Military Museums and Social History

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Frontispiece: Furniture from General Pershing's headquarters at Chaumont, France, framed the original map displaying allied and enemy dispositions on 11 November 1918 in this recreation of the general's map room for the 2002 exhibition West Point in the Making of America at the National Museum of American History.
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Armies have always played central roles in civilized societies and so the material culture associated with them – weapons, uniforms, medals, trophies, flags and all the other trappings of martial endeavor – has regularly attracted the interest of collectors and the public. Displaying this material culture to the public became the main purpose of the modern military museum as it emerged in the 19th century, initially to foster national pride, later to memorialize fallen heroes. More recently still, exhibition in military museum has undergone a major shift, from simply displaying artifacts to using them to tell stories. Although the old concerns for national pride

and memorialization remain salient, they no longer dominate the scene. Military museums since the 1980s have increasingly drawn for their exhibitions on the new military history, with its stress on the common soldier, the experience of war, and the place of the armed forces in society. This shift in scholarship coincided with the emergence of the new museum studies, which not only made museums and their work themselves subjects of study but also transformed museum practice. The last three decades have clearly seen the appearance of a new kind of military museum taking its place alongside a new kind of military history. We have discussed this process as it took place primarily in European museum elsewhere.[1] Here we focus on the American scene.

Origins of Modern Military Museums

The relatively new field of museum history has so far had little or nothing to say about military museums.[2] Part of the reason may be the well-known academic distaste for military studies, but the neglect of the history of military museums may also stem from their origins unlike other museums. Military museums have two main lines of ancestry. One sprang from private or restricted collections of arms and armor amassed by wealthy, often titled, collectors; when they went public (mostly in the 19th century), they formed what were usually called armory museums, though often such collections came to reside in art museums. The other ancestral line of military museums derived from the obsolete firearms and other military materiel stored in state arsenals; these became the so-called arsenal and artillery museums. Although the categories were hardly exclusive – firearms found their way into arms and armor collections, just as edged weapons, polearms, and armor accumulated in arsenals – they were distinct. Arms and armor collections tended to emphasize objects unique, unusual, and often beautiful, while arsenal collections were more likely to amass work-a-day weapons and equipment.[3]

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1 | Barton C. Hacker/Margaret Vining (2007): »Toward a History of Military Museums«, in: Robert Douglas Smith (ed.), ICOMAM 50. Papers on Arms and Military History 1957–2007, Leeds: Basiliscoe Press, pp. 3–22.

2 | Edward P. Alexander's highly regarded Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums (1979), Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, for instance, makes no mention whatsoever of military or naval museums of any kind. For a very useful introduction to the field of museum history as part of the late 20th-century transformation of museum studies (though also omitting military museums), see Randolph Starn (2005): »A Historian's Brief Guide to New Museum Studies«, in: American Historical Review 110, no. 1, pp. 68–98, especially pp. 71–80. See also Sharon Macdonald (2006) (ed.): A Companion to Museum Studies, Malden, MA: Blackwell.

3 | Frederick P. Todd (1948): »The Military Museum in Europe«, in: Military Affairs 12,

In the late 19th and early 20th century, collections of arms and armor and of gunpowder weapons began to be amalgamated in national military museums open to the public. These museums were primarily historical technology museums intended to collect, preserve and display military material culture. They showed militaria in classified displays, usually arranged in chronological order. Significant military collections of the same kind that found their way into the new military museums also went to other kinds of museums, especially art museums, which tended to emphasize the decorative arts over military-historical interest.[4] The splendid arms and armor collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is a case in point. Rather than growing from an existing historic collection, it was assembled at the turn of the 20th century largely through gift and purchase. Its curators explicitly eschewed what they called military paraphernalia in favor of a more artistic assemblage, "the rich gear of the hunt and chase, the panoply of the tournament and joust, and the pageantry of court life".[5] Although the Metropolitan's collection remains unrivaled, other American art museums have also acquired significant collections through similar means with similar outcomes.[6] A 1960 worldwide survey by the newly established Association of Museums of Arms and Military History, as ICOMAM was initially

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no. 1, pp. 36–45, p 38; Ian G. Robertson (1994): »Museums, Military«, in: André Corvisier (ed.): A Dictionary of Military History and the Art of War, trans. C Turner, English edition revised, expanded and edited by John Childs, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 540–43, p. 540.

4 | Robertson: »Museums, Military« (note 3), p. 540. See also J. Lee Westrate (1961): European Military Museums: A Survey of Their Philosophy, Facilities, Programs, and Management, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, pp. 177–200.

5 | Association of Museums of Arms and Military History (1960): Repertory of Museums of Arms and Military History, Copenhagen: AMAMH, p. 143. See also Bashford Dean (1915): Handbook of Arms and Armor: European and Oriental, including the William H. Riggs Collection, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Helmut Nickel/Stewart W. Pyhrr/Leonid Tarassuk (1982): The Art of Chivalry: European Arms and Armor from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. An Exhibition, New York: American Federation of Arts; Stephen V. Grancsay (1986): Arms & Armor: Essays from the Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, 1920–1964, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

6 | John H. Beeler (1985): »The John Woodman Higgins Armory (Higgins Armory Museum)«, in: Military Affairs 49, no. 4, pp. 198–202; Chuck Arning (2009): »Review of Higgins Armory Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts«, in: Public Historian 31, no. 4, pp. 124–27; Donald J. LaRocca (1985): »Kienbusch Centennial. Carl Otto Kretzschmar von Kienbusch and the Collecting of Arms and Armor in America«, in: Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin 81, no. 345, p. 2/pp. 4–24; Claude Blair (1992): Studies in European Arms and Armor: The C. Otto Von Kienbusch Collection in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art; Walter J. Karcheski Jr. (1995): Arms and Armor in the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago.

