

# NEWSLETTER

Honor, Educate and Heal... A Place for All

thehighground.us — 715.743.4224



General Ulysses S. Grant (fourth from left) and his staff, including Lieutenant Colonel Ely S. Parker (Seneca, 1828–1895, second from the right), late spring, 1864. Photo by Mathew Brady. National Archives and Records Administration 524444

## "Why We Serve: Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces"

**Native American Veterans and Tribes are invited to share their stories, history and memorabilia**



Smithsonian  
National Museum  
of the American Indian

"Why We Serve: Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces" was produced by the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). The "Why We Serve: Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces" exhibition will be on display in the Welcome Center April 10-July 6, 2026. This exhibit tells personal stories of Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Alaska Native Veterans who have served in the U.S. armed forces and brings long overdue recognition to those who have served their country selflessly and with honor for more than 250 years.

Visitors will learn about the origins of Native American military service, how Indigenous languages were used to win battles, the service of Native women during World War II, and the heroics of Native Americans from the Civil War, WWI, WWII, Korean War, Vietnam War and through the conflicts in the Middle East. **Why We Serve honors the Native Americans who have served in the U.S. military, often in extraordinary numbers, since the American Revolution** (cont. on page 7).

**See page 13 for this year's Veterans Program dates!**



### CAMO Presentation on June 17 at 6pm

"UW MIA Recovery & Identification Project: Archaeological Approaches to Recovery and Repatriating Fallen American Heroes" - Presented by Lead Archaeologist Gregg Jamison, Professor of Anthropology at UW-Milwaukee. The project aims to recover, identify and repatriate the remains of MIA American Armed Services Personnel, helping fulfill our Nation's promise to provide the fullest possible accounting of those who gave their lives in service to our country. This talk highlights our history, goals and archaeological approaches to recovery operations in Europe.

### What's Inside

#### 06. Featured Veteran

Atomic Veteran Gile McWain:  
1953 Atomic Testing in Nevada

#### 11. Education Days

Schools and Homeschool Groups are Invited to Claim their Spot

#### 14. Gift Shop Products

Visit the Store that Supports the Mission: [thehighground.shop](http://thehighground.shop)

# Honor Stones, Memorials & Honorariums

## Where Every Stone Tells a Story

Each year, our Honor Stone program offers a meaningful way for families, friends, and community members to celebrate a special Veteran, a service-hearted loved one or K9. Whether in memory of a loved one, in recognition of a milestone, or simply as a heartfelt tribute, Honor Stones create a lasting symbol of appreciation and remembrance. Placed along our Plaza, in the Persian Gulf, Korean and Military Working Dog tributes, these engraved stones serve as a quiet reminder of the people and K9s who have shaped our lives. Every stone tells a story—of gratitude, love, service or legacy—and together they form a powerful collection tribute that reflects the strength of our community.

Purchasing an Honor Stone not only preserves a name or message for years to come, but also directly supports our mission. Contributions from this program help us continue offering essential services, programs and resources throughout the year. **If you're looking for a thoughtful way to honor someone, consider a gift that lasts far beyond and continues to inspire everyone who visits. For Honor Stone information and applications, visit our website at [thehighground.us/honor-stones](http://thehighground.us/honor-stones)**

### 2026 Honor Stone Ceremony Dates

**May 16:** Legacy at 11am & 2pm

**June 13:** Korean at 11am and Legacy at 2pm

**July 11:** Persian Gulf at 11am and Legacy at 2pm

**August 1:** Legacy at 11am & 2pm

**September 19:** Legacy & MWD at 11am and Legacy at 2pm

**October 3:** Legacy at 11am & 2pm



### IN MEMORY OF

Tracy Algers

Oscar Felsch

Allen P. Frank

Chris J. Franklin

Zach Gallenberg

Ed Hanson

John Imrie

Peggy Koehler

Vilas & Vernice Kraft

Kenneth Kraft

Francis Krantz

Rodney Littlefield

Frederick Littlefield

Ronald L. Lun

Leroy "Moose" Meyer

Virginia Montgomery

Charles Mouradian

Rocky Nelson

Frank R. Olszewski

Edgar Ott

Ben Rous

Gaylord Rous

Norb Siolka

Andy Stevens

Thomas "Blackie" Bednarek

Herman Strangfeld

David Tiry

John Tollefson

Brent Vroman

### IN HONOR OF

Bill Buss

Don Funseth

K9 Kim - Handler: Guerrero

Lindgren-Galloway Family

Max Littlefield

Rick Mickel

"Family Vets"

Prairie Du Chien

Correctional Inst. Veterans



Confidential chat at [VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net)  
or text to **838255**

**Vet Center – La Crosse**  
910 2nd Avenue  
Onalaska, WI 54650  
Direct line:  
608-782-4403

**Vet Center – Madison**  
1291 North Sherman Ave  
Madison, WI 53704  
Direct line:  
608-264-5342

**Vet Center – Green Bay**  
1600 South Ashland Avenue  
Green Bay, WI 54304  
Direct line:  
920-435-5650

**Vet Center – Milwaukee**  
7910 North 76th Street, Ste 100  
Milwaukee, WI 53223-3916  
Direct line:  
414-902-5561

# Event Highlights

## Invitation to Veteran Artists

**Military Veteran artists/craftspeople:** Display and sell your works at the Welcome Center during the **Clark County Spring into the Arts Tour April 24-25**. For more information, email Theresa at [museum@thehighground.org](mailto:museum@thehighground.org) or call 715-743-4224.

