

Preserving important pieces of history

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October 17, 2009—Long forgotten military papers, medals, uniforms and other treasures will have a home where they will be showcased, admired and used as teaching tools thanks to new facilities currently under construction at the Army Heritage and Education Center.

Approximately 125 veterans, local community members, re-enactors and Carlisle Barracks staff members filled the halls of AHEC's Ridgway Hall to commemorate the Oct. 16 groundbreaking for the new Visitor and Education Center and Museum Support/Conservation Facility.

"People forget how we got the freedoms we have, and facilities like these bring attention to what it took for us to get where we are today," said WWII and Korean War Veteran Sam Lombardo. "So many people have military stuff up in their attics, whether it is their own paperwork and uniforms or their father's or grandfather's, but what an honor it is to have it here for everyone to see. It means so much more when it will be on display here."

Army War College Commanding General Maj. Gen. Robert Williams echoed Lombardo's sentiment in his address to the crowd at the groundbreaking ceremony.

"It is deeply meaningful for those who donate their papers and uniforms," he said.

Construction for the VEC began in August 2009 and will incorporate the first gallery for the museum, multipurpose rooms to support educational programs, seminars and veteran reunions, and support services for visitors. In order to honor and service the sacrifice Soldiers and their Families have made, military artifacts and archival materials will be properly restored and preserved so future generations may learn from tangible, historical relics.



Army Heritage Center Foundation board members are joined by representatives from the Army Heritage & Education Center, the U.S. Army War College and members of both local and federal

government in breaking ground for the new Visitor and Education Center and the Museum Support/Conservation Facility.

"We can never too often remind our nation's citizens of our military's sacrifice and a facility like this helps to do just that," said U.S. Rep. Todd Platts. "The military's history is a crucial part of our own amazing history as a nation, and the written documents and artifacts such as communication between Soldiers and Families, tell the story of the sacrifices made by our men and women on the frontlines."

For some, the museum and preservation efforts represent a place of healing and reflection.

"I see this as a place of healing for a lot of folks, a place where they can escape the day-to-day life and come here to reflect on what it took to make this nation so great," said Gary Slack, an Army Heritage Center Foundation board member. Slack, who is president of US Combat Systems at BAE Systems, was on hand to present the foundation with \$100,000 from BAE Systems.

"We need facilities like the ones here at AHEC for the future of our military and so the younger generations know what we went through and so that they can actually understand what we went through," said Joe Novak, a Marine Corps Veteran of the Vietnam War and one of the day's re-enactors. "Gentlemen like myself and those who are here today re-creating different soldiers' experiences give young people the opportunity to learn about what we did and why we had to do it."

Novak said he loves driving down Interstate 81 and seeing the different equipment on display on the Army Heritage Trail next to the construction site at AHEC.

"I think the whole museum is just awesome, especially when you are coming up the pike and see the Huey (helicopter), which we used in Vietnam," he said. "We have to have the knowledge there so it is never forgotten."



The groundbreaking event was highlighted with re-enactors who were also present on the Army Heritage Trail for the Oct. 17 Volksmarch during Carlisle Barracks' Oktoberfest.

Re-enactors lined the trail, hunkered down in their pillboxes, bunkers and barracks against the cold, rainy weather that is often a reality in warfare.

"I think re-enacting different soldiers from different wars is an important education tool for children," said Morgen Dautrich, who portrayed a WWII paratrooper with the 508th PIR and the 82nd Airborne Division. "They have seen these types of things in video games and movies,

but to let them feel the packs on their backs and carry the weight that these guys carried in war provides better understanding for what our men and women endured."

The other sides of battle lines were also portrayed along the trail.

Re-enactors brought history to life during the Oct. 16 VEC and Museum Support/Conservation Facility groundbreaking and Oct. 17 living history event along the Army Heritage Trail.

"Schools don't always teach the German aspect of WWI and WWII," said Brad Wenger, a WWI German Infantryman re-enactor, who was holed up in the German pillbox display along the Army Heritage Trail. "Students come to the re-enactments with a decent understanding of the American soldier, but often they don't know about the other perspectives."

The re-enactments and groundbreaking event served as reminders of how far the American military has come over the course of the nation's history.

"Some of my father's papers are here and this means a lot to me," said Cumberland County Commissioner Rick Rovegno. "If you don't know where you came from, you won't know where you're going and facilities like the ones at AHEC remind us of where we came from and help us to know where we are going."

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