



World War II:

Voices of Service

Exhibition Guide

Developed by

THE GILDER LEHRMAN
INSTITUTE *of* AMERICAN HISTORY

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GENERAL INFORMATION

World War II: Voices of Service is a traveling exhibition developed by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History (GLI) with the generous support of the Veterans Legacy Program and the academic guidance of Michael Nieberg. World War II: Voices of Service explores major events of the war through the photographs, letters, and oral histories of everyday Americans. From the attack on Pearl Harbor through the GI Bill, this traveling exhibition provides an overview of the important events on the battlefield and the home front. Stories in blue feature the experiences of men and women interred in National Cemeteries. The exhibition commemorates WWII veterans and service members through the discovery and sharing of their stories, reminding viewers that it was individual Americans from all walks of life whose service and sacrifice led to Allied victory. We invite you to use this exhibition to learn more about the service of veterans in your community.

Format

The exhibition is composed of seven retractable vinyl panels. Each panel measures 82 inches in height and 33 inches in width. It requires a total of 20–24 running feet and can be displayed separately or together. Detailed setup instructions are provided to the venue's coordinator upon shipment. Setup instructions can also be found on the [FAQ page of the Gilder Lehrman Traveling Exhibitions](#) webpage.

Rental Security

Exhibitions may be displayed in any open areas, but preferably not in a hallway. No exhibition is to be displayed outdoors or in a tent or other temporary structure. It is preferable that a staff member is in the room with the exhibition when it is open to students or guests. If a borrower causes damage to or loss of any part of the exhibition, that institution will be responsible for paying the replacement or restoration costs. The value of the *World War II: Voices of Service* exhibition is \$1,875. Some institutions choose to add a rider to their insurance policy.

Shipping

The exhibition is shipped in two wheeled, plastic cases measuring 39 inches x 14 inches x 14 inches and weighing approximately 85 pounds. GLI will be responsible for arranging shipping via FedEx. A week before your loan period ends, we will provide a return label and instructions.

Reporting

Each site is required to complete a condition report upon receipt of the exhibition and again after the exhibition has been packed for return. Condition report forms will be sent to the venue coordinator via email.

Questions

If you have questions, please contact

Traveling Exhibitions Program

exhibitions@gilderlehrman.org

Phone (646) 366-9666 ext. 16

EXHIBITION CONTENT

Panel One: World War II: Voices of Service

Introductory Text:

The Second World War resulted from unresolved problems from the First World War. Tensions rose in Asia as Japan tried to assert itself in the face of the traditional imperial powers of Britain, France, Holland, and the United States. In Europe, two new ideologies, fascism (promoted by Germany and Italy) and communism (promoted by the Soviet Union), posed grave challenges to the democratic and capitalist states. In the 1930s, Americans debated how to prepare for these challenges. In December 1941, the debate ended when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

World War II: A Timeline

- **September 1939:** Germany invaded Poland. Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. Dozens of other countries would join the Allies against Germany and the Axis powers.
- **May–July 1940:** Germany invaded France and bombed London repeatedly. Americans significantly increased spending on the US military.
- **September 1940:** Italy, Germany, and Japan formed an alliance. Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia later joined them in the Axis powers.
- **September 16, 1940:** The US instituted the Selective Training and Service Act.

- **December 7, 1941:** Japan attacked the US fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii
- **December 8–11, 1941:** The US declared war on Japan. In alliance with Japan, Germany and Italy declared war on the US. The US declared war on Germany and Italy
- **April 1942:** US forces in the Philippines surrendered to the Japanese military. Japanese forces led American prisoners of war on the Bataan Death March.
- **June–August 1942:** American forces triumphed over the Japanese in the Battle of Midway and at Guadalcanal.
- **September 1943:** Italy surrendered to the Allies.
- **June 1944:** American, British, Canadian, and Free French forces landed in Normandy for Operation Overlord (D-Day).
- **April 1945:** American forces liberated the concentration camp at Buchenwald, Germany.
- **April–June 1945:** American forces won a two-month battle for the island of Okinawa
- **May 8, 1945:** V-E (Victory in Europe) Day
- July 1945: July 1945: The United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain dictated peace terms at the Potsdam Conference.
- **August 1945:** The United States used atomic weapons on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- **September 2, 1945:** V-J (Victory over Japan) Day