known, underscored the persistent diversity of museums-military, art, general-that housed significant military collections.[7]

Military Museums in 19th-Century America

For complex historical and political reasons, the United States has never created a national military museum. The United States Military Academy at West Point established an Artillery Museum in 1854, which later became the public West Point Museum. Although it included in its remit a requirement to house trophies of the American Revolution, the War of 1812 and the Mexican War, its chief function long remained giving hands-on ordnance instruction to academy cadets. Its relatively remote location may have precluded its playing a larger role, even after it became public.[8] The US Army sponsored a few other museums in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but then retired from the museum business for several decades.[9] Private, local, and state military museums also proliferated, but none ever moved beyond their founding purpose in the direction of becoming a national military museum.[10] Perhaps the closest approximation to a national military museum in 19th-century America was the short-lived Museum of the Military Services Institution of the United States in New York, inspired by the British Royal United Service Museum.[11]

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7 | AMAMH: Repertory of Museums of Arms, (note 5). Subsequent surveys of individual countries tend to confirm this diversity: Jean M. Humbert/Lionel Dumarche (1982): Guide des Musées d'Histoire Militaire: 400 Musées en France, Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle; Terence Wise/Shirley Wise (1994): A Guide to [British] Military Museums and Other Places of Military Interest, 8th ed., Powys: Imperial Press; Steve Rajtar/Frances Elizabeth Franks (2002): War Monuments, Museums and Library Collections of 20th Century Conflicts: A Directory of United States Sites, Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

8 | Robertson: »Museums, Military«, (note 3), p. 540; Philip K. Lundeberg (1994): »Military Museums«, in: John E. Jessup/Louis B. Ketz (eds.): Encyclopedia of the American Military: Studies of the History, Traditions, Policies, Institutions, and Roles of the Armed Forces in War and Peace, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, pp. 3:2133–57, pp. 2134–35. See also Richard E. Kuehne/Michael J. McAfee (1987): The West Point Museum: A Guide to the Collections, West Point, NY: United States Military Academy

9 | Joseph H. Ewing (1979): »Military Museums and Collections«, in: John E. Jessup, Jr./Robert W. Coakley (eds.): A Guide to the Study and Use of Military History, Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army, pp. 339–47; R. Cody Phillips (1992): A Guide to U.S. Army Museums, Washington, DC: Center of Military History; Lundeberg: »Military Museums«, (note 8), pp. 2140–46.

10 | Benjamin H. Kristy (1998): »Museum Collections as Historical Sources«, in: Robin Higham/Donald J. Mrozek (eds.): A Guide to the Sources of United States Military History: Supplement IV, North Haven, CT: Archon Books, pp. 543–80, especially pp. 571–80.

11 | E. Altham (1931): »The Royal United Service Institution, 1831–1931«, in: Journal of

Figure 1. In 1884, the Military Services Institution of the United States opened its museum on Governor's Island in New York Harbor; shown here is the title page of the museum's first catalogue. © The Catalogue of the Museum, 1884 [Governor's Island, NY: Military Services Institution of the United States, 1884].

In 1884, it opened a sizeable military heritage museum and park on Governor's Island in New York Harbor (Figure 1), where it displayed "trophies and relics to promote patriotism, invention and historical research". Declining attendance forced the museum to close in 1924.[12] Various plans to establish a national museum since the late 19th century have failed to materialize, although work is now underway on a National Museum of the United States Army located at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and scheduled for a 2015 opening.[13]

the Royal United Service Institution 76, no. 502, pp. 234–45; E. Altham (1900): History of the Banqueting House, London: Royal United Service Institution; L.E. Cowper (1935): »British Military Museums«, in: Museums Journal 35, no. 2, pp. 40–49; W.A. Thorburn (1962): »Military History as a Museum Subject«, in: Museums Journal 62, pp. 187–93; Peter Thwaites (1996): Presenting Arms: Museum Representation of British Military History, 1660–1900, London: Leicester University Press, pp. 28–29. See also Arthur Leetham (1924): Official Catalogue of the Royal United Service Museum, Whitehall, S.W., London: Royal United Service Institution.

12 | Military Services Institution of the United States (1884) (ed.): The Catalogue of the Museum, 1884, Governor's Island, NY: Military Services Institution of the United States; Edmund Banks Smith (1913): Governors Island, Its Military History under Three Flags 1637–1922 , New York: The Author, pp. 147–49; Lundeberg: »Military Museums«, (note 8), p. 2138.

13 | For a review of early attempts to create a national army museum in America, see Lundeberg: »Military Museums«, (note 8), pp. 2138–40. On current plans, see the website

A much more significant American contribution to the public display of the military past has been battlefield interpretation and the construction of related site museums. The great impetus for their emergence in the late 19th century was the American Civil War (1861–1865). They were conceived at first as typical war memorials or tributes to the dead, like the 1863 Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg.[14] Battlefield parks followed later in the century: Chickamauga-Chattanooga (1890), Shiloh (1894), Gettysburg (1895), and Vicksburg (1899).[15] The U.S. National Park Service, created in 1916, eventually took charge of these parks and many more. Nearly half the major historical military areas now administered by the National Park Service preserve and interpret Civil War sites. The Civil War battlefield parks smoothed the way for a number of parks associated with other American wars, including the American Revolution, the War of 1812 and the Indian wars. The National Park Service also took responsibility for many of the military collections that accumulated in such historic properties as forts, armories, and arsenals before ending up as public museums. Battlefield museums early evinced a propensity to address soldiers' experiences and the local effects of war, a practice that may well have influenced the later development of social historical approaches to displaying military history. Path-breaking efforts to engage their audiences more directly through battlefield reenactment and living history have also proved useful in more conventional military museums.[16]

The closest American approximation to a national military museum has, in fact, been the Smithsonian Institution. Military objects began flowing haphazardly to the Washington institution from its founding in 1847, but the major military collection originated, as did many other Smithsonian collections, in the 1876 United States Centennial International Exhibition held in Philadelphia to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Elaborate displays of military material (Figure 2) proved popular at the international expositions and

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of the Army Historical Foundation at http://www.armyhistory.org/ahf.aspx?pgID=868, 20 March 2012.