**Event information:** [clarkcountywi.org/visit-clark-county](http://clarkcountywi.org/visit-clark-county)



### Memorial Day Ceremony

Monday, May 25th at 3pm

#### Guest Speaker:

Veteran Melissa Doud, WDVA Tribal Liaison and proud member of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa



## 2026 Calendar of Events

- April 22 Beaded Suncatcher Workshop (CAMO)
- Apr 24-25 Spring Into The Arts Tour (Host Site)
- May 6-9 Spring Work Week
- May 9 Volunteer Appreciation Lunch
- May 16 Legacy Stone Ceremonies; Spring Bake Sale
- May 25 16th Annual Honor Ride; Memorial Day Ceremony
- May 30 Wellness Through CAMO
- June 5-7 Courage to Heal Female Veterans Retreat
- June 12-14 Male Veterans Retreat
- June 13 Korean and Legacy Stone Ceremonies
- June 17 Recovering Our MIAs by Gregg Jamison (CAMO)
- June 27 Freedom Celebration Fireworks at Dusk
- July 8 WWII POW Carl Nordin Presentation (CAMO)
- July 11 Persian Gulf and Legacy Stone Ceremonies
- Aug TBD CAMO Event
- Aug 1 Legacy Stone Ceremonies
- Aug 2 Vietnam Reunion; 42nd Annual Heroes Ride Welcome
- Aug 15 26th Annual Ride to Remember® Motorcycle Ride
- Sept TBD Female Veterans Workshop
- Sept 19 Military Working Dog and Legacy Stone Ceremonies
- Sept 29-Oct 2 Education Days (includes CAMO presentation)
- Oct TBD CAMO Community Halloween Event
- Oct 3 Legacy Stone Ceremonies; Fall Bake Sale
- Oct 8-9 Fall Cleanup Days
- Oct 16-18 "Operation Re-Connect" Military Couples Retreat
- Nov TBD CAMO Event
- Nov 11 Veterans Day Gathering
- Dec TBD CAMO Event
- Dec 3 Quilt Raffle Drawing (quilts displayed before drawing)

## Museum Exhibits

The Museum will be showing gallery exhibits that reflect the "Human Cost of War" throughout 2026. Exhibit details are available here and on our website. We invite you to follow us on Facebook for updates.

# Mission News

## "Courage to Heal" Female Veterans Retreat This Summer

The Highground will offer a 3-day retreat June 5-7, 2026, focusing on management techniques for female veterans affected by post-traumatic stress (PTS) and / or military sexual trauma (MST).



Sarah Blum, Vietnam Veteran nurse, PTS / MST advocate, experienced peer support leader and author of "Warrior Nurse" and "Women Under Fire", will lead workshops and talking circles to assist Veterans in finding healing and coping skills as they continue their journey towards better mental health and joyful living. These activities will all take place within the camaraderie of fellow female Veterans at the comfortable and beautiful setting of the Highground Veterans Park. Interspersed between the healing workshops and talking circles will be art projects and outdoor activities.

This is the seventh year that The Highground has been offering healing retreats for female Veterans. The retreats provide a non-intimidating middle-ground in PTS/MST management as they are not a professional counseling event, but they offer experienced peer support, vetted programs and encourage support within the Veteran group which has resulted in many strong friendships. Comments from female Veterans who attended this retreat last year include, "I'm so glad I came! It was good to meet other women with the same issues." "The feeling of friendship and camaraderie was amazing!"

For more information and to register, please contact Theresa at The Highground at [museum@thehighground.org](mailto:museum@thehighground.org) or 715-743-4224.

*The retreat is offered free of charge to female Veterans due to the generous sponsorship of the WDVA, Global Finishing Solutions, Pamela Graham, American Legion Aux 291, Harold Schmitt, Melanie Wensch, The Vets Run, Mark & Beth Rodwell, The Rusty Nail, Kerry McAllen, and William Bishop. Available spots fill up fast, so please register early!*

**Work on our September Female Veterans event is well underway. Stay tuned for details on dates, workshops and healing activities.**



## Suncatcher Workshop on April 22 (CAMO)

Welcome spring with sparkle and creativity at the whimsical Beaded Suncatcher Workshop.

As part of our 2026 CAMO (Community and Military Outreach) Program and in celebration of Clark County's Spring into the Arts, participants ages 12 and up are invited to craft vibrant, light-catching designs using frames, chicken wire and colorful glass beads.



No experience is needed. Step-by-step guidance and all supplies are provided. Just bring your imagination and get ready to create something that shimmers in the sunshine. Those who wish may also have their finished suncatchers displayed during the Spring into the Arts event at The Highground on April 24 and 25, adding a touch of handmade magic to the celebration.

**Join us for a joyful, hands-on experience that welcomes the season with color, creativity, and community. To reserve your spot, call Bonnie at 715-743-4224 or email [donations@thehighground.org](mailto:donations@thehighground.org)**

# Mission News

## The Male Veterans Retreat is June 12-14

**Unplug. Connect. Recharge.** Join us for a weekend designed to help you leave the noise behind and connect with those who understand without needing a word. The retreat will offer Veterans the opportunity to have fun, enjoy great food and experience interesting activities in the company of fellow Veterans. The retreat is open to any male Veteran of any age. The weekend will be focused on mindfulness and will include a mix of outdoor activities and PTSD management workshops.

**To register for the retreat and get a detailed itinerary, Veterans can send an email to [ops@thehighground.org](mailto:ops@thehighground.org) or call Pete at 715-743-4224.**



## Hooked on Winter Fun: Veterans' Ice Fishing Retreat

**With the help of many community members and volunteers, the Winter Veterans Retreat (held Jan 16-18), with full attendance, was a wonderful experience.** As many people face increased struggles with mental health, isolation, and lack of physical activity during the winter months, this annual winter retreat is an especially welcome event. The retreat is open to all Veterans and focuses on activities



proven to help with post-traumatic stress (PTS) management, including getting outdoors, ice fishing, art, meditation and spending time with other Veterans. There was also ample free time within the itinerary which allowed Veterans to spend time exploring the park. An introduction to snowshoeing was held, but due to the freezing temperatures, the group snowshoe event did not occur. The hope is that the introductory workshop encourages Veterans to try this fun and economical winter sport.