Panel Two: Going to War

Introductory Text

The Second World War was a total war. The United States committed more resources, fought in more places, and engaged more personnel than ever before. More than 12 million American men and women served in uniform, and millions more provided critical support at home. The war had virtually unanimous support from all Americans, especially as they learned more about atrocities of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

2.1 Japanese photograph documenting the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09552.02)

Photograph of the USS Oklahoma capsized following the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. (National Archives, 306555)

Oral History Interview of Walter Staff (Oklahoma Historical Society)

“The phone’s upside down . . . and then we realized that we were upside down. . . . And knowing where we were and underwater, we just were resigned to the fact we thought the air would go bad and that would be that. . . . It was a sickening scene when I came out and saw all the fleet on the bottom the Arizona smoldering and, and all the battleships sitting. Sitting on the bottom. . . .”

2.2 America Will Build. Published by the United States of America, 1942. (Bancroft Library, University of California)

Americans All, War Manpower Commission, 1942. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09530)

2.3 Doris “Dorie” Miller pin, ca. 1943. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09934.05)

2.4 Harry Steele Savage, For Your Country’s Sake Today, Recruiting Publicity Bureau of the US Army, 1944. (Hennepin County Library)

2.5 Letter from Morris Wiener to Sylvia Wiener, December 7, 1944. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09414.1279)

“Three years. Lord, it seems like a century. It hardly seems possible to believe that there ever was a time when things were any different, and any other existence doesn’t have the ring of reality. Strange, isn’t it, how the abnormal state of affairs can become to be accepted as the normal.”

Panel Three: The War In Europe

Introductory Text

In Europe, the United States and the other Allied powers—including Britain, Canada, and the Soviet Union—fought against the Axis powers of Germany and Italy. Unwilling to risk an invasion of France in 1942, the United States and Great Britain invaded North Africa. From there, they crossed the Mediterranean to liberate Sicily and southern Italy while also conducting a massive aerial bombardment campaign. In June 1944, they began the liberation of France with Operation Overlord (D-Day). Less than a year later, the Allies had advanced deep into Germany to fulfill President Roosevelt’s pledge that the Axis powers would surrender unconditionally.

3.1 US troops landing on a beach in French Morocco, November 8, 1942. (Naval History and Heritage Command, SC163437)

3.2 American troops enter Palermo, Sicily, July 22, 1943. (National Archives, 276536992)

Nurse Ruth Deloris Buckley, oral history interview. (Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress)

“I didn’t mind the hard work. In fact I welcomed it, because when my time was occupied, I forgot the shelling. But the nights could be filled with terror.”

US bombers over Marienburg, Germany, October 9, 1943. (National Archives, 535972)

3.3 Tuskegee Airmen, ca. 1941–1945. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09645.005)

3.4 Robert L. Sargent, *Into the Jaws of Death*, June 6, 1944. (National Archives, 513173)

3.5 American infantrymen near Amonines, Belgium, January 4, 1945. (National Archives, 12010148)

Oral History by Bernard Estes, December 11, 1994

“When we got up there, while we were driving in it, we thought the bumps we felt were logs at first, under the snow. But it was dead Germans and dead Americans.”

3.6 Sus Ito, near Fays, France, 1944.

Susumu Ito, oral history interview, January 23, 2000. (Densho Digital Repository, Susumu Ito and the Saul Collection)

“We heard about atrocities, but actual camps and—and the result and the numbers of people that were there—they gave us no preparation for what we were to encounter. . . . It was a rather devastating thing to see and had long impressions.”