14 | Robertson: »Museums, Military«, (note 3), p. 542; Annette Becker (1997): »War Memorials: A Legacy of Total War?«, in: Stig Förster/Jörg Nagler (eds.): On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861–1871, Washington, DC: German Historical Institute; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 657–80.

15 | Herman Hattaway (2001): Gettysburg to Vicksburg: The Five Original Civil War Battlefield Parks, Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

16 | Ronald F. Lee (1973): The Origin and Evolution of the National Military Park Idea, Washington, DC: National Park Service; Edwin C. Bearrs (1987): »The National Park Service and Its History Program: 1864–1986: An Overview«, in: Public Historian 9, no. 2: The National Park Service and Historic Preservation, pp. 10–18; Joseph E. Stevens (1990): America's National Battlefield Parks: A Guide, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

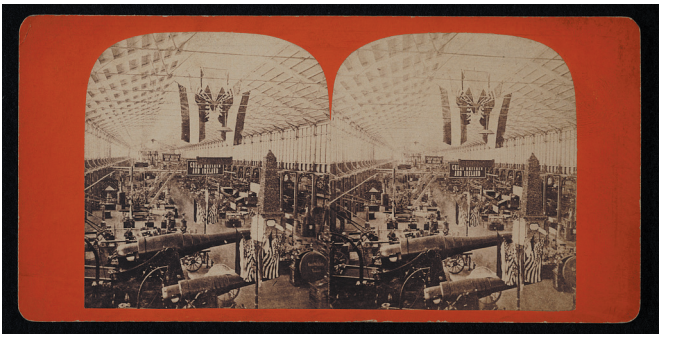

Figure 2. In 1876 Krupp gun-making machinery was displayed in the machinery hall at the Centennial International Exhibition in Philadelphia.
© Photographic print on stereo card. US Library of Congress Washington, DC.

fairs that proliferated in Europe and America during the late 19th century. Like exhibitions in the new military museums, they were more evocative than substantive, providing little context and focusing overtly on war-weaponry, flags, uniforms, battle trophies, and other war-related objects. Again like contemporary military museums, exhibition displays of militaria generally overlooked the magnitude of material – civilian as well as military – produced and used in the mundane activities other than war that concerned all branches of the armed forces.[17] Smithsonian Secretary Spencer Baird persuaded a number of Philadelphia exhibitors to save the hassle and expense of shipping their material home and instead donate it to the United States National Museum, part of the Smithsonian Institution.[18] Other major accessions followed when the army decided to leave the museum business entirely for lack of

17 | Robert W. Rydell (1984): All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Robert W. Rydell/Nancy E. Gwinn (1994): Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World, Amsterdam: Amsterdam VU Press; Paul Greenhalgh (1988): Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles. Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

18 | Robert C. Post (1976): A Treatise upon Selected Aspects of the Great International Exhibition Held in Philadelphia on the Occasion of Our Nation's One-Hundredth Birthday, with Some Reference to Another Exhibition Held in Washington Commemorating That Epic Event, and Called 1876, a Centennial Exhibition, Washington, DC: National Museum of History and Technology, Smithsonian Institution; Bruno Giberti (2002): Designing the Centennial: A History of the 1876 International Exhibition in Philadelphia, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky; Pamela M. Henson (1999): »Objects of Curious Research: The History of Science and Technology at the Smithsonian«, in: Isis 90, Supplement, Catching up with the Vision: Essays on the Occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the Founding of the History of Science Society, pp. S252–S254.

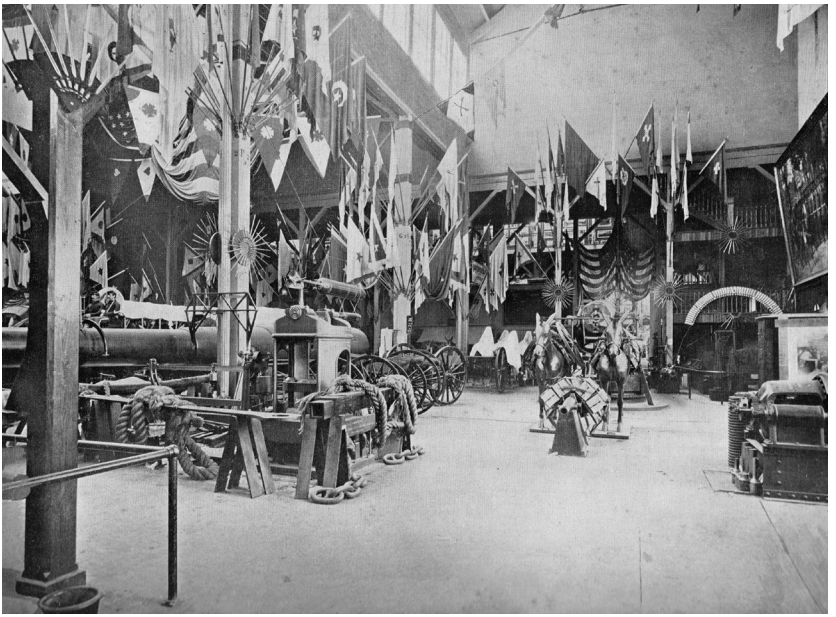

Figure 3: The US Army organized a substantial display for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois. The army later transferred much of this material to the Smithsonian. © Unnumbered plate from H.W. Buel (1894): »The Magic City: A Massive Portfolio of Original Photographic Views of the Great Worlds Fair and Its Treasures of Art«.

