

The International Second World War History Network

Newsletter 3. July 2025

Telling the stories of the 420,000 Americans who didn't come back

By Rona Shaw

More than 420,000 Americans lost their lives in the Second World War. Their sacrifices are often evidenced by little more than a name on a tombstone.

A group of volunteers is working to ensure their stories are uncovered and documented for future generations.

This initiative is the brainchild of Don Milne who -- in 2016 -- began researching and writing stories of the fallen on what would have been their 100th birthday. He soon realized that it would take one person writing a story a day more than 1,000 years. So, through word of mouth and a well-placed article or two, he began engaging volunteers. The result is the organization known as Stories Behind the Stars (SBTS).

Other organisations across America engage in similar efforts. But none approach the magnitude of the 1,500 SBTS volunteers from around the globe. With each member spending a few minutes or an hour here and there to research and write, the group has now completed 70,000 stories.

This grassroots effort has succeeded largely by allowing individuals to choose the people they profile. The SBTS provides training, maintains the database and monitors the contributions to the story repositories (see: Fold3.com and TogetherWeServed.com). But how the stories are told reflects individual writers' styles.

Because information has been lost over the years, some profiles are incomplete. But many others are fully formed. They reveal the thoughts of the fallen through letters home to their mothers and fathers. Others quote from citations for medals of courage and valour.

But all give us and future generations an exceptional insight into the men and women who -- when called -- made the ultimate sacrifice. For more information, visit:

storiesbehindthestars.org (the group's website)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/719618038447000/> (the group's Facebook page).



How a storm from the sky ended the war in the Pacific

On 15 August 1945, Japan's Emperor Hirohito announced the surrender of Imperial Japan to the Allies, making an unprecedented broadcast to his nation. That date is marked in both Japan and the UK as VJ Day.

18 days later, the official instrument of surrender was signed in Tokyo Bay by representatives of Japan's government in the presence of General Douglas



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Macarthur, Supreme Commander in the Southwest Pacific theatre. Those in Tokyo Bay that day included Royal Navy Lieutenant Prince Philip, the future husband of the late Queen Elizabeth II and father of King Charles III.

For the US, VJ Day is 2 September.

Japan's surrender is often attributed to the detonation of atomic bombs over Hiroshima on 6 August and Nagasaki on 9 August which demolished both cities and killed up to 246,000 people. But these attacks were just the culmination of a devastating conventional Allied air campaign.

In late 1943, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff approved strategic bombing against Japanese home islands and East Asia using B-29 Superfortress bombers in India and airfields in China.

Named Operation Matterhorn, the operation involved the construction of airstrips near Chengdu in inland China to refuel B-29s traveling from Bengal to targets in Japan.

The nine raids in Operation Matterhorn succeeded only in destroying Ōmura's aircraft factory. XX Bomber Command lost 125 B-29s, most due to flying accidents. Other problems included the difficulty of transporting supplies to India and China, technical issues and the inexperience of air crews. Crews were often unable to bomb accurately due to high winds and cloud cover.

Following the capture of Guam, Saipan and Tinian in June-August 1944, six airfields were built on the islands for B-29s which could reach Japan and return without refuelling.

In January 1945, Curtis LeMay (above) took over command of the XII Bomber Command in the Marianas. He concluded that night-time firebombing rather than high-altitude daylight precision bombing was the quickest way to end the war. The first attack was launched against Tokyo on 9 March. It destroyed 16 square miles of the city in a firestorm and killed up to 100,000 people.

Further attacks against other Japanese cities including Nagoya, Osaka and Kobe were launched while precision attacks continued in parallel. Night firebombing resumed on 13 April against Tokyo and other cities including Kawasaki, Yokohama and Hamamatsu. By the end of May, more than half of Tokyo had been destroyed. During May and June, much of Japan's six largest cities had been destroyed, more than 100,000 people killed and millions made homeless.

XXI Bomber Command, re-designated as the Twentieth Air Force under LeMay on 16 July, began incendiary raids against small cities from 17 June. On 1 August, the largest single raid of the Second World War mainly targeted Hachioji, Mito, Ngaoka and Toyama where 99.5 per cent of its buildings were destroyed. Five days later, Hiroshima (see below) was the subject of the first atomic attack. On 8 August, the Soviet Union declared war against Japan as agreed with UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Roosevelt. The destruction of Nagasaki the next day was a further crushing blow.