The central event of the weekend was a half-day of ice fishing on Lake Arbutus. Paul and Melissa Borsheim opened their beautiful home to the large retreat group and served a big breakfast and lunch. Borton Construction sponsored the day

at the lake. Paul, Melissa and several volunteer fishing guides led the ice fishing planning for months leading up to the event, making sure Veterans had the proper equipment, instruction, support and ice shack shelters to thoroughly enjoy their time on the ice. The volunteer guides were Matthew Borsheim, Eric Sagen, Tim Helgerson, Eric Kramer, Joe Schwartz, Don Dunham and Al Kjos. Veterans received packages of ice fishing equipment to take home to continue this fun outdoor sport.

Taking many forms, creating “art” has been proven to be rewarding and therapeutic to those seeking improved mental health and can be a source of healing to those managing post-traumatic stress (PTS). A “Vets & Guitars” informational session was led by Victoria Shoemaker, The Highground’s Vets and Guitars program instructor. Victoria was joined by past Vets and Guitars students and family members who shared how taking part in the music instruction has benefited not only the Veteran student, but also their loved ones, as the Veteran obtained personal healing and growth from the music courses. Another art workshop, an introductory tutorial to painting with acrylics on canvas, was led by Theresa Hebert, museum coordinator at The Highground. Veterans were given a complete set of acrylic paints and brushes to take home and continue their newfound talents. Meditation takes many forms and can be individualized to suit personal preferences and needs. It has often become a key component in PTS management. The Highground’s own Pete Kern, Veteran and operations manager, led meditation instruction and exercises throughout the weekend. Accompanying these exercises, Veterans were given meditation instruction books and a 52-week journal with prompts to encourage introspection and put their thoughts into writing to help manage stress and despondency, and to assist with problem-solving.

**The success of these retreats is built on the unwavering support of dedicated sponsors and supporters. *Major funding for this year’s Winter Veterans Retreat was provided by a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. Generous donors who also supported this retreat include Borton Construction, Harold Schmitt, Hansen’s IGA, Pamela Graham, Global Finishing Solutions, Frontenac Farms Off Road Park, Kerry McAllen, American Legion Auxiliary Unit #291, The Rusty Nail LLC, Mark and Beth Rodwell, and Island Outdoors of La Crosse. A special thank you goes out to the Moraine Motel for their hospitality in making our Veterans feel welcome and comfortable during the retreat, to Bonnie Hachen for the wonderful meals she prepared, and to Nancy Rodman for the tasty desserts she brought on Saturday.***

# Featured Veteran

## Atomic Veteran Gile McWain

USMC Atomic Veteran Gile McWain visited *The Highground* in 2025 and through a fascinating conversation we learned of his unique service during the 1950s including participating in the 1953 Atomic Tests Operation “Upshot-Knothole” at the Nevada Proving Ground. He told our staff of the hazardous way the troops protected themselves...hands in front of eyes, “don’t stand up”,... and of marching to Ground Zero minutes after the detonation. In addition, troops were forbidden to speak of the experience and of any health concerns for years after the testing, even among each other, which delayed important health treatments. Gile submitted his story and connected museum staff with the National Association of Atomic Veterans to get thorough first-person accounts in order to create the “Atomic Veteran” exhibit.



Atomic Veteran USMC Gile McWain's military service and personal stories were the impetus for *The Highground* to create an educational exhibit about "Atomic Veterans". He was quoted in this news article and is shown in the photo above from his time in the USMC & during a recent visit to *The Highground*.

**In the winter of 1953, my helicopter squadron was asked to volunteer to take part in the 1953 Atomic Bomb Tests that were to take place in the desert of Nevada. I was gung-ho, I volunteered!** We were sent to Camp Desert Rock (a huge tent city) in Nevada. I was there for all the test shots, which consisted of eleven shots. Shot “Annie” was the first of eleven that I took part in; the following is my story which in many instances varies from the government’s version.

Thirty-plus Marines and myself were loaded into trucks at dawn on the day before the test and taken to the test site. We were given a tour of the trenches where we would observe, and then we proceeded towards Ground Zero. We walked past the displays of various military equipment; we walked under the 300-foot tower that contained the atomic device. After the tour we went back to the tent city to return to the test site the next morning for the shot! On the morning of the shot, we were up at 2:30am, did our normal routine and were trucked back to the site. It was darn cold that morning. We were told that the shot would be done at around 5:15am. We were to kneel in the trenches facing the front of the trench, to shield our eyes with our hands. We were told not to look towards the shot or stand up until we were ordered to do so. The countdown began on the speaker and at “ONE”, the detonation occurred. The sound was a crack, then a rumble and a flash. I could see the bones in my hand. The ground shook and it felt like I was sitting in an earthquake. The shock wave passed over our trench, throwing dust and debris everywhere. A few seconds later the return wave blew back towards Ground Zero. At this point, we were able to stand up and look at the explosion site.

As we looked up at the blast, we saw a rolling fireball of very brilliant colors and light flashed all around it. We saw vapor trails where drones passed by it. As the fireballs started to subside, a mushroom-

type of cloud formed, rising thousands of feet. After a time, the cloud dissipated and formed a dust cloud. After the shot time, we left our trenches and moved toward the blast area. As we moved forward, we were told to pick up our feet as we did not want to raise any dust. We were issued gas masks, but we never used them. As we continued to move forward, we passed many displays of military equipment that had been tossed about, we passed sheep that had been staked out in different areas; some were alive, some were burned, some blind, and some dead. We did stop a few times but continued forward. We were told we had made it to Ground Zero and ordered to turn around and leave the site. When we were out of the blast area, we removed our film badges and were swept off with a broom. We were allowed a five-minute shower. I was told that somewhere in our group was a guide and monitor. However, I never saw that person. This concludes test #1. Test #2 I took part in shot #2 “Simon”. The bomb was also located at a 300-foot tower. At this test, I was airborne in a helicopter flying towards Ground Zero from six miles out. My job was to record the shockwave when it hit the helicopter on a pressure monitor. The remaining crew members were reading the radiation exposure that we had. We flew towards Ground Zero after the blast. My helicopter flew towards the dust column and received radiation readings of 50 R/H, after which we took evasive action. We continued to fly into the detonation area for a short time, monitoring the radiation, which was extremely high. We then returned back to the helicopter landing area. We secured the helicopter and returned to our tents. We received no decontamination process.