exhibit space. Although that decision would be reconsidered after World War II, the army meanwhile began in the 1890s a three-decade transfer of vast quantities of military materiel, including thousands of ordnance items (Figure 3), to the national museum. Of special significance was the mass of materiel that reached the museum during and just after the First World War, including the historic army quartermaster collection.[19] The 1924 closing of the National Services Institution museum brought another sizeable collection of military objects to Washington. The US National Museum had meanwhile acquired a purpose-designed building, which sharply distinguished it from the many European museums housed in converted palaces, arsenals, or castles inherently ill-suited for the purpose.[20] But it shared with its European

19 | Lundeberg:» Military Museums«, (note 8), pp. 2135, 2137, 2139; »Smithsonian Collections: A Brief History«, in: Appendix A in Office of Policy and Analysis Study Team, Concern at the Core: Managing Smithsonian Collections, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, pp. 299–300.

20 | The need for renovation in traditional European military museums and its difficulties was a major theme in the symposium on military museum exhibition held at Legermuseum in Delft, Nov. 2002. See Heleen Bronder (2002) (ed.): Presenting the Unpresentable: Renewed Presentations in Museums of Military History, Delft: Legermuseum.

counterparts little inclination to arrange exhibits and galleries to tell stories or to explain arcane military matters to their visitors, or even attempt to display objects to best advantage. (Figure 5) Objects were simply classified and sorted, usually in something approximating chronological order, to celebrate technological progress and military valor.[21]

Military Museums Redirected

The First World War profoundly affected military museums, as it did virtually every aspect of Western culture. Preeminent among the institutions founded because of the Great War was the Imperial War Museum in London, which opened to the public in 1920. The idea of such a museum originated during the war partly as a propaganda effort to sustain eroding public enthusiasm for the fight, partly as a sincere attempt to meet a deeply felt need to record the war widely regarded as epochal from the outset.[22] The concept of such a museum resonated throughout the British Commonwealth (Figure 4) and even inspired an abortive attempt to found a Great War museum in Washington. Despite coming late to the war, many in the United States shared both the patriotic enthusiasm and a sense of living in historic times. But their efforts to create a comparable museum failed. The high hopes and major accomplishments of the immediate postwar years fell victim to a changed political and economic environment after 1920. The promised war museum never materialized and much of the remarkable war collections were dispersed over the next decade. What remained eventually became part of the National Museum of American History, which opened to the public in 1964 as the Museum of History and Technology.[23]

21 | G. Brown Goode (1896): »On the Classification of Museums«, in: Science n.s. 3, pp. 154-61; Sally Gregory Kohlstedt (1988): »History in a Natural History Museum: George Brown Goode and the Smithsonian Institution«, in: Public Historian 10, no. 2, pp. 7–26; Maurice Maindrou (1900): »Les musées militaires«, in: La Revue Blanche 21, pp. 259–63, pp. 601–604; Todd: »The Military Museum in Europe«, (note 3), pp. 41–43.

22 | Becker: »War Memorials«, (note 14), pp. 657–80; Gaynor Kavanagh (1994): Museums and the First World War: A Social History, London: Leicester University Press; Gaynor Kavanagh (1988): »Museums as Memorial: The Origins of the Imperial War Museum«, in: Journal of Contemporary History 23, no. 1, pp. 77–97; Susanne Brandt (1994): »The Memory Makers: Museums and Exhibitions of the First World War«, in: History and Memory 6, no. 1, pp. 95–122.

23 | Elizabeth Rankin (2006): »War Museums in the British Dominions: Conceptualising Imperial Allegiance and Colonial Autonomy«, in: New Zealand Sociology 21, no. 1, pp. 49–67; Margaret Vining/Barton C. Hacker (2008): »Displaying the Great War in America: The World War I Exhibition of the United States National Museum in Washington, DC, 1918 and Beyond«, in: Claudia Reichl-Ham (ed.): The Universal Heritage of Arms and Military

