

VGCA Tours National Museum of the United States Army

*By Bruce Buchner and Rob Becker
Photos by Bruce Buchner and Jack looney*

On March 11th, 2023 VGCA members visited the new National Museum of the U.S. Army at Fort Belvoir, VA. About twenty members (*some seen at right*) participated in the tour of the museum, which is located at 1775 Liberty Drive just off the Fairfax County Parkway. Several of the museum's docents helped guide the VGCA members and their guests through the facility, which just opened on Veteran's Day in 2020.



Some of the more interesting firearms on display include the Giradoni air rifle that was carried on the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Civil War Henry and Spencer rifles, and an early gas trap M1 Garand (*previous page and inset*). Other major exhibits on display include an LCVP landing craft or Higgins boat that is one of only six Normandy invasion landing craft known to still exist NS “Cobra King”, an M4A3E2 Sherman tank that was the first tank of General Patton’s Third Army to reach the 101st Airborne when they were besieged in Bastogne during the battle of the bulge. There was an FT-17 tank that shows scars from German machine guns during her service in the WWI Meuse-Argonne campaign and a 12-pounder “Napoleon” cannon that fought at Gettysburg.



The “Napoleon” was a light and highly mobile smooth-bore muzzle-loading artillery piece of French design (*above right*) adopted by the U.S. Army in 1857. Over 1100 were manufactured for the U.S. Army (most between 1861 and 1863) while another 500 were manufactured for Confederate forces.

All in all, it was a good time for all concerned and if you didn’t get to be part of this tour, a future visit is highly recommended.

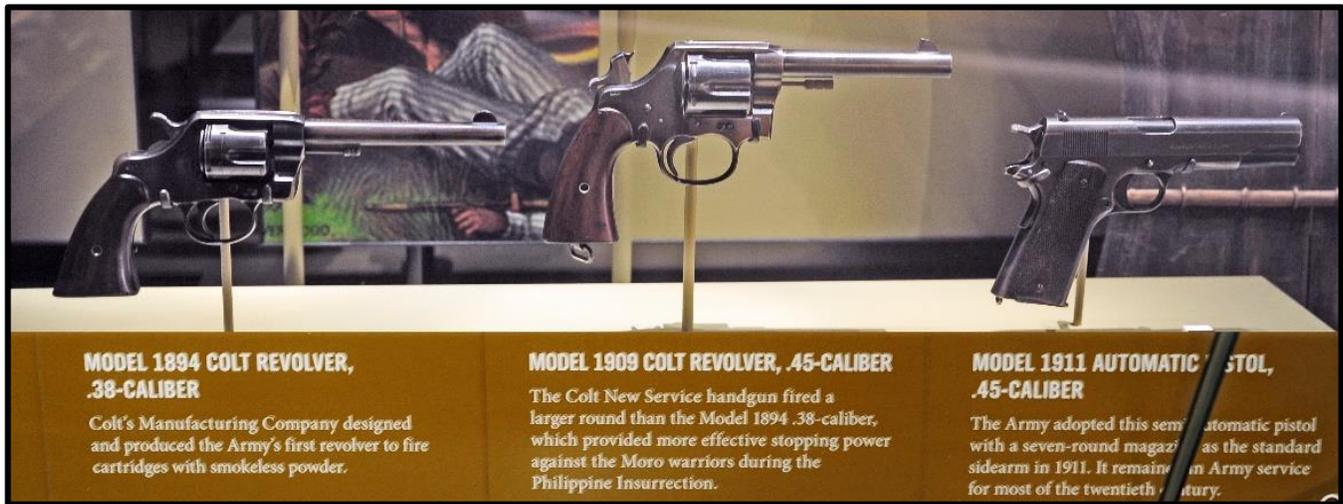
The museum is open 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., every day except December 25th. Entrance is free, but it is recommended that you reserve a timed-entry ticket in advance. Walk-up tickets are available. Group tickets for 10 or more people are also available.

The Museum’s website is Thenmusa.org

A special thanks goes out to Mr. Jack Looney for his great photographs that follow!



A display of Colonial/Revolutionary War-era firearms and accoutrements (*above*) in the Colonial Warfare (1607-1835) exhibit.



A display of U.S. Army sidearms (*above*) from around the turn of the last century, to include the John Browning-designed classic Model 1911 (*far right*).



A diorama of U.S. “Doughboys” (*left*) in the Nation Overseas Gallery (1898-1918). Doughboy was a popular nickname for American infantrymen during World War I of unknown origin, but whose use can be traced back to Mexican-American War of 1846-1848 and which remained in use until the early 1940s. Note the French Chauchat machinegun being employed by the soldier in front.