### FOOTNOTE:

I returned to my unit after the tests and became ill. I was weak and fatigued. I was sent to sickbay on the base. They treated me as if I had a common ailment. After I got out of sickbay, I was shipped overseas to Hanshin, Japan. After a short period of time, I became very ill with chills and fever. I lost weight and my hair. After a while, I was sent to Osaka, Japan Army Hospital. I was there for 2.5 months. Afterwards, I was returned to my unit and had light duty for 30 days. I was weak and sick, but I kept up with my duties. After my tour of duty, I was returned to the United States. I was stationed in Minneapolis for the rest of my time. I continued to have health issues and was later sent to Fort Snelling for a diagnosis. I did not receive any real guidance for what was wrong. I was honorably discharged on January 15, 1955. I was sent back home to Wisconsin and continued to have health issues. My weight went down to 140 lbs. I saw many doctors and did not receive any concrete diagnosis. After several years, my health improved but has never been normal for the rest of my life.

# Museum News (cont.)

## Why We Serve: Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces Exhibition (cont. from page 1)

The exhibition asks, "Why would an Indigenous group serve a country that overran their homelands, suppressed their way of life and confined them to reservations?" What is revealed is that Native people have served for many of the same reasons as others: to demonstrate patriotism, pursue employment, education, or adventure. Yet tribal warrior traditions, treaty commitments, and responsibility for defending Native homelands have also inspired military service. **Why We Serve** is a comprehensive look at Native military involvement and explores Native American military service from its origins to the modern day. Through compelling, free-standing displays and extra content, visitors will discover the little-known but outsized contributions Native Americans have made to the U.S. military throughout our country's history. **Native American Veterans and Tribal Leaders are invited to share Veteran stories, tribal history and memorabilia in this exhibit. For more information, email Theresa at museum@thehighground.org or call 715-743-4224.**



Marine Corps veteran Debra Wilson (Oglala Lakota) addresses a panel from the National Museum of the American Indian about her vision for the National Native American Veterans Memorial, during a public forum at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Tulsa in Catoosa, Oklahoma, 2016. STEPHEN PINGRY/Tulsa World

## CAMO program receives generous grant for 2026 presentations



We are very happy to report that our CAMO (Community and Military Outreach) Program has been awarded a \$3,250 grant from Million Dollar Round Table (MDRT). Thank you, Juli McNeely, for sponsoring our application.

# Request Information

The Highground Veterans Memorial Park is a grassroots, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The private facility, which receives no ongoing federal or state funding, is supported by private donations and grants. It has a small operating budget and exists because volunteers and contributors have given The Highground their time, talents and personal/financial resources.

Please accept my donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I would like the gift to be used for:

\_\_\_\_\_ and/or the printed newsletter subscription \$25

**Please mail to:**  
**The Highground**  
**P.O. Box 457 Neillsville, WI 54456**  
**or call 715-743-4224 to make a donation.**

**I would like more information about:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Upcoming events and the fundraising calendar
- \_\_\_\_\_ Honor Stones
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adding someone to the mailing list (please include the name and address of the person you want to send a gift subscription to)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Capital Campaign
- \_\_\_\_\_ Endowment Fund
- \_\_\_\_\_ Booking details for "We Were There: Korean War" and "My War" exhibits

**I would also like to volunteer for the following events and activities. Please reach out to me!**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Porch Greeter
- \_\_\_\_\_ Spring Work Week / Fall Cleanup Days
- \_\_\_\_\_ Heroes Ride Annual Bike Tour
- \_\_\_\_\_ Honor Ride/Memorial Day
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ride to Remember®

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Questions or Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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# Museum News

## "The American Revolution Experience" Exhibit - May 17 – 26, 2026

### May 23-Revolutionary War Presentation by Jon Grossardt

With the sponsorship and assistance of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution Nay-osh-ing Chapter, The Highground is able to host "The American Revolution Experience," a collaborative project of the American Battlefield Trust and the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).

"Independence may have been declared in Philadelphia by the Declaration's 56 signers, but it was hard-won on the battlefields we protect by the thousands of Patriot soldiers from whom today's Daughters trace descent," said Trust President David Duncan. "Together, our organizations bear witness to the fact that we are not so far removed from those impactful events, that there are meaningful ways to bridge those 250 years." Individual DAR chapters across the nation have partnered with institutions in their communities to offer venues for the exhibit. The American Revolution Experience invites visitors to consider the choice faced by members of the revolutionary generation as tensions mounted in the 1770s: Would these ordinary citizens risk their lives and livelihoods in pursuit of liberty? Or would they remain loyal subjects of the British crown, coming into conflict with neighbors and family? The exhibit shows viewpoints and experiences, touching on the journeys — both literal and figurative — of Patriots and Loyalists, men and women, Black and Native populations and even international allies. Rather than focusing only on generals and famous statesmen, it introduces audiences to drummer boys, military mapmakers, and other ordinary people who were impacted by global events.

"The American Revolution would not have happened without the decisions, sacrifices and valor of ordinary people," said DAR President General Pamela Rouse Wright. "DAR is honored to have collaborated with the American Battlefield Trust on this initiative to highlight some of our Patriots and their roles in the founding of this great country. We are thrilled for people in communities across the country to learn more about these individuals."



Photo by Melissa A. Winn. Battlefields.org

## Exhibit Ideas Coming to Life

We are busy gathering items for a fun exhibit to bring to you in early 2027 called "How our Military History has Affected United States Culture." From movies to fashion, from kids' toys to food and medicine, the U.S. military and wartime issues have led to a great number of developments in our everyday lives. Helynn Schufletowski, a volunteer at The Highground, is working with staff members to help source items and research this exciting topic.