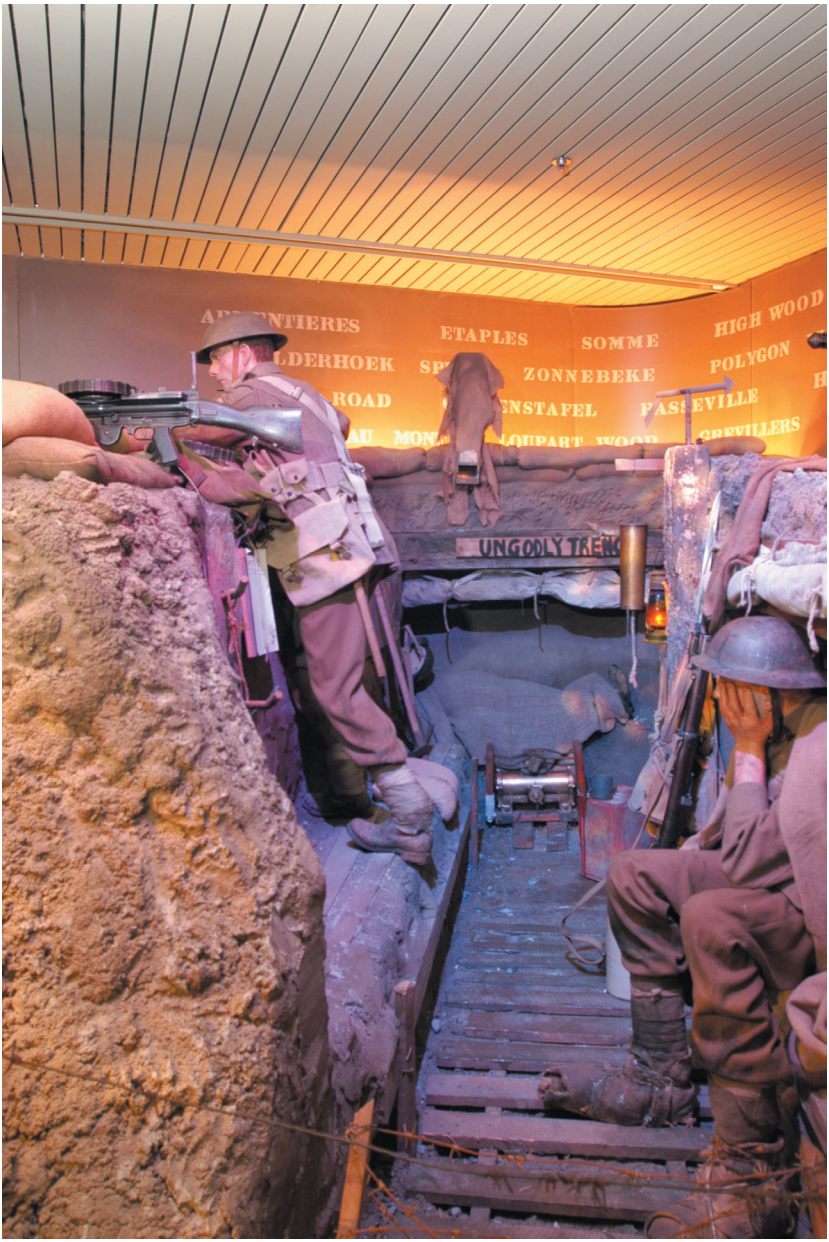

Figure 4: Like the Imperial War Museum in England, the New Zealand National Army Museum sought to replicate a World War I trench.
© National Army Museum, Waiouru, New Zealand.

Until the 1980s, the new museum's military collections were displayed in cases with labels that merely identified objects, but offered little in the way of context, historical or otherwise. In this respect, it differed scarcely at all from military museum practice elsewhere. Traditional curators tended to prefer "the curio class of exhibit-the association item and the firsts and lasts of military history".[24] During the era of the world wars, the central mission of military museums expanded from displaying the relics of the past to include honoring the wartime sacrifice of past generations, but went no further. For a quarter-century beyond the end of World War II they also largely retained traditional approaches to presenting their subject. That only changed when the currents of the so-called new military history began to roil the waters of old museum practices in the 1980s. In place of the long-time emphasis on great captains, strategy, and combat, the new military historians in America stressed the activities of common soldiers, the structure of military institutions, and the ineractions of armed forces and their societies,[25] an approach that soon spread to Europe.[26]

The new military history also for the first time opened a window into the experience of the women who regularly formed part of armies.[27] Until the late 20th century, women's history was largely ignored by all museums, but perhaps especially by military museums. The curator of history in the United States National Museum

History: Challenges and Choices in a Changing World, Vienna: Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, pp. 27–38.

24 | Claude F. Luke (1933): »The Early Days of the Imperial War Museum«, in: Strand Magazine 82, pp. 534–41, as cited in Todd: »The Military Museum in Europe«, (note 3), p. 40; Laurie Milner: »Displaying War: The Changing Philosophy Behind the Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum in London«, in: Bronder, Presenting the Unpresentable (note 20), pp. 10–17, pp. 11–12.

25 | Richard H. Kohn (1981): »The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research«, in: American Historical Review 86, no. 3, pp. 553–67; Edward M. Coffman (1984): »The New American Military History«, in: Military Affairs 48, no. 1, pp. 1–5; Peter Karsten (1986): »The 'New' American Military History: A Map of the Territory, Explored and Unexplored«, in: American Quarterly 36, no. 3, pp. 389–418; Peter Karsten (1986) (ed.): The Military in America: From the Colonial Era to the Present, New York: Free Press.

26 | Torbjørn L. Knutsen (1987): »Old, Unhappy, Far-off Things: The New Military History of Europe«, in: Journal of Peace Research 24, no. 1, pp. 87–98; Peter Paret (1991): »The New Military History«, in: Parameters 20, pp. 10–18; Don Higginbotham (1992): »The New Military History: Its Practitioners and Their Practices«, in: David A. Charters/Marc Milner/Brent Wilson (eds.): Military History and The Military Profession, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992, pp. 131–44; Robert M. Citino (2007): »Military Histories Old and New: A Reintroduction«, in: American Historical Review 112, no. 4, pp. 1070–90.

27 | Barton C. Hacker (1981): »Women and Military Institutions in Early Modern Europe: A Reconnaissance«, in: Signs 6, no. 4, pp. 643–71.