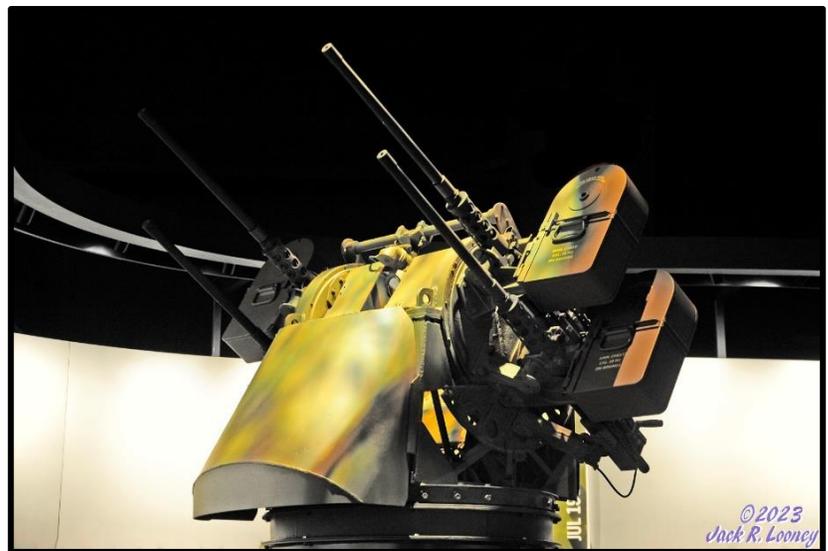
The Global War (1919-1945) Gallery “portrays the U.S. Army’s role in the Allied victory during World War II.” Depicted here (*at right*) is a 40mm Bofors anti-aircraft cannon. Note the formation of model B-17 bombers flying overhead. During WWII, American airmen were part of the U.S. Army Air Forces. The U.S. Air Force did not become an independent service until 1947.



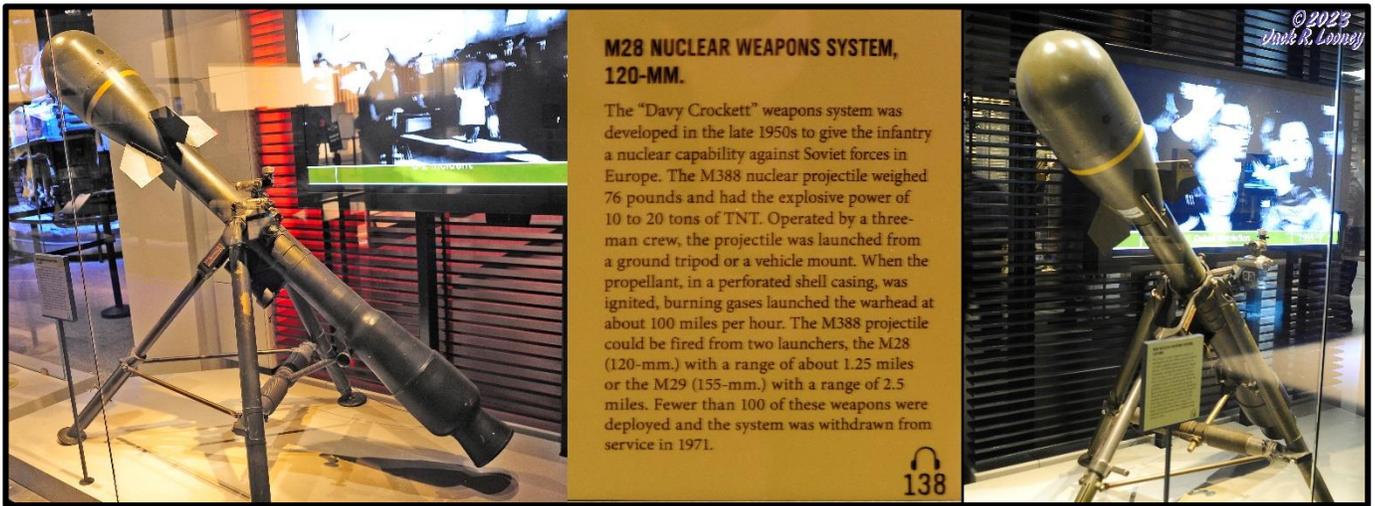


Two American G.I. classics (*left*) – an M2 .50 caliber machinegun (another John Moses design) mounted on ¼ Ton 4x4 Willys Jeep. The Jeep was developed right before the U.S. entered WWII and almost 650,000 were produced during the war. Replacing horses and mules in U.S. service, Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall is quoted as saying the jeep was "America's greatest contribution to modern warfare."

If one .50 caliber heavy MG is good, then four must be better, right? The M45 Quad mount (*right*) utilized four M2 HB (heavy barrel) machineguns and was the primary mobile anti-aircraft system of the U.S. Army in Europe during WWII. Though designed and intended for use against aircraft, the M45 was frequently used against ground targets as well, where it earned the nicknames of "Meat Chopper" and "Krautmower".



The M3 with M2 sniper scope (*left*) was an early attempt at creating a night vision capability. Deployed right the end of WWII (replacing the first T3 variants), it consisted on an M2 select-fire carbine with an infrared spotlight (on top), television type cathode ray scope to "see" the target, and associated battery pack carried in a backpack. Ungainly and heavy, it had a range of approximately 100-120 yards. The M3 with the M2 sniper scope saw service during the Korean War and into Vietnam.



What Cold War (1947-1991) exhibit would be complete without a display of the Davy Crockett weapons system? Designed to launch an M388 nuclear projectile with an explosive yield of about 20-tons TNT, the 120mm M28 (above) only had a range of 1 ¼ miles! The same warhead fired from the 155mm M29 had a range of 2 ½ miles. Developed as part of the Battle Group Atomic Delivery System (BGADS) program, the M388 was one of the smallest nuclear warheads ever developed. Davy Crockett, named for the American frontiersman killed at the Battle of the Alamo, was fielded in 1961 and was in service until the last warhead was deactivated in 1971.



Named for General Omar Bradley, the Bradley Fighting Vehicle (left) mounts a 25mm M242 Bushmaster chain gun, two BGM-71 TOW (Tube-launched, Optically tracked, Wire-guided) anti-tank missiles, and an M240 coaxial machinegun. The "upside down V" on the side of the hull was an Allied identification symbol used during Operation Desert Storm in 1991, much like the "Z" seen currently painted on Russian vehicles fighting in Ukraine.