To support our Museum exhibits, call Theresa at 715-743-4224 or visit our donation webpage at [thehighgroundpark.givingfuel.com/general-donation-page](http://thehighgroundpark.givingfuel.com/general-donation-page)

# Museum News

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## “WWII Holocaust: Rise of the Nazi Party, the SS and Personal Stories of the Holocaust” – Exhibition and Education Days Program

### Under Construction for Display this Fall: Sponsors Needed!

Components of the exhibition are being created in-house, in collaboration with Troy Buddenhagen, and we are bringing in traveling exhibits and presenters from Holocaust Education Centers. ***Sponsors are needed to create an exhibition to properly represent all those who were affected by the Holocaust and to offer an educational exhibit on the detailed history.***

One of the traveling exhibits which has been confirmed as of the publishing of this newsletter is: “From the Children, About the Children, For the Children: Art and Writing of the Holocaust” – from the Institute for Holocaust Education (Omaha, NE, ihene.org). This is a collection of children’s artwork, poetry and selections from an underground youth newspaper created during the Holocaust. The panels include excerpts from two youth newspapers that were written in the Terezin ghetto in Czechoslovakia. Boys aged 12-15 living in the barracks created their own means of expression by editing these newspapers. Most of the children involved in writing these newspapers perished in Auschwitz or other extermination camps. Their writings were thankfully preserved and later published.

This traveling exhibit will be displayed at The Highground Sept 29-Oct 30, 2026 and may be extended to January, 2027, depending on funding. It is important to us to have this exhibition as part of The Highground’s Education Days in late September/early October.

**More Traveling Exhibits and Complete Exhibition Details TBA – please stay tuned! If you would like to help support this important exhibit, please email Theresa at [museum@thehighground.org](mailto:museum@thehighground.org) or call 715-743-4224.**

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## There's Still Time to See the “WWII Bomb Crews & Atomic Veterans” Exhibition!

**The current Welcome Center main gallery exhibit featuring the stories of Veterans and civilians who supported the USAAF is wrapping up its run and will only be available to view until April 1, 2026.** Within the exhibit are the stories of Gerald Hoefert, Richard Ebben, Lester Willner, Loren Longmore, Robert Stith, Joseph Urban Jr, Michael Podobnik, Frederick Meyer, Vivien Truax, William C. McDonald, Ethel Guffy Simpson, Ruby Jermstad, and Lee Jermstad (who died while being held as a POW in the Japanese Camp O’Donnell after surviving the Bataan Death March). A very special exhibit is on display within this exhibition of the story and artifacts brought back by Carl Nordin who was held as a prisoner of war by the Japanese from March 1942-September 1945.

Following a visit to The Highground by USMC Veteran Gile McWain, we were inspired to create and include an educational exhibit on Atomic Veterans alongside the WWII Bomb Crews Exhibit. Gile, an Atomic Veteran due to his involvement in atomic testing in the 1950s, brought his story and connections to other atomic veterans’ stories including the opportunity to speak with Atomic Veteran Keith Kiefer, commander of the National Association of Atomic Veterans (NAAV). As with all events and missions of The Highground, this exhibit is the result of several volunteers aiding our staff. ***James Veeshowske donated a large balsa wood model of a B-24 that he constructed which is proudly on display. Also on display is the returning exhibit of The Highground’s to-scale replica of “Little Boy”, (created by Combat Parts, Inc. and Kulas Body Shop) the atomic bomb which was dropped over Hiroshima, Japan in 1945. We have “offset” the horror of WWII and the suffering of civilians and military troops due to the atomic testing and bombs by exhibiting our “Senbazuru” 1,000 Origami Crane Exhibit created by volunteers.***

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## We Were There Vietnam Exhibit

**Work is continuing on the We Were There: Vietnam War project.** Banners are being composed for printing. In order to include all the personal stories which were submitted, a book is being assembled to accompany the banner exhibit.

# Event News

## Vietnam Veterans Reunion 2026 at The Highground—Walking the Path of Remembrance Together

**On Sunday, August 2**, The Highground will host its annual Vietnam Veterans Reunion combining Vietnam exhibits and a special presentation by survivors of the 1969 USS Frank E Evans collision, a wreath-laying at the “Lost 74” and “Fragments” Tributes, a Veterans lunch and an opportunity to meet fellow Vietnam Veterans. **There have been over 300 Vietnam Veterans at each of the last four reunions, so we are looking forward to a great gathering!**



*SH-3A Sea Kings flying from Kearsarge join the search and rescue operations over the stern section of Frank E. Evans, as Everett F. Larson (right) and British frigate Cleopatra (back left) render assistance, 2 June 1969. (U.S. Navy Photograph NH 98649, Naval History and Heritage Command)*

**The Veterans Lunch (RSVPs required before July 24 – Veterans can include one guest on their RSVP) will be served from 11:30am-1pm and is sponsored by Ho Chunk Gaming Black River Falls.** At 1pm USS Frank E Evans survivors, Steve Kraus and Terry Vejr, will give a presentation on the collision of the USS Frank E Evans and the HMAS Melbourne on June 3, 1969, their personal stories of survival, and their mission to remember the 74 lost souls (73 who were never recovered) from that day during the Vietnam War. The presentation will take place in the main gallery of the Welcome Center.

