



## 50th Anniversary Vietnam War Commemoration Ceremony



MSG Brook Leavitt sings the National Anthem, as members of the LaSalle Institute JROTC Present the Colors. Retired Brig. Gen. Barry Hartman is shown at left.

Photo courtesy  
Robert Van Pelt

The Friends of the New York State Military Museum, along with the Association of the U.S. Army's Capital District of New York Chapter, held a ceremony on March 29, 2023 to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. The date March 29 represents the date of the departure of the last American troops from Vietnam.

The date is now commemorated annually as National Vietnam Veterans Day, in accordance with a proclamation signed by President Barack Obama in 2012 and a law signed by President Donald Trump in 2017. It is held in order to recognize the service and sacrifice of Vietnam veterans and their families.

The commemoration recognized and honored the service of Vietnam War era veterans who served in the military during the period from November 1, 1955 through May 15, 1975, with time on active duty (even if only for training). It covered all branches of the service — Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and Coast Guard.

The ceremony was held at the Saratoga-Wilton Elks Lodge in Saratoga Springs. Retired Brig. Gen. Barry Hartman, a Trustee of the Friends and the AUSA's chapter vice president, served as Master of Ceremonies. Hartman was an armored cavalry troop commander in Vietnam. He served two tours in Vietnam, and he was on the last plane out of Da Nang (the second-to-last plane out of Vietnam) on March 29, 1973.

Hartman noted that the recognition was long overdue and that the 50th anniversary ceremony was a way to welcome home the veterans after so many years.

Also at the ceremony, 34 veterans or their surviving spouses received lapel pins issued by the Department of Defense. The pins were presented by Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Van Pelt, Friends Trustee and Executive Director of AUSA's Capital District of New York Chapter. After receiving their pins, each of the veterans spoke briefly about their service.

Master Sgt. Brooke Leavitt of the New York Army National Guard sang the National Anthem. The colors were presented by color guards from the Junior ROTC at the LaSalle Institute in Troy, NY.



Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Van Pelt and Gold Star Mother Rev. Charlene Robbins

Photo courtesy Robert Van Pelt



## Oral History Interviews Resumed

The Museum has resumed doing oral history interviews of veterans. Recently, interviews were done with World War II veteran Robert Elbertson; Vietnam veteran (now New York State Assemblyman) Robert Smullen; and, Vietnam veteran Christopher Ralston. These interviews can be accessed directly at the links shown below. In addition, the entire collection of oral history interviews (around 2,000 in all) can be found at <https://museum.dmna.ny.gov/research/oral-history-project/oral-history-program-veteran-interviews-r>.

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Robert Elbertson entered the United States Navy in March 1944 and served until March 1947. He was a Gunner's Mate 3rd Class on ships in the Pacific Theater in World War II, in New Guinea and The Philippines. After the War, he was in The Philippines, as well as China. His service after the War included patrols along the Japanese and Chinese coasts.

The interview with Robert Elbertson can be accessed directly at:  
<https://youtu.be/1NvAb3PUIVc>.



WW II veteran Robert Elbertson (seated) at the Museum, with interviewers Fred Katz and Wayne Rozen; Elbertson's U.S. Navy uniform is on the chair at right

Photo courtesy Tim Sinnott

Robert Smullen, United States Marine Corps, 1991-2013, retired with the rank of Colonel. He was part of the Marine Expeditionary Unit, Special Operations Capable (MEUSOC) program and had his first deployment, to the Persian Gulf, in 1998-99. Later, he served three tours in Afghanistan. Following those tours, he led the US Marine Corps Small Wars Center, which, as he says in the interview, “[b]asically, [is] all of the operations that are conducted short of war — one of them being counterinsurgency.” Smullen is now a member of the New York State Assembly (Assembly District 118).

The interview with Colonel Smullen can be found at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35ETCCqbqas>.



Photo courtesy Jim Gandy

Vietnam veteran Robert Smullen at his oral history interview, which was conducted by Museum volunteer Paul Hauschen

Christopher Ralston was an infantry rifleman in the United States Marine Corp from September 1967 to October 1969. He served in Vietnam in 1968-1969, beginning as a replacement in early 1968 in the Battle of Khe Sanh. He was wounded in that Battle and spent three months in a military hospital in Japan, before being returned to Vietnam and completing his tour of duty.

The interview with Christopher Ralston is available at:  
<https://youtu.be/09Qh7sGul7g>.



Photo courtesy Jim Gandy

Vietnam veteran Christopher Ralston, being interviewed in the Museum’s Saratoga Room by Museum volunteers Fred Katz and Wayne Rozen

## Education Program Gearing Up for Season

The Museum's Education Outreach Program (EOP) is planning on resuming activities once the Museum is again open to the public.

The EOP was begun in 2013. Its primary purpose is to inform students about the contributions of New York State and its residents to the wars throughout our nation's history. Over the years, the EOP has hosted over 5000 students, along with their teachers and parent-chaperones. This includes 95 students from the Amsterdam High School ROTC Program and a similar number from Albany High School's "refugee student" program. According to EOP Chairperson Bill Watkins, the visits have involved general tours of the Museum and its various exhibits, as well as specific programs on the Battle of Gettysburg, World War I and World War II.

At present, there are two visits tentatively scheduled for this summer from the Gavin Park Summer Program — one in July and another in August. In addition to those planned visits, the EOP is communicating with Saratoga Springs High School and Skidmore College about potential visits, as well as with a group representing home-schooled children.