Figure 5: One of the cases of Great War women's uniforms on exhibit in the United States National Museum during the 1920s displays uniforms worn, left to right: a member of the Motor Corps, National League for Women's Service; a captain in that Motor Corps; a major in the First National Service School; and a member of the American Friends Service Committee. © Armed Forces History Division, National Museum of American History, Washington, DC.

might well have been speaking for many of his successors as well as most of his colleagues when, in 1929, he dismissed women's uniforms from the World War (Figure 5) as "not of primary historical or scientific interest", and urged their removal from a decade-old display because "the space which they now occupy is urgently needed for the accommodation of material of very much greater value".[28] A female exhibition officer described much the same sentiment among her male colleagues at the Imperial War Museum seventy-five years later, observing that the museum's "team of historians are all men and don't take kindly to what they regard as peripheral subjects".[29] Although a women's work section formed part of the Imperial War Museum from the beginning, little of that material became part of the permanent

28 | Theodore T. Belote to William de Chastignier Ravenel, 9 March 1929, Smithsonian Institution Archives, as quoted in Margaret Vining/Barton C. Hacker (2005): »Uniforms Make the Woman: Material Culture and Social Technology in the First World War«, in: Bernard Finn/Barton C. Hacker (eds.): Materializing the Military, London: Science Museum Press, p. 68.

29 | Mark Liddiard (2004): »Changing Histories: Museums, Sexuality and the Future of the Past«, in: Museum and Society 2, no. 1, pp. 15–29, p. 18.

display.[30] The problem is less finding opportunities to show women's military history separately – as recent exhibits in London and Paris testify[31] – than it is integrating women into normal military history exhibits. Recent experience at the National Museum of American History illustrates this point.

Recent Military Exhibition in the Smithsonian

The museum now known as the National Museum of American History opened in 1964 as the Museum of Technology and History. The new museum incorporated the institution's military collections, several hundred thousand individual items. As might be expected, the new military exhibit featured lots of weapons and uniforms arranged in more or less chronological order from the American Revolution through the 19th century-a typically traditional exhibit, including even the semi-iconic circular wall display of edged weapons surrounding the Great Seal of the United States. In 1980, the museum changed its name and altered its mission to collect, care for, study, and interpret objects that reflected the experience of the American people. It became, in short, a museum reshaped to accommodate the new social history, with its stress on race, class, and gender.[32] As elsewhere in the museum world, the caretakers of the military history collections were rather slower than their colleagues to embrace the new dispensation. Even as late as 2002, a symposium at the Army Museum in Delft on European military museum exhibition had as one of its major themes how to implement the transformation of outmoded exhibit strategies into displays that set the artifacts into larger social contexts.[33] A major physical renovation of the American museum's armed forces history hall in 1984-1985 cleaned up the old

30 | Susan Grayzel edited a collection of interpretive and explanatory essays for a digitized Imperial War Museum's Women's Work Collection under the title »A Change in Attitude: The Women's Work Collection of the Imperial War Museum«, http://www.tlemea.com/introduction.asp, 20 March 2012. For a published sampling of the collection, see Diana Condell/Jean Liddiard (1988): Working for Victory? Images of Women in the First World War 1914–1918, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

31 | A latter-day temporary exhibit at the museum based on the collection produced Kate Adie (2003): Corsets to Camouflage: Women and War, London: Hodder & Stoughton. François Rouquet/Fabrice Virgili/Danièle Voldman (2007) (eds.): Amours: Guerres et sexualité 1914–1945, Paris: Gallimard, for BDIC and Musée de l'Armée, similarly documents a temporary exhibit at the Invalides.

32 | »A Browsing Bibliography in the New Social History« (1975), Chicago: Newberry Library; James B. Gardner/George R. Adams (1983) (eds.): Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History, Nashville: American Association for State and Local History.

33 | Bronder: Presenting the Unpresentable (note 20).

display and added a few new artifacts, but did nothing to alter the basic exhibition structure.

That changed in 1987 with the opening of a major military exhibit on an unlikely topic. Though it also displayed the heroic wartime service of Japanese-American soldiers, its main concern was the incarceration of Japanese-Americans in World War II.[34] Entitled *A More Perfect Union: Japanese-Americans & the U.S. Constitution*, the exhibit commemorated the bicentennial of the United States Constitution by addressing one of the constitution's failures, a generally well-received departure from past triumphalism.[35] It also set the Smithsonian on a new direction in military exhibition, a shift confirmed in another major exhibit that followed in 1992, a fiftieth anniversary commemoration of America's World War II. Its debt to the new military history was made explicit in its title: *G.I.: The American Soldier Experience in World War II* (Figure 6). During the 1990s a series of smaller, temporary exhibits explored such topics as American women in war, centering on their experience as prisoners of war in the First Gulf War (1991); the African-American cavalry soldiers who served in the Western army during the late 19th century; the significance of the post-World War II GI Bill; and the women allowed to enlist in the US Navy as yeoman (f) in World War I.

Despite this shift in exhibition strategy, the question posed in this conference – "Does War Belong in Museums?" – arose in an acute form when the position of armed forces history curator became vacant in 1993. The position remained unfilled for five years as the curatorial staff debated that very question. Eventually the answer was yes, but it was a narrow decision. In a sense, it was the wrong question. Museums, including military museums, rarely exhibit war. Rather they exhibit the weapons and paraphernalia of the organizations that include war-fighting among their purposes. This is an important distinction, as Jan Piet Puype, long-time curator at the Legermuseum, noted in a 2005 article.[36] This was also the implicit conclusion of the 2002 symposium held at the Legermuseum in Delft. Despite being entitled *Presenting the Unpresentable*, most of the discussion centered on how to renovate the

34 | *A More Perfect Union: Japanese-Americans & the U.S. Constitution*, exhibit in the National Museum of American History, 1987–2004. Virtual exhibit at http://americanhistory.si.edu/perfectunion/experience/index.html. See also Tom D. Crouch (1989): »Some Thoughts on Public History and Social Responsibility«, in: Illinois Historical Journal 82, pp. 195–200

35 | Philip Tajitsu Nash (1989): »A More Perfect Union: Japanese-Americans and the Constitution«, in: Radical History Review no. 45, pp. 139–42; Allen W. Austin (2005): »Review of A More Perfect Union website«, in: Journal of American History 92, no. 1, pp. 326–28;

36 | Jan Piet Puype (2005): »Arms on Display: Core Business or Illustrations? A Commentary on the Presentation of Arms and Armour in Museums«, in Finn/Hacker: Materializing the Military (note 28), pp. 159–67.