**In addition to Vietnam Veterans Reunion activities, attendees will also have the opportunity to help “welcome home” the bicycle riders of the 42nd Annual Heroes Ride Bike Tour as they enter The Highground at approximately 11am.**



**Thank you to our sponsors: Ho-Chunk Gaming Black River Falls, Judy Hutter, and Eugene and Dr. Donna Thomas.**

**To RSVP for the lunch or to become a sponsor, email Theresa at [museum@thehighground.org](mailto:museum@thehighground.org) or call 715-743-4224.**

thehighgroundhonorride.com'."/>

**HONOR THE FALLEN  
ON MEMORIAL DAY**

**16TH ANNUAL HONOR RIDE MAY 25 2026**

**Route details: [thehighgroundhonorride.com](http://thehighgroundhonorride.com)**

**Bring a friend and make a difference! Join our volunteer team and be part of a community that cares. For more information, visit [thehighground.us/about-us/volunteer](http://thehighground.us/about-us/volunteer)**

# Event News

## Learning today, leading tomorrow. Schools & Homeschool Groups: Claim your spot for Education Days

The Highground's Annual Education Days will be held September 29 and October 30 for fifth grade – middle school (including a half-day guided tour of The Highground) and October 1 and 2 for high schools and adults (featuring a full day of unique presentations on military history, the countries and people affected by war, and displays of cultural importance).

The fifth grade – middle school students will experience a Flag Retirement Ceremony conducted by the Daughters of the American Revolution – Ah Da Wah Gam Chapter along with their guided tour. Schools need to pick the day and either the morning (9:30am-12:15pm) or afternoon (11:30am-2:15pm) session. A lunch break is not scheduled within the sessions; however, students are welcome to bring sack lunch to eat before or after sessions at the onsite picnic tables. Students are invited to bring a Ziploc bag of soil from their home, school or other special place to place on the Dove Mound. A special Holocaust presentation will be available for students whose schools can schedule extra time during their visit. Theresa will include more details in school invitations and future press releases.



The programs on October 1 and 2 will be geared towards a high school/adult level of understanding and maturity. These days will feature more in-depth programs that offer insights into the WWII Holocaust in European Theater and military and cultural experiences during 20th and 21st century conflicts. Schools will need to pick which day to attend. Both days will be a full day from 9:30am-2:00pm. A lunch break is included from 11:30am-noon. The Highground will work with schools that need to arrive later or leave before the scheduled times.

**Teachers are welcome to contact Theresa with questions if they would like to coordinate a lesson plan with the presentations that will be offered. For more information, please call Theresa at 715-743-4224 or send an email to [museum@thehighground.org](mailto:museum@thehighground.org)**

**Sunshine, fresh air and making a real difference—Mark your calendar for Wednesday, May 6–Saturday, May 9, and help us spruce up the park so it's ready for sunny days!**

## Patriotic Quilt Raffle Threads Together \$2,820 for 2025



Last year's quilt raffle featured 29 handmade quilts and crocheted afghan blankets, with 630 tickets sold out by November 10. **Thanks to the incredible support of participants and donors, the raffle raised \$2,820 to strengthen our ability to serve our Veterans and community through education and programs.**

We are so thankful for the patriots who purchased tickets and took a chance on these beautiful, handcrafted works of art. A special thank you to the talented quilters and artisans who generously donated their time, materials and skills to produce these gorgeous pieces. Their dedication and artistry made this raffle possible and ensured its success.

“We are deeply grateful for the community's continued support. Every ticket purchased, every quilt donated, and every person who participated helps sustain the vital work we do,” expressed Chris Pettis, executive director of The Highground.

**For information about this year's Patriotic Quilt Raffle, we invite you to keep an eye on website event calendar at [thehighground.us/calendar](http://thehighground.us/calendar)**

# Mission News (cont.)

## A Message From the Executive Director

As we head into a new season, I'm excited about everything we have lined up and grateful for the energy this community brings. There's something special about this time of year—warmer temperatures, vegetation comes back to life after winter dormancy, volunteers assist in the spring beautification, more guests visit the park and many new Veteran stories shared, reminding us of why our work matters.

Our team has been busy planning a mix of events and programs that offer plenty of ways to connect, learn and have a little fun along the way. You'll see some familiar favorites returning, along with a few new ideas we're trying out. Whether you're joining us for an upcoming gathering, participating in a workshop, or simply stopping by to say hello, we're looking forward to sharing the season with you.

What continues to inspire me most is how much of this is powered by you—your time, your enthusiasm, your gifts, and your willingness to be part of something bigger for all the right reasons. Every bit of involvement helps us keep moving forward and strengthens the community of Veterans we're building together.

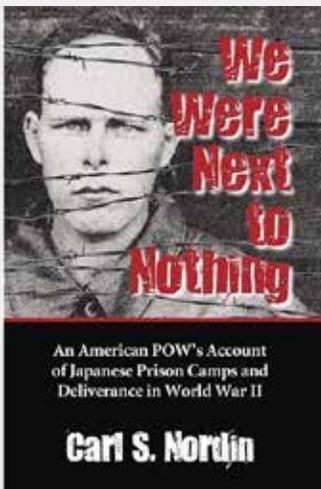
***Thanks for being here and for everything you bring to this place. I'm looking forward to seeing you at our upcoming events and kicking off a great season together.***



## WWII POW Carl Nordin (CAMO Presentation)

**July 8 at 6pm**

WWII POW Carl Nordin's story will be presented by his daughters, Carleen Tjader & Susan Allan. The presentation will feature POW artifacts, including his secret journal, brought back from the Pacific Theater by Carl after over 3 years as a POW.



## Making Spirits Bright: Recapping The Highground Holiday Survival Workshop

To the cheerful tune of holiday music and under the warm glow of multicolored lights, we welcomed community members and Veterans to a festive CAMO workshop designed to help “sleigh” the stress of the season.

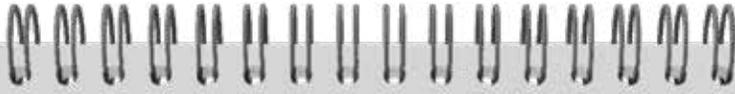
Guests enjoyed hands-on demonstrations of clever holiday hacks, including creative gift-wrapping techniques, smart ways to organize shopping lists, and easy, delicious meal ideas perfect for busy families.

***We extend a special thank you to Helynn Schufletowski, who shared simple and inspiring tips for holiday light displays that brought extra sparkle to the evening.***

One guest summed up the spirit of the event by saying, “It was a fun evening that got me in the holiday spirit, and I loved hearing other family traditions.”

