

USAHEC: Researchers' favorite destination poised to be national destination

Carol Kerr, USAWC Public Affairs

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Feb. 8, 2011 - Foreign Policy's Tom Ricks raved about the place in his blog. "For me it was like going to Disneyland On top of that, the institute's staff was both informed and friendly.

Pa. Rep Stephen Bloom reads the Elvis Presley letter that accompanied his gift of a pistol to General of the Army Omar N. Bradley in a large new exhibit of his life in Ridgway Hall. Bloom toured the new Visitors and Education Center, due to open Spring 2011. Photo by Scott Finger.



"If the entire federal government were this helpful, we'd all be better off," he wrote about the Army's Military History Institute, here on the USAHEC campus.

Ricks, journalist and author, spent a recent week absorbed by the special finds in the MHI library. "I pored through Marine message logs from the Chosin Reservoir campaign, got a deeper understanding of the Korean War overall, and sampled the institute's wonderful collection of obscure military history books," Ricks wrote." Did you know that the expression "going blooey" (that is, falling apart) comes from the chateau at Blois, France, where the U.S. Army shipped its fired officers during World War I?"

But you don't need to be a published author to find something to like about the Army Heritage & Education Center.

When Gen Carter F. Ham led the Pentagon's review of the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, he brought an Army research team to Ridgway to understand its background. For many years, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting team has relied on USAHEC research about troop movements and unit locations during WW2, the Korean conflict, and Vietnam. Official Army research has included research into airport contamination cases for which historic data helped absolve the Army of several million dollars of liability. Recent Pa. Adjutant General Jessica Wright hosted the Pennsylvania Veterans Council at the new Visitors Education Center, ushering in a new era of veterans' meetings and reunions.



Jack Giblin looks on as Lt. Col. Mark Viney, USAHEC Director, tells Soldiers' stories to Rep. Bloom at the USAHEC's Ridgway Hall, Jan. 27. Photo by Scott Finger.

The story of USAHEC is its ability to offer so much for so many.

More than 91 thousand people visited the USAHEC campus in 2010, tapping into one or more of its programs – from the Army Heritage Trail events, Ridgway Hall lectures and exhibits, veterans' reunions, school activities, and research.

Some USAHEC patrons vote with their feet. Army Heritage Days attracted almost 11 thousand to the two-day celebration of the nation's Army heritage. Oktoberfest-2010 was a celebration of camaraderie and heritage on the Army Heritage Trail for 7500 visitors. Visitors officially made USAHEC the #2 destination for tourists in Cumberland County, after Carlisle Productions.

Others relish the ability to use the famous collection remotely. Increasingly, parts of the massive collection are digitized and available online, such as the unique collection of photographs on the Carlisle Indian Industrial School added this year. Good enough for award-winning authors and producers, the collection is good-to-go for everyone now.

Traveling displays introduced USAHEC to new audiences at the Carlisle Truck Show, the AUSA Conference, and the Army's All-American Bowl in Texas. These unique audiences reflect the USAHEC mission. USAHEC wants today's Soldiers to know that this is a place that can preserve and protect their history. Nearly 600 veterans requested the Military History Institute's renowned veterans survey – when they return a survey to MHI, they enrich the USAHEC ability to 'tell soldiers' stories ... one soldier at a time.' Traveling exhibits make new connections with potential visitors to the campus in Cumberland County.

For veterans, there is no better place to entrust treasured belongings and memories.

Donations are the heart and soul of both the research collection and the artifact collection of uniforms, equipment, and a host of military items. In 2010, donations included a M109 self-propelled howitzer from the Maine National Guard, howitzer refurbishment by BAE Systems, retired Gen. Paul D. Harkin's photo albums of his WW2 service on Gen. Patton's staff, Samuel Tappan's War of 1812-era journal about the 23rd Infantry Regiment, and WW2 letters and artifacts donated by retired Gen. Carl Vuono. Donated photos and videos found new life in several award-winning videos that complement the current Ridgway Hall exhibits about General Omar Bradley and the Schools at Carlisle.

The critical donation of 2010 was the new Visitors Education Center, donated by the Army Heritage Center Foundation on behalf of state, county and private contributors. With more than 15 percent increase in visitors in 2010, the opening of the VEC in 2011 promises more exploration and education for more USAHEC patrons and fans.

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