

## 2022: Museum Year in Review

*A New WWII Exhibit, an Original Movie Documentary, and the French Legion de l'honneur Medal to a D-Day Veteran*



### Expanded Museum Schedule: Record Number of Visitors & Volunteers

The museum's visitor attendance in 2022 was 3638 (compared to 2583 in 2021); 90% of the visitors are from outside Brevard. This year we had a record number of 22 Pathfinders (docents), whose initiative and enthusiasm encouraged us to open for five days per week (previously four), and to stay open through December 31 for the first time in the museum's history.

### New Exhibit, Artifacts, and Partnerships

2022's new exhibit was a WWII scene "Letters from Home, Somewhere in Europe," displaying a 1943 Willys Jeep and 1942 Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

The fully-restored and running Jeep was donated to the museum by Ken Dawson of Winston-Salem, N.C., to honor the military service of his friend Phil Mayrand, U.S. Army Ranger, Vietnam. The two friends met as young Explorer Scouts in the late 1950's.

Harley-Davidson motorcycles like this one (with its "suicide shifter") were used by WWII MPs in the European theatre.



### Patriot's Point Partnership

The museum also received donations of a WWI Maxim machine gun, a 14-foot Soviet missile, and German uniforms and shoes. New Director of Acquisitions Bobby Kotlowski established a partnership with Patriot's Point Naval & Maritime Museum in Charleston, SC to procure additional artifacts. He expects more historically significant items in 2023.

## International Recognition

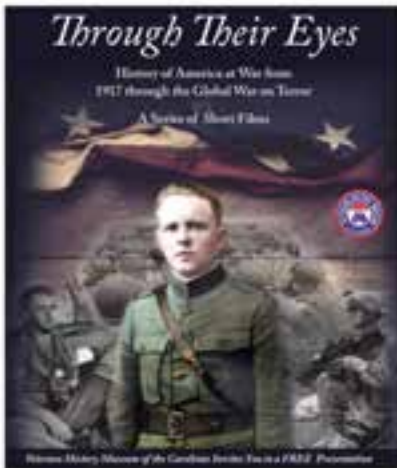
With the City of Brevard, the museum hosted a ceremony bestowing of the French Legion de l'honneur on D-Day veteran George Sarros (seated) for his service in liberating France and Europe from Nazi occupation. French Consul General Anne-Laure Dèsjonquieres (in black jacket) presented the medal in a ceremony attended by more than 100 people. Also in photo: NC Representative Mike Clampitt (center) and Mayor Maureen Copelof (far right).



Sarros served as a motor machinist on LST 515, which delivered tanks, troops, and ambulances onto the beaches of Normandy on D-Day and beyond. They picked up ambulances full of wounded Allies soldiers and took them to hospitals in London. LST 515 made 65 crossings of the English Channel in the days following June 6, 1944.

This medal was awarded as the result of several years of work with the French Consulate by museum Co-Curator Tom Bugala (not pictured).

## Original Video Programs and Grants



The soldier pictured on the movie poster above is WWI artillery officer Latimer Johns, who died and is buried in France. Johns was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. He was the great-uncle of museum treasurer Michel Johns Robertson.

In 2022, inflation and a sluggish economy resulted in a 14.5% decline in donations to the museum. A Covid-relief grant from North Carolina Humanities enabled the museum to stay open. Grants and partnerships supported exciting new programs such as the Jeep Exhibit and “Through Their Eyes” (a documentary consisting of six videos). A short video in each gallery tells the history of each conflict through professional narration, photos, music, museum artifacts and local veterans’ stories.

The world premiere showings of “Through Their Eyes” drew 700 people, including 150 eighth-graders and high school students, with requests for showings in 2023 to schools, libraries, colleges, and community organizations.

The six videos now show in each of the museum’s galleries and will be on our website and Facebook page. In 2023, the volunteer video team will develop a study guide for students and create “meet the veterans” events. We thank the North Carolina Humanities, Lake Toxaway Charities, Pisgah Forest Rotary, and Transylvania County for their support.

## Community Presence & Business Support

We continued our participation in community events such as Independence Day, Veterans Day, and Memorial Day. We received generous sponsorships from five local businesses: Egolf Motors, TVS, Harris Ace Hardware, The Cherry Tree, and O.P. Taylor’s.