This festive workshop was part of The Highground's Community and Military Outreach (CAMO) Program, which provides opportunities for connection, learning and support for both community members and Veterans.

# Veterans Programs



## Vets & Guitars Spring 2026

**Preregistration required**

**STARTS MARCH 19**

**Beginning Guitar: 4:30pm**

**Continuing Guitar: 6pm**

*For more information and to register, call Theresa at 715-743-4224 or email [museum@thehighground.org](mailto:museum@thehighground.org)*

## Upcoming CAMO Workshops and Presentations

APRIL 22 Suncatcher Workshop

MAY 30 Wellness Through CAMO

JUNE 17 Recovering our MIAs

JULY 8 WWII POW Carl Nordin Presentation

## Upcoming Retreats

**Registration required**

JUNE 5-7 Female Veterans Retreat

JUNE 12-14 Male Veterans Retreat

SEPT TBD Female Veterans Workshop

OCT 16-18 Couples Retreat

## Board of Directors

**Chairman, Gary Weirauch-Veteran**  
Neillsville, WI

**Vice Chair, Gary Karczewski-Veteran**  
LeRoy, IL

**Treasurer, Don Quicker-Veteran**  
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**Wayne Guenther-Veteran, Strum, WI**

**Michael Hanke-Veteran, Chippewa Falls, WI**

**Mary Kay Haupt-Holmen, WI**

**Ken Wentzel-Veteran, Spencer, WI**

**Michele Benson-Director Emeritus, Veteran**  
Ripon, WI

**Daniel Curran-Director Emeritus, Veteran**  
Dodgeville, WI

**Scott Kissinger-Director Emeritus, Veteran**  
Wisconsin Rapids, WI

**Steve Maddox-Director Emeritus, Veteran**  
Athens, GA

### Executive Director

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[director@thehighground.org](mailto:director@thehighground.org)

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### Gift Shop Coordinator

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### Maintenance

Mike Purgett

### Gift Shop Staff

Roxane Purgett

Rachel Meyer



*You aren't just a supporter; you're the engine behind our progress. Thank you for powering this mission. If you're looking for more ways to help, we invite you to visit our website at [thehighground.us/about-us/donate](http://thehighground.us/about-us/donate)*



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# FEATURED ITEMS

**ARE YOU A NEW CUSTOMER? GET 15% OFF YOUR FIRST ONLINE ORDER!**

**GIFT SHOP HOURS: WINTER: 10-4 DAILY • SUMMER: 10-5 M-F; 9-5 SAT & SUN**

*Please visit our website for possible changes*

We carry a variety of products for all, designed with those you love in mind. Check out our t-shirts, sweatshirts, hats, jewelry, home decor and more in store and online.



**15% OFF YOUR FIRST ONLINE PURCHASE**

## THEHIGHGROUND.SHOP

The store that supports the mission

MARCH - MAY 2026



**St Patrick's Day Gnomes** 5104  
**\$13.95**

*Add these adorable gnomes to help you find that pot of gold. Available with a green or white hat. Measures: 6.5" x 17" x 5.75"*



**Heart Gnomes** 950  
(sold separately) **\$5.95**

*Gnomes with a heart at the tip of their hats, with antennas, searching for you. Available with a red or black hat. Each measure: 3.75" x 10" x 3"*



**Dad Pillow** 3400  
**\$25.95**

*A novelty and functional gift for Father's Day or birthdays. 21" x 12" washed black pillow with zipper. 100% cotton shell/100% polypropylene fill*



**Thermometer Butterfly** 4061  
**\$33.95**

*Butterfly thermometer - metallic painted wall decor. Indoor/outdoor use.*



**Easter Box Signs** 5105  
(sold separately) **\$6.95**

*Cute tabletop decor for the Easter season. Perfect for a coffee table or mantle. Get all three to use as a centerpiece.*



**HG Gift Card**  
*Made with love, supports a cause. Get a gift card in any amount for any occasion.*

**Call us 715-743-4224**

Email: [store@thehighground.org](mailto:store@thehighground.org)

[thehighground.shop](http://thehighground.shop)

W7031 Ridge Rd, Neillsville, WI 54456

# Wish List

## We are in need of these specific items:

- **NEEDED:** Tour guide volunteers who are available to give tours during the "on-season" May through October
- **WANTED:** Volunteers for events and porch greeting

## We are in need of funding for the following:

- \$200 for non-archival totes with lids
- \$700 for the "Why We Serve: Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces" Exhibit
- \$1,400 for special project picture frames
- \$5,000 for the "WWII Holocaust Exhibition: Personal Stories and History" (this 3-4 month exhibit includes Education Days)
- \$10,000 for a 6-passenger golf cart for shuttling guests

*Thank you to the generous sponsors of our wish list items from the December newsletter. You saw a need, and you filled it. We are so grateful for our community of supporters.*



## Gift opportunities to consider:

**Employee Matching Gift Program:** Some employees offer gift matching programs for qualified 501(c)3 nonprofits such as The Highground. This means that your employer will match the amount of your donation or volunteer hours up to a certain amount, increasing your direct gift. Refer to your Human Resource Dept. or search [charitynavigator.org](http://charitynavigator.org) to see if your employer has such a program. If not, consider making the suggestion to your employer.

**To support any these initiatives, please send a check to the address to the right or submit your donation on our website at: [thehighgroundpark.givingfuel.com/general-donation-page](http://thehighgroundpark.givingfuel.com/general-donation-page)**

**If you have any questions, email [donations@thehighground.org](mailto:donations@thehighground.org) or call us at 715-743-4224.**

Find us somewhere on Social Media!



## Newsletter Subscription

To help reduce the cost of our printed newsletter, please consider receiving the email newsletter. The signup form is located at the bottom of our website homepage ([thehighground.us](http://thehighground.us)). Please know that The Highground does not sell its lists or your information to anyone. If you would like to continue receiving a printed newsletter, a small donation of \$25 per year would help us cover the printing and mailing costs.