For the most part, the staff of the EOP consists of Museum docents and other volunteers, with assistance from the Museum's curatorial staff. But others from the surrounding community have also served in the EOP.

The EOP is always looking for additional staff to participate in its activities. Anyone who is interested in our nation's military history, and enjoys working with students, is encouraged to join the EOP. For more information, please call EOP Chairperson Bill Watkins at (518) 403-4184 or Museum Office Manager Colleen Maheux at (518) 581-5100.

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Congratulations to long-time Museum docent and volunteer Garth Lloyd on being named to the Board of Trustees of the Friends of the New York State Military Museum.

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# Friends Mourn Passing of Howie Young



Photo courtesy Lucille Millarson

Howie Young with a young visitor in  
the World War II section of the Museum

We are saddened to report that since the last Newsletter, Museum docent and volunteer Arthur (“Howie”) Young passed away.

Howie graduated Mohonasen High School in 1962. He graduated from SUNY-Brockport with dual B.A.’s in History and Political Science. He worked for Travelers Insurance in Albany for 40 years.

Howie had been a Museum docent since 2008. He was one of the founders of the Museum’s Education Outreach Program, which began in 2013. As noted by Bill Watkins, head of the Program, Howie “could always be counted on to volunteer for every group of students who attended [the] program,” and he was one of the people who “added a flair to EOP that would otherwise be absent.” Howie also made several presentations to students on the life of a Civil War soldier.

Howie loved history, especially the Civil War and World War II. He was particularly interested in the Battle of Gettysburg, and ancestors of his fought in that battle. He also appeared in the 1993 movie “Gettysburg” as a member of the 125th New York Volunteers, appearing “on the wall” at Pickett’s Charge.

In addition, Howie was a long-time re-enactor of historical battles. He was a re-enactor for the following groups: The Lord Howe 55th Regiment from the French and Indian Wars; the 71st New York from the Spanish-American War; the Sixth Battalion, Black Watch, Royal Highlanders in World War I; and, the 83rd Infantry Division in World War II. He portrayed a member of the 71st New York at the opening ceremonies of the NYS Military Museum in 2002.

In 2008, remains of an unknown Civil War soldier were found at the Antietam National Battlefield in Maryland. It was determined that the soldier was part of a New York military unit and that he had died at the Battle of Antietam in 1862. The soldier was later re-interred with full military honors at the Gerald B.H. Solomon National Cemetery, following a funeral service held at the Museum. Howie served as a Color Guard member at the service and as a guard mount on the casket.

Howie is survived by his wife, Virginia, his son Scott, his sister Rae Ann Boyark (Edward), and several nieces and nephews. May he Rest in Peace.

# Museum Hoping to Re-Open to the Public in Early July

The construction work on the Museum continues. The work on the inside of the roof has been completed. The photo on the left, below, shows a portion of the refurbished ceiling (the interior of the roof).

Work on the HVAC system will be next. That work will require that the Veterans Research Center be temporarily relocated to the public area at the back of the Museum floor. The Museum staff continues to move items from the Research Center to off-site locations.

The picture on the right, below, shows the Research Center's temporary location. A wall and door will be added to the area so that the materials in the Research Center will be separate from the Museum floor.

According to Museum Director Courtney Burns, it is hoped that the Museum will be open to the public in early July, although the opening may be later. Discussions are underway to hold a Grand Re-Opening ceremony for the public, in order to spread the word that the Museum is once again open.



Finished work on the interior of the roof



Temporary home of the Veterans Research Center

Thank you to the following people for their efforts in creating and/or distributing this issue of the Newsletter: Fred Katz, Robert Kazalski, Courtney Burns, Jim Gandy, Colleen Maheux, Tim Sinnott, Robert Van Pelt, Paul Hauschen, Bill Watkins, Lucille Millarson, Mark Lawton, Bruce Farley and Francis Crandall (Flight Creative Group).



# Museum Docents

In this issue, we highlight long-time Museum docent Mark Lawton, who has been a docent since 2005.

Mark was born in New York City. He entered the U.S. Marine Corps toward the end of the Korean hostilities. Upon his discharge, he utilized the GI Bill to attend Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Public Affairs. After graduation, Mark served in Federal, State, and local government positions for 25 years. He subsequently worked on Wall Street as an investment banker for eight years.

For 10 years, Mark was also the head of the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities in New York State, a higher education consortium of 160 independent colleges and universities which advocates in the New York Legislature for non-discriminatory higher education public policy on behalf of its members.

A widower, Mark married Holly Schwarz in 1992, and a few years later, upon retirement, he moved from his "faux-farm" to Saratoga Springs, where Holly lived. Since then, he has served as a volunteer for several local and statewide non-profit organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union/Albany Chapter, the NYS League of Conservation Voters, the Saratoga Preservation Foundation, and Protect the Adirondacks. He was also a member of the 2001 Saratoga Charter Commission, whose successful draft is still in effect today. Mark's favorite past-times are gardening, making bird houses and "Aldo Leopold" benches in his workshop, and, of course, reading, reading, reading....

Mark has also served on the Museum's Docent Advisory Committee. He has enjoyed and learned from his fellow docents, and he plans to continue to serve as a docent and to show his love for the Museum in the community.



Photo courtesy  
Tim Sinnott