Susumu Ito’s photograph of survivors of Dachau, ca. May 1945. (Densho Digital Repository, Susumu Ito and the Saul Collection)

Panel Four: The War in the Pacific

Introductory Text

In the Pacific, the United States fought Japan with a combination of sea, ground, air, and amphibious operations, while at the same time supporting the Nationalist Chinese government of Chiang Kai-Shek. American fleets, based around modern aircraft carriers, destroyed the Japanese navy in battles like Midway and Leyte Gulf. The Army and Marine Corps conducted “island hopping” campaigns to move closer to the Japanese home islands. By 1943–1944, the American military was operating at full capacity, allowing the United States to fight two wars thousands of miles apart. The use of two atomic bombs in August 1945 ended the war in the Pacific

4.1 Battle of Midway, June 1942. (Photograph by William G. Roy. Naval History and Heritage Command, 80-G-312018)

4.2 US Marine Corps photograph of Marines at Guadalcanal, ca. 1942–1943. (National Archives, 74250429)

Leon Frank Jenkins, September 14–15, 1942

“I am so nervous I can hardly write. . . . Don’t remember much. . . . Psychonurosis, War Nervous – Blast Injury, Migrain [sic] Headaches. Something must have happened that day the bomb hit close to me.”

4.3 Photograph of Navajo code talkers Henry Bake and George Kirk in Papua New Guinea, December 1943. (National Archives, 100378136)

4.4 Gilmon Brooks, oral history interview by Paul Zigo.

“It looked like black ash. That’s what I remember, all over. Black ash, this volcanic ash. It was like sand. And when you walked in it, you knew, one step forward, two steps back, because you’d sink in this ash.”

Gilmon Brooks Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center (Library of Congress, AFC/2001/001/3153)

7th war loan/now all together, United States, War Finance Division, 1945. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09520.34)

4.5 Marines on Okinawa, June 22, 1945. (National Archives, 532559)

4.6 Quoted in Ezequiel L. Ortiz and James A. McClure. *Don Jose: An American Soldier’s Courage and Faith in Japanese Captivity* (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 2012), 93.

“All of us had been beaten, some more than others, over a period of a few months. . . . I speak of not the indignity of having to stand in formation in the freezing cold in a foot of snow, but knowing you cannot protect yourself or you will possibly be seriously injured or killed. The humiliating slap at the face, feeling a rifle butt connect to your head, or

your stomach, or other parts of the frail body, the helplessness feeling that comes with all this pain.”

Photograph of Joseph O. Quintero in uniform holding his flag, around 1991, Courtesy of the Quintero family. (Smithsonian National Museum of American History)

Closeup photograph of flag made by Joseph O. Quintero in 1945. (Smithsonian National Museum of American History)

Panel Five: Life on the Home Front

Introductory Text

The American home front supported the war effort wholeheartedly. Rationing, a shared sense of purpose, and the mass commitment of Americans to achieving victory led to a profound sense of national unity. Wartime industries provided good-paying jobs to people who had been unemployed during the Depression. Women, Black Americans, and Mexican Americans saw new economic opportunities. For this reason, some people remembered the war as the “good war.” But not everyone’s experience was positive. Racial violence in Los Angeles, Detroit, Beaumont, Mobile, and elsewhere created tensions that undermined the unity of the home front and raised disturbing questions.

5.1 Homemaker’s War Guide, Office of War Information, Division of Public Inquiries, 1942. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09653.02)

5.2 Americans will always fight for liberty, Office of War Information, Division of Public Inquiries, 1943. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09520.37)

5.3 Theodor Seuss Geisel, Starve the Squander Bug, 1943. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09524)

5.4 “If you are short of money just neglect to buy some stamps and bonds. . . . I know that you civilians are told ceaselessly to buy bonds and stamps but please don’t try to sacrifice your health or happiness when they could easily be saved.”

Photograph of George V. Tudor (1942). Series 5. Photographs. 3. (Chapman University)

5.5 Women welders, including the women’s welding champion of Ingalls Shipbuilding Corp., Pascagoula, Mississippi, 1943. (National Archives, 522890)

5.6 United We Win, War Manpower Commission, 1942. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09542)

5.7 Walter White to Franklin Roosevelt, June 21, 1943. (National Archives, 311315425)

“No lesser voice than yours can arouse public opinion sufficiently against these deliberately provoked attacks which are designed to hamper war production, destroy or weaken morale, and to deny minorities, Negroes in particular, the opportunity to participate in war effort on same basis as other Americans.”