# THE BENEFITS OF A CHARITABLE BEQUEST

Each year, the Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project (dba The Highground) receives bequests that help us meet our current funding needs, expand Veterans programs and plan for the future.

A charitable bequest is an amazing way for you to support the work of The Highground and its continuing mission. Here are some of the reasons why you may consider bequest giving:

- Making a bequest today will cost you nothing.
- You can make a gift of any amount while retaining control of your assets during your lifetime.
- Bequests can be modified at any point in time.
- An outright gift from your estate is entirely free from federal estate taxes, permitting The Highground to utilize the full amount of your gift. Bequests made to individuals, in contrast, are usually heavily taxed.
- Enjoy the satisfaction of creating a legacy and having a lasting impact on the long-term health and recovery of our Veterans.

## Here are the many ways you can make a bequest:

- Make a gift of cash, securities or property.
- Give a specific dollar amount or asset.
- Specify a percentage on your estate.
- Specify a gift from the balance of your estate.
- Designate the Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project as a beneficiary of your IRA, retirement account or insurance policy.\*

*\*To designate the Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project as the beneficiary (whole or part) of your life insurance policy/policies, you can request a beneficiary change form from your insurance company.*

## Our information:

The Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project  
W7031 Ridge Rd  
PO Box 457  
Neillsville, WI 54456  
Phone: 715-743-4224  
EIN/Federal Tax ID#: 39-1512902

**To learn more about bequest giving, please send an email to [Chris Pettis at director@thehighground.org](mailto:Chris.Pettis@thehighground.org) or call 715-743-4224.**



This tribute began with the story of a young Vietnam Veteran. He was a Scout Dog Handler, married prior to his service and killed in action just 90 days into his tour of duty. This tribute isn't just a statue. It captures the silent, sacred trust between a handler and their dog—a bond forged in chaos and enduring beyond the battlefield. This tribute honors this dog and handler and all other Military Working Dogs who have served in our armed forces. View all our tributes at [thehighground.us](http://thehighground.us)

## Let Them Not Go In Silence

The Highground Veterans Memorial Park staff, visitors and supporters remember and honor all who have served; in times of combat and in times of peace. All Veterans of any era have, at one point in their life, written a blank check made payable to "The United States of America", for an amount up to and including their life. We recognize that they and their families have in many different ways been affected by their service. Many positive qualities and sometimes hardships result from signing that blank check. Over 26,000 Wisconsin men and women gave their lives during combat (KIA) service to our country. As a tangible reminder for us all, a different selection of KIA names will be printed for each future ceremony and newsletter. **Again, this is not the complete list but a selection of names from each war who gave their lives in combat areas.**

**Let us remember and honor all those who perished during their service and let them not go in silence. We ring our replica Liberty Bell in their honor at each ceremony. We hope you will ring it whenever you are here.**

### Korean War

Kenneth Edward Dvorak  
Milton Francis Dvorak  
James Keyser Eagan  
Donald F. Ebert  
Melvin H. Ebert  
Delbert V. Edgette  
Harold M. Edgington  
Leland Ernest Ehrlich  
Bernard J. Einum  
Kenneth C. Eirich  
Vernon C. Eliason  
Tellus H. Elkins  
Theodore Clarence E. Ellis  
Lawrence W. Erdman  
Daniel G. Erste  
William G. Ewing  
Donald P. Faldet  
Leo F. Falvey  
Harold O. Fay  
Marvin J. Fenske  
Lawrence J. Ferkovich  
James Thomas Fiedler  
George H. Finstad  
James R. Fisher  
John Joseph Fitzgerald  
Thomas L. Flaherty  
Ervin Joe Flauger  
David Roger Flood

Michael E. Foley  
Walter A. Fonder  
Henry L. Ford  
Robert M. Ford  
Robert F. Fox

### Vietnam War

David John Wilcox  
Robert Frederick Wilke  
Gordon Waldemar Will  
John Gustave Willems  
Terry Joe Williams  
Larry Allen Williamson  
Michael Jay Wilson  
Scott Thomas Wimmer  
Robert James Wisch  
Lawrence J. Wissel  
Edward Witek  
Ralph Michael Wixson  
Arthur Edward Wojahn  
Jeremy Robert Wojtkiewicz  
Robert Clarence Wolf  
Aaron Lee Wood  
Dennis Melvin Wood  
Curtis Steven Woods  
Durel S Woods  
Theodore R Woods Jr  
Randall Woolcott  
Randall Alan Woolcott

Larry Roger Woolridge  
James Kenneth Wozniak  
David James Woznicki  
Vincent Wright  
Richard Thomas Wucinski  
Clinton Carl Wusterbarth  
Glen Harry Young  
John E Young  
Michael Edward Young  
William Francis Zahn Jr  
Thaddeus Zajac  
Thomas Howard Zehner

### Gulf Wars—GWOT—Present Day

Ryan D. Jopek  
Matthew R. Kading  
Charles A. Kaufman  
Richard J. Kemp  
Charles A. Kiser  
Tyler R. Kreinz  
Tyler J. Kritz  
Amy Krueger  
Kevin M. Kryst  
John "Hans" F. Kurth  
Cheryl LaBeau-O'Brien  
Ryan J. Larson  
Matthew I. Leggett  
Jason F. Lemke

Keith E. Lloyd  
Ryan P. Long  
Patrick L. Lybert  
Mark A. Maida  
Stephen G. Martin  
John J. Mattek, Jr  
Andrew G. Matus  
James McDonald  
Michael A. McGlothlin  
Jacob A. Meinert  
Lance Monsen  
Nickolas A. Mueller  
Scott T. Nagorski  
Brian K. Naseman  
Ryan J. Nass  
Benjamin H. Neal  
Rocky Nelson  
Richard J. Nelson  
Michael C. Nolen