Figure 6: The 1995 exhibition at the National Museum of American History, G.I. The American Soldier Experience in World War II, offered visitors a glimpse into the World War II enlisted experience in this replica of an army barracks room, where a sergeant berates a half-dressed private.
© Armed Forces History Division, National Museum of American History, Washington, DC.

older building in which most military museums resided and how to provide military artifacts with social contexts. Presumably the unpresentable was war-caused horror, violence, and death, but the issue never surfaced in the symposium's presentations or discussions.[37]

The new military exhibits mounted at the National Museum of American History after 1998 illustrate how little the presentation of war mattered. A major exhibition in 2000 on nuclear submarines in the Cold War marked the centennial of America's submarine force. That was followed in 2002 by another major exhibit, on West Point in the making of America, which commemorated the bicentennial of the US Military Academy. Warlike activities appeared in the submarine show, *Fast Attacks and Boomers: Submarines in the Cold War*, but tended more toward technology, international relations, and the seaman's experience. One of the central themes of the topically organized submarine show was how men and women interacted with both technology (Figure 7) and the organization, although including women (primarily the wives of sailors) proved difficult to sell to the sponsors and senior museum staff.[38] The West Point exhibit was framed chronologically, from

37 | Bronder: Presenting the Unpresentable (note 20).

38 | *Fast Attacks and Boomers: Submarines in the Cold War*, exhibit in the National Museum of American History, 2000–2003. Virtual exhibit at http://americanhistory.si.edu/subs/. See also Barton C. Hacker (2005): »Objects in an Exhibition: Reflections on 'Fast Attacks

the academy's founding in 1802 through the First World War (see the frontispiece). America's wars certainly figured in the exhibit, *West Point in the Making of America, 1802–1918*, but the emphasis was on economic development, technological innovation, and the humanity of West Pointers. The exhibit relied heavily on the biographies of selected graduates, 51 in all, who had in one or another, famously or obscurely, contributed to American national development. All graduates during the period were men, of course, but the exhibit explicitly included information about their wives and families as well as their careers, another difficult sell.[39]

The latest exhibition in the National Museum of American History was essentially a complete reinstallation of the permanent armed forces history hall under the title of *The Price of Freedom: Americans at War*.[40] Although America's wars provided the framework for the exhibition, the actual displays had little direct relation to war. Like most military history exhibits, they showed visitors examples of the weapons, uniforms, and equipment of soldiers from the late colonial period through the ongoing wars in the Middle East. Context and explanation were notably lacking. In some ways, this exhibit marked a reversion to an earlier style of military exhibit, the more-or-less chronological arrangement of many artifacts to celebrate military prowess and progress, a fall from grace noted by reviewers.[41]

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and Boomers'«, in: Finn/Hacker (eds): Materializing the Military (note 28), pp. 141–48; Barton C. Hacker (2007): »Reflections on Nuclear Submarines in the Cold War: Putting Military Technology in Context for a History Museum Exhibit«, in: John Schofield/Wayne Cocroft (eds.): A Fearsome Heritage: The Diverse Legacies of the Cold War, Seattle: Left Coast Press, pp. 201–30. Cf. Gary E. Weir (2003): »Fast Attacks and Boomers: Submarines in the Cold War: The National Museum of American History«, in: Technology and Culture 44, no. 2, pp. 359–63.

39 | *West Point in the Making of America, 1802–1918*, exhibit in the National Museum of American History, 2002–2004. Virtual exhibit http://americanhistory.si.edu/westpoint/. See also Barton C. Hacker/Margaret Vining (2002): West Point in the Making of America, Irvington, NY: Hydra; Margaret Vining/Barton C. Hacker (2007) (eds.): Science in Uniform, Uniforms in Science: Historical Studies of American Military and Scientific Interactions, Washington, DC: National Museum of American History; and Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press; Barton C. Hacker/Margaret Vining (2005): »Nuclear Subs and West Point: The Rise and Fall of Two Exhibitions at the National Museum of American History«, paper presented at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians, Seattle, WA, April 2005.

40 | *The Price of Freedom: American at War*, exhibit in the National Museum of American History, 2004. See http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/.

41 | Edward Rothstein (2004): »Drawing Battle Lines in Museum View of War«, exhibition review of The Price of Freedom, in: New York Times, 11 Nov. 2004. http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/11/arts/design/11free.html; Robert Friedel (2005): »The Price of Freedom: Americans at War«, in Finn/Hacker: Materializing the Military (note 28), pp. 149–57;

