask-wearing inside and frequent hand-washing, it was pretty much camp as usual. There were history lessons, field trips to Oxbow Meadows Environmental Center, camp-outs and water games.

Camp Director Alexis Belman makes sure to squeeze in lessons between the fun and games. They learn about what it takes to be a good leader. One lesson covers the Army values -- Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity and Personal Courage -- and how those values likely mirror the ones they learn at home and at school.

Sign up for next year’s camps in the spring!

Left: Camper-made platoon flags hang from the rafters in the WWII Mess Hall, which serves as the indoor HQ for summer camp. Right: One young camper seems to have mistaken a counselor for the enemy!
Celebrating Strength and Resilience
Annual Gala Set for August 21

It's been a year – right? But now the annual 1775 Society Salute to Soldiers Gala and Silent Auction is back and will be better than ever! As we emerge from the pandemic, the museum has chosen “Celebrating Strength and Resilience” as the theme of this year’s event, planned for Saturday, Aug. 21. The black-tie event is scheduled to kick off with a cocktail reception at 6 p.m., dinner at 7 p.m. followed by dancing until you drop.

The silent auction is going online this year and features several vacations, including the always popular week in an Italian villa, as well as a beach condo and a luxury cabin in the North Carolina mountains. Art has been donated by well-known local artists. There’s also a NASCAR experience for the daredevils in the crowd! With the auction available online, bidding is open to – well, the world – so it will be competitive. Bidding begins Aug. 8; stay tuned to the museum website and our social media pages for the link. The auction will close the night of the gala.

Tickets to the gala are available on the museum website for $150 per person. 1775 Society members receive two complimentary tickets or more, depending on membership level. Museum Premier Partners and Sustaining Sponsors also receive complimentary tickets. Besides the website -- www.nationalinfantrymuseum.org -- you can purchase tickets by calling Jane Bayer at 706-685-2604. But join the 1775 Society before Aug. 21, so you can receive free tickets while also supporting the museum’s mission of honoring Soldiers past, present and future.

1775 Society Members Get First Peek at New Gallery

Who doesn’t love a sneak peek?

The Foundation invited 1775 Society members back to the NIM for the first time since fall 2019. Turnout was great; it’s clear people are hungry to socialize again. And they were enticed by the opportunity to see the completely overhauled “A Global Presence” gallery before anyone else. The gallery traces Infantry history from 1989 to the present and features an Iraqi streetscape, an Afghan mountainside and remnants from the attacks of 9/11. The pandemic shutdown gave exhibit designers a good window of opportunity to gut the previous “Sole Superpower” gallery and update it to include recent actions in the Global War on Terrorism.

Reactions to the new gallery were over the top. We are anxious to open it up to everyone just as soon as the pandemic is in check.

The Foundation also took the opportunity to present the Shield of Sparta to Mrs. Richard Hallock, a generous supporter of the museum since it was in the planning stages. The Shield of Sparta is awarded to spouses of Infantryman for their own significant contributions to the Infantry. COL Richard Hallock, now deceased, was a much-decorated paratrooper in World War II, a personal aide for intelligence to Gen. Lucius D. Clay in Berlin after the war, and the youngest major to be a battalion commander in Korea.
Help the National Infantry Museum Foundation achieve its mission of honoring Soldiers past, present, and future by joining the 1775 Society. Contact Jane Bayer at 706-685-2604 or jbayer@nationalinfantryfoundation.org to learn more.
The National Infantry Foundation was established in 1998 to honor our nation’s Infantrymen, past, present and future, and to preserve their legacy. The Foundation, in partnership with the U.S. Army, is committed to sharing their legacy through the National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center.

The museum is sponsored, in part, by the U.S. Department of Defense. The content of this newsletter does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Government and no official endorsement should be inferred.

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Have you joined the NIA?  
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