Panel Six: The War for Freedom

Introductory Text

The racial segregation of the American military sat uncomfortably alongside a war fought to ensure universal human rights. Racism also played a critical role in the decision of the United States government to intern Japanese Americans in camps on the baseless claim that they posed a security threat. The government’s general indifference to the genocide of Europe’s Jews also had its roots in the widespread racism and xenophobia of the era.

6.1 Charles Alston, “I’m going to see that you grow up in a better world, young fellow!”, ca. 1943. (National Archives, 535606)

6.2 Letter from LeRoi Williams to his family, June 3, 1943. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09587.017)

6.3 Gilmon Brooks, third from the right, stands at attention during training. (Department of Defense Photo, USMC 5344)

Gilmon Brooks Collection (AFC/2001/001/3153), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

“It just seemed like just all of sudden all hell broke loose, you know. Just bullets and mortar shells and everything. And then I realized hey, this [ammunition] dump, they’re trying to zero in on us. . . . All of a sudden I thought somebody had stuck a poker in me or something. . . . when I woke up, I was on a hospital ship. And what amazed me, the first thing to be in some white clean sheets. I couldn’t believe it, I thought I was back in heaven.”

6.4 Japanese internment broadside, May 3, 1942. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC06360)

6.5 Franklin D. Roosevelt on Citizenship], Office of War Information, Division of Public Inquiries, 1943. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09653.03.01)

6.6 Private First Class Stanley Izumigawa (100th Infantry Battalion Veterans Education Center)

“The first night that we went up to the foxholes on the front line finally brought the reality of war. . . . It was always nervewracking, sitting alone in a foxhole about ten yards away from the next buddy, staying tense and alert all night in the darkness and quiet, guarding against any attack or infiltration by the enemy . . . The minutes would drag by agonizingly slowly. Visions of an enemy patrol creeping your way would cross your mind as your imagination worked up.”

Panel Seven: The War’s Legacies

Introductory Text

The Second World War made the United States a global superpower. Unlike after the First World War, the nation remained engaged politically, economically, and militarily in both Europe and Asia. At

home, however, many social and economic patterns reverted to their prewar norms. The GI Bill of Rights gave educational and occupational benefits disproportionately to White men because they had disproportionately served. In one way, therefore, the war only reinforced existing patterns. But the nation had changed as a result of the war, and in 1948, President Truman ended all discrimination in the US military based on race.

7.1 Dwight Eisenhower, Mission Fulfilled, May 7, 1945. (Dwight D. Eisenhower Library)

Private First Class Stanley Izumigawa. (100th Infantry Battalion Veterans Education Center)

“Indeed, when news of the German surrender came, I don’t remember where we were. I know we just accepted it with relief. There was no jubilation, no spontaneous celebration. I guess we were tired of war, or just tired.”

Department of Defense, Defense Audiovisual Agency, Troops in Burma read President Truman’s Proclamation of Victory in Europe, May 9, 1945. (National Archives, 531341)

7.2 Atomic Bomb Cloud over Nagasaki, Japan, 1945. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09595.105)

7.3 Army Service Command, The New Okinawan, Restricted Extra, August 15, 1945. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09546.01)

Everet to Frank B. White, September 26, 1945. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09855.277.02)

“I can halfway imagine how you fellows felt knowing that the worst was over. Words can no way describe it. Total strangers were slapping each other on the back and the old women with tears in their eyes were hugging the service men.”

7.4 Millie Dunn Veasey during World War Two, ca. 1943– 1945. (Women Veterans Historical Project)

Oral history interview with Millie Dunn Veasey by Hermann J. Trojanowski, June 25, 2000.
(Women Veterans Historical Project, University of North Carolina)

“Immediately after I got out, I think I was kind of lost, I didn’t do too much for one whole year. . . . I think for about six months I was just gone, I don’t know, to find yourself, really.”

7.5 Harry S. Truman, Executive Order 9981, July 26, 1948. (National Archives, 300009)