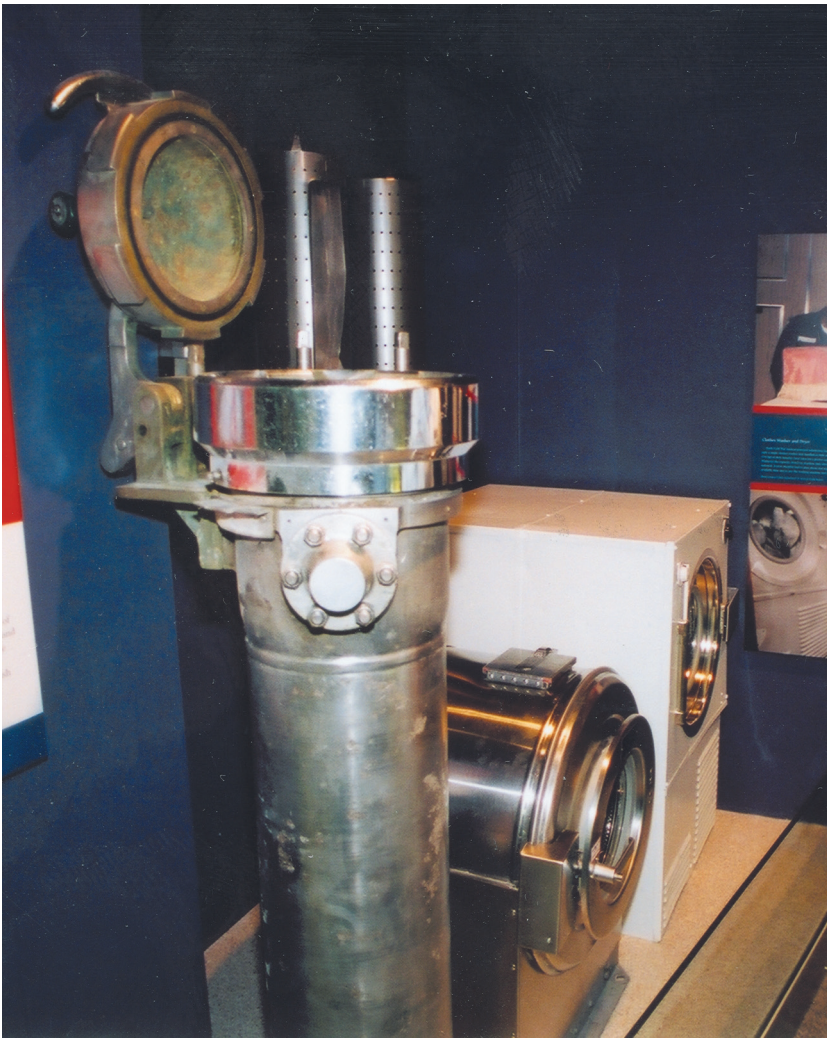

Figure 7: Including a trash disposer and clothes washer in the 2000 exhibition, Fast Attacks and Boomers: Submarines in the Cold War, helped viewers to gain some sense of life aboard a nuclear submarine.
© Armed Forces History Division, National Museum of American History, Washington, DC.

Carole Emberton (2005): »The Price of Freedom: Americans at War«, in: Journal of American History 92, no. 1, pp. 163–65; Scott Boehm (2006): »Privatizing Public Memory: The Price of Patriotic Philanthropy and the Post-9/11 Politics of Display«, in: American Quarterly 58, no. 4, pp. 1147–66.

Military Museums and Social History

Even as the experience of the world wars made military museums more frankly memorial, it did little to change styles of exhibition. Still, the first tentative efforts at storytelling exhibits began to appear, tending to focus more on the common soldier and his gear than the great men of the past. Military museum curators and historians, observed Frederick Todd in his 1948 survey of European practice, "began to break away from the collection of military items as objects of art or of antiquarian interest; they began to discover they had a respectably serious field of their own in the techniques of warfare".[42] Yet through much of the 20th century, military museums continued to mount arcane displays of war-related objects and static chronological exhibitions of military materiel with little or no interpretation. Exhibits remained much of a piece, according to Todd: "cases of objects associated with the great or near-great, rows of armor for horse and man, dusty uniforms mounted on grotesque manikins, clusters of weapons on their walls, and ceilings of fading banners".[43] Even today, as any regular visitor of military museum will testify, such practices have scarcely vanished, though they are far less pervasive than they once were.[44]

Only in the 1980s did significant changes make themselves felt. Military museums, like other museums, benefited from the growing professionalization of staff members.[45] They also enjoyed the renovation of older structures that helped make them more suitable as museums, or even the construction of new purpose-built museums. No less significant were the new sensibilities shaped by the Second World War and the Cold War and the new thinking engendered by the growing importance of a new social history. More specifically, military museums began to draw on military social history, the new military history as it was called, emphasizing the common soldier, the experience of war, and the place of the armed forces in society. New techniques for displaying the results complemented the new ways of thinking about the past and the new venues.

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42 | Camille Bloch (1920): »Bibliotèques et musées de la guerre«, in: Revue de Paris 27, pp. 608–33, as cited in Todd: »The Military Museum in Europe« (note 3), p. 39.

43 | Todd: »The Military Museum in Europe« (note 3), p.39.

44 | For a recent survey, see Barton C. Hacker/Margaret Vining (2005): »European Military History Museums: A Personal, Electronic, and Bibliographic Survey«, in Finn/Hacker: Materializing the Military (note 28), p. 169–78.

45 | American Association of Museums (1973): Museum Studies: A Curriculum Guide for Universities and Museums, Washington: AAM; Office of Museum Programs (1976): Museum Studies Programs in the United States and Abroad, Washington: Smithsonian Institution; Alexander: Museums in Motion (note 2), pp. 231–48; Gaynor Kavanagh (1991): The Museum Profession: Internal and External Relations, New York: Leicester University Press.

Interactive exhibits and living history were only the most prominent among a range of innovations designed to engage ordinary museum visitors more effectively. Few of these developments went unchallenged and some of the issues have yet to be resolved but the last two decades have clearly seen the appearance of a new kind of military museum taking its place alongside a new kind of military history.[46]

46 | James Morrison (2008): »War and Peace«, in: Museums Journal 108, no. 11, pp. 22–27.