



COURTESY CURRAHEE MILITARY MUSEUM

An exhibit at the Currahee Military Museum in Toccoa pays tribute to Lt. Gen. Robert Frederick Sink, who commanded the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment through most of World War II. He was portrayed in the television miniseries "Band of Brothers" by retired U.S. Marine Capt. Dale Adam Dye Jr.

our country. It honors them and the families they leave behind," he says.

National Infantry Museum & Soldier Center, Columbus
nationalinfantrymuseum.org

Fort Benning was the inspiration for city leaders in Columbus to build a signature museum to honor the infantry's legacy and the valiant sacrifice of America's foot soldier, says Greg Camp, retired Army colonel and president of the National Infantry Museum Foundation. "They told us to think big," he says.

Fundraising and a public/private partnership between the U.S. Army and the foundation created the \$100 million, 190,000-square-foot facility. Opened in June 2009, it has hosted 2.5 million visitors.

"Classes from Fort Benning hold graduations on our parade grounds and bring their families to the museum to see the legacy they have joined," Camp says.

The museum includes interactive and immersive exhibits; fully preserved World War II-era bar-

racks, mess hall, orderly room, supply room, chapel, sleeping quarters and headquarters; a Memorial Walk of Honor; a Vietnam Memorial Plaza; and, most recently, a memorial to those lost fighting terrorism. (See "Honoring the fallen" on page 8.) *USA Today* has voted it the No. 1 best free museum in America.

"The signature exhibit is The Last 100 Yards, the part of any battle fought by the infantry. Its sloping ramp depicts life-size dioramas of American battles through the centuries, starting with Yorktown [during the Revolutionary War]," Camp says.

Other galleries immerse visitors in the types of fighting found during World War II, Vietnam and other conflicts.

"We use thousands of artifacts and multimedia to bring the stories to life," he says.

He remembers two high-ranking officers who had fought in three wars hitting the ground when the sounds of a firefight broke out in the Vietnam exhibit.

Camp believes that the exhibits give people a better understanding of the role of the infantry and show them that freedom isn't free. "It warms our heart to see veterans come in. It's emotional, but they are doing what they all said they'd do: They're remembering their comrades."

Currahee Military Museum, Toccoa
toccoahistory.com

Currahee, an Indian word that means "stands alone," became the battle cry for a new type of soldier during World War II: the American paratrooper. Between 1942 and 1945, 17,000 soldiers of the 501st, 506th, 511th and 517th Parachute Infantry Division trained on hikes and runs "3 miles up, 3 miles down" Currahee Mountain in Toccoa.

Located in the restored train depot in Toccoa, the Currahee Military Museum tells the story of the original 6,000 paratroopers who jumped from airplanes—often behind enemy lines in Europe and the Pacific—during World War II as well as those who served afterward.

"You can't imagine what these troops meant to the people in Europe under the Nazi occupation," says Brenda Carlan, executive director.

She recounts a favorite story of a young girl in Europe in 1944, who described the paratroopers' arrival as "these mushrooms [that] fell from the sky. They landed, grew legs and ran away. Everything got better from that day."

Carlan calls the three-building depot museum a "mom-and-pop" operation, because there is no government funding.

"We don't have a lot of fancy electronics, but what we do have are authentic artifacts that you can touch and feel to understand history. We are more interested in sharing the stories than the statistics," she says.

A standout exhibit is an English stable that was one of hundreds used to house American troops before D-Day.

"We raised the funds to move it here and fixed up the stalls like the Army had them," Carlan says.

The museum opened in 2006, and more visitors and veterans come every year. The current number is about 18,000 per year.

"I don't think the 'Band of Brothers' producers know we exist, but that show really boosted interest in Currahee," Carlan says.

The camp was abandoned in 1945, but since 2011, the Camp Toccoa at Currahee nonprofit organization has been raising funds to rebuild the camp gate and other buildings.

"If you respect something, you preserve it," Carlan says. "I feel like we're racing against time. If our generation doesn't pass history on to the next, we're all in trouble." ☺

Laura Raines is a freelance writer who lives in Mableton. Her feature stories have appeared in local and regional newspapers and magazines.



To learn about more military museums and attractions in Georgia, see the bonus online content on page 38A of this month's digital edition at georgiamagazine.org.