The conventional bombing campaign between March and the end of the war is estimated to have killed more than 500,000 civilians and made 5m homeless. It did at least as much as the A-bomb to break Japanese civilian morale and convince Tokyo its position was hopeless.



New film tells the story of Brazilians who served in the Second World War

A documentary that tells of the story of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force in the Second World War has been released this summer.

Brazil was neutral and maintained commercial and diplomatic relations with both Allied and Axis powers until August 1942. It severed diplomatic relations with Germany, Japan, and Italy following the Pearl Harbour attack. US air bases were established in Brazil to counter Axis naval activities provoked immediate reprisals from the Axis powers. A total of 36 Brazilian merchant ships were sunk with the loss of nearly 2,000 lives, triggering Brazil's declaration of war.

The Força Expedicionária Brasileira (Brazilian Expeditionary Force) was quickly formed. Its advance formations landed in Naples on 16 July and the force was deployed as part of IV Corps under Wallis Crittenberger in northern Italy. More than 25,000 Brazilians served in the force.

Directed by Reader in Brazilian & Latin American Studies at King's College London Dr Vinicius de Carvalho, the film includes interviews with Italians who living in Pistoia and near Monte Castello when the FEB was there.

You can see the film here: <https://youtu.be/Lkk1Ahk3Wrw>



Walking tour of Rome in the Second World War launched

The Allies Museum of Rome has launched the World War II Rome Allies Tour which involves visiting locations in Italy's capital with special connections with the Second World War. This includes the Via Rasella, site of the Partisan attack on the German police in March 1944 which led to the Ardeatine Caves Massacre. The tour is available to embassies only. Interested embassies or institutions can contact: tours@alliesmuseum.com to schedule a private tour.

The Allies Museum will open a virtual museum about the Italian Campaign 1943-45 in the autumn of 2025. With a focus on collecting, organising, and digitising archives, this first step will serve as the foundation for the future physical museum. It will allow developers and early visitors to provide important testing and feedback to the large language models developed,

providing important data as to how to best present material in the physical location. You can find out more here: <https://www.alliesmuseum.com/>

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Diary of Events

1-26 August

Salerno, Cassino, Po

The Fusiliers in Italy 1943-45

Fusiliers Museum, London



The exhibition documents the Royal Fusiliers' Italian Campaign in Second World War. Visitors will be able to browse some of the museum's archival material, as part of a live digitisation project to open up access to its Second World War archives. Entry included with a Tower of London visit ticket.

1-30 August

Victory in 194 Exhibition

The Gurkha Museum

Peninsula Barracks, Winchester

This commemorates the role of Gurkha units and individual soldiers in 1945 in helping secure the end of the Second World War.

6 August, 0805-0830

Hiroshima Commemoration

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park

1-10 Nakajimacho Naka Ward

Hiroshima 730-0811

8-9 August

80th Anniversary End of War Symposium

The Higgins Hotel, Magazine St, New Orleans

A two-day symposium that analyses turning points and closing moments of the war

9 August, 1050-1110

Nagasaki Moment of Silence Livestream

Nagasaki Prefecture Japan

13-15 August

Marching Orders: VJ Day

National Army Museum. London.

This is a family gallery tour

15 August. All day

Interpreting Australia's Second World War

The Theatre, Australian War Memorial

Memorial historians and curators will reflect on the significance of Australia's Second World War

and provide a preview the forthcoming exhibitions: Australians in Bomber Command, Sydney Harbour under attack, and the battle of Milne Bay.

15 August. 11am

The National Far East Prisoners of War (FEPOW) Fellowship Welfare Remembrance Association's commemorative service

Norwich Cathedral, Norwich.