JROTC groups from Transylvania County and Haywood County came in for customized tours (photo at right), and the museum awarded its annual scholarship to a Transylvania JROTC cadet.



## Ambassador to Business

Honorary Museum Board Member USAF Lt. Col. (Ret.) Ed Cottrell (on left in photo with N.C. Governor Roy Cooper) represented the museum at the ribbon-cutting of the Pratt & Whitney plant in Asheville, N.C. Cottrell was introduced to the audience as a P-47 Fighter Pilot who flew 65 missions in the Battle of the Bulge. He credits the Pratt & Whitney radial engine for saving his life when his engine was shot by a German ME-109.



## Back to the Battlefield



Andrew Biggio, author of *The Rifle*, met WWII pilot Ed Cottrell at a museum event. Biggio has taken Cottrell on three “back to the battlefield” trips to Holland and Belgium. Biggio also took Cottrell to the gravesite of his roommate Thomas H. Smith, who was shot down and killed in battle. This was the first time Cottrell had been able to pay tribute to his fellow pilot and friend. This photo received 8 million+ viewings on Facebook.

Biggio, USMC veteran of Afghanistan, has become a partner with the museum, honoring two local WWII veterans by publishing their stories in the latest edition of his book. In the photo at right, Biggio honors WWII US Army Nurse Dorothy Managan (now age 100) by inscribing his book to her.



## Media, Communications and Outreach

In 2022, our website had 35,775 visits (up from 22,082 in 2021), 90% being first-time visits. The search words “things to do in Western N.C.” are what brought most of those to our site. We averaged 50 site visits per day until June and July, when that number jumped to 1000+ per day, with 80-97% from cell phones. This tells us people are searching for things to do while they’re traveling.

The most popular stories on our website’s “Living Histories” blog last year were “Still Hoping to Save the Kitty Hawk” (18,309 visitors) and “Band of Brothers” (2349 visitors).

The museum’s social media include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. Our Facebook page, where we posted 200 stories in 2022, has 3000+ followers. Our posts received 88,725 views, with 8000+ followers sharing or liking our content. We share with groups like “We Are Brevard NC,” making our posts available to their 23,000 followers.

Our communications outreach now includes 17 media placements for each event. We have 1915 subscribers to our weekly e-newsletter, with 42% open rate. Bold Life Magazine published two features on our programs. Area newspapers placed the museum’s articles on their front pages a total of seven times in 2022.

Three TV stations broadcasted stories on the French Legion de l’honneur ceremony. Greenville, SC’s Fox Carolina journalist is expected to return February 27 to do a segment about the museum.

Four board members represented the museum at the Charleston, S.C. commissioning of the USS *Frank E. Petersen*, the Navy’s newest guided missile destroyer, displaying some of the museum’s important artifacts, and spreading the word about the museum to a new audience.

## Guest Speaker History Programs

We held a record 10 history lectures, averaging 71 attendees each, with two programs bringing in more than 100 people. Nationally-known authors as well as local veterans telling their stories brought audiences into three new venues: Transylvania County Elections Center Conference Room, Transylvania County Library's Rogow Room, and Brevard College's Ingram Lecture Hall. Nationally-known authors James Scott (*Target Tokyo*, *Black Snow*) and Sean McMeekin (*Stalin's War*) presented programs on their new books.



Requested by a California Vietnam Veterans' group, speakers are now livestreamed on Facebook and posted on our site for viewers all over the world.

## Museum Partnership with Brevard College



Brevard College's History Department co-sponsored our program based on the book, *Loyal Forces: The American Animals of WWII*. The program was presented by National WWII Museum official and Brevard College alumna Toni Kiser (pictured). We look forward to our continued partnership with Brevard College.

## The Museum's Future

Museum Founder/Curator, Emmett Casciato, took a leave of absence to run for public office and won. Volunteers stepped in with seamless continuity and added new ideas. Casciato is now a member of the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners and energetically back at the museum, developing plans to raise support for an eventual new home for the museum.

We are looking forward to 2023 being an even better year for our museum. Our space is still limited but our vision and enthusiasm are growing. When we open March 1, 2023, our volunteer Pathfinders will be there to greet you.

*David Morrow, President*

*Veterans History Museum of the Carolinas, December, 2022*

Below, Vietnam veterans gathered at the museum



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