

Illinois State Military Museum puts visitors on European street during WWII

Written by Illinois National Guard PAO
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SPRINGFIELD, IL (07/23/2013)(readMedia)-- A U.S. Soldier takes cover behind a bullet-riddled brick wall, holding his Thompson submachine gun against his right leg as he reloads. Behind him, another U.S. Soldier in a muddy uniform uses the barrel of his M-1 Garand rifle to nudge open the front door of a house.

This scene is the focus of a new display in the Illinois State Military Museum in Springfield and aims to take visitors back to the villages of Europe in 1944.

"This display puts you right in the middle of a village alongside Illinois Soldiers during World War II. You get a taste of the tension that Soldiers feel," said Bill Lear, the museum curator who designed the display and supervised its construction and installation on the second floor of the museum.

Lear is an Illinois Army National Soldier who served in Afghanistan with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team during its 2009 deployment, the largest single deployment of Illinois National Guard personnel since World War II.

The museum shows the history of the Illinois National Guard from its days as a French militia in 1723 to its current service in Iraq and Afghanistan. This scene expands the museum's World War II section.

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"We have another life-sized display showing Illinois Soldiers landing on a Pacific island and we have an interactive computer kiosk that lets visitors select World War II information from a menu of choices. There are also displays showing U.S. weapons and captured German and Japanese weapons and equipment," Lear said.

The new street scene is the result of the generosity of the 84th Division Railsplitter Association, a group of World War II veterans, and the Illinois National Guard and Militia Historical Society, a nonprofit organization that supports the museum's programs. The Railsplitter Association contributed funds to the Historical Society that in turn bought the mannequins, uniforms, signage and construction materials and hired the labor to build the display, said Lear.

"We've lived in freedom because of the service and sacrifice of the Railsplitters and servicemembers like them during World War II. And now, thanks to the Railsplitters and the Historical Society, the military museum can continue to tell the story of the Illinois members of the greatest generation," said retired Illinois National Guard Brig. Gen. Stewart Reeve, director of the Illinois State Military Museum.

The Illinois State Military Museum displays the history of the Illinois National Guard from 1723 to the 21st Century. Located two blocks north of the intersection of MacArthur Boulevard and North Grand Avenue in Springfield, Ill., the museum is open Tuesday through Saturday, 1 to 4:30 p.m. Admission and parking are free. For further information about the museum call [\(217\) 761-3910](tel:2177613910)

or visit

<http://www.il.ngb.army.mil/museum/>

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