15 August. 1155am

National VJ Day 80 Remembrance Event

National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire,

Organised by the Royal British Legion, the event

will include a two-minute silence at midday, a

service at the Armed Forces Memorial and a

flypast by the Red Arrows and historic aircraft

from. The event will be broadcast live on BBC

One. Access is by ticket only

15 August. All day.

VJ Day 80 Exhibition

RAF Museum Midlands,

Lysander Avenue, Cosford, TF11 8UP

16 August. 1215pm

The Children, Families and Friends of Far East Prisoners of War (COFEPOW) association service and wreath laying.

National Memorial Arboretum. Staffordshire.

Saturday 16 August

19-24 August

The Tuskegee Airmen Inc Annual Convention

The Higgins Hotel, New Orleans

The event will involve expert speakers, an

exhibition and a golf tournament.

30-31 August

The IWM History Festival

Imperial War Museum Duxford

The festival will commemorate the 80th

anniversary of the end of the Second World

War. It will bring together enthusiasts and

experts for a weekend of discovery and

entertainment





12-14 September

We Have Ways Fest

Blackpit Farm Silverstone Road MK18 5LJ

The Second World War History Festival will be addressed by Second World War historians and experts. The event will be hosted by Al Murray and James Holland of the We Have Ways of Making You Talk Podcast

16 September 2025-30 April 2026

Beyond Burma: Forgotten Armies

The National Army Museum

An exhibition marking the 80th anniversary of VJ Day will investigate the multinational army that fought in the Far East

18 September

Codebreakers and Groundbreakers: Women's Work in the Second World War

Newnham College, Cambridge

The event will build on the 2024 *Newnham and Bletchley Park: Women's Work in World War exhibition*. It will take stock of the research on Newnham, establish lines of enquiry for research into other institutions from which women were recruited into Bletchley, and set a broader context for the wider employment of women during the war. Reserve a place by emailing herwarwork@newn.cam.ac.uk

31 October 2025

Scotland and its role in World War

UHI Perth, Scotland

An all-day series of lectures, open to academics, students and members of the public. Proposals for papers should be submitted by 3 September 2025 to Lars Cook or Lewis Cairns.

Lars Cook: lars.cook.perth@uhi.ac.uk.

Lewis Cairns: lewis.cairns.perth@uhi.ac.uk

6-7 November

Remembrances of the Second World War

This is a conference to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of the war. It is organised by Le Conseil scientifique et d'orientation de la Mission du 80ème anniversaire de la Libération, Paris

20-22 November

18th International World War II conference

National WWII Museum, New Orleans

This event will bring together scholars, authors, historians, and witnesses from around the globe to discuss the war that changed the world

Until 30 September

From Ashes to Blossoms: 80 years after Hiroshima exhibition

Ezen Foundation

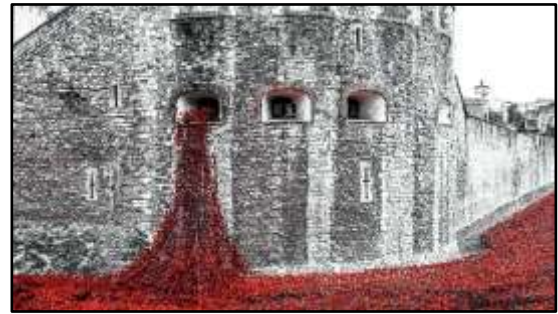
3 Camden Passage, London N1 8EA

London's Ezen Foundation's exhibition marks the 80th anniversary of the atomic bomb

Until 16 November

The Royal British Legion's Through Their Eyes: 80 Years On exhibition

National Memorial, Arboretum. Staffordshire



Until 22 November

Special commemorative poppy installation to mark VJ Day

Tower of London

Until 19 February 2026

The London in the Second World War - Exhibition

The London Archives

40 Northampton Road London EC1R 0HB

2026

7-15 April

The Monte Cassino to Rome Peace Walk 2026

The second Monte Cassino to Rome Peace Walk starts at the Abbey of Monte Cassino on Tuesday 7 April. It ends in St Peter's Square on the morning of 15 April. The walk will pass through Piedimonte San Germano, Roccasecca, Arce, Stragolagalli and Ripi in the Liri River Valley and will then resume at Nemi and pass through Castelgondolfo to follow the Appian Way to St John in Lateran.

For more information contact:

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