



Everything New Orleans

## World War II Museum's U.S. Freedom Pavilion: 5 top attractions



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on January 09, 2013 at 11:50 AM, updated January 09, 2013 at 9:03 PM

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I predict that What Would You Do? will be the most effective digital presentation

My advice for visiting the spectacular new \$35 million [U.S. Freedom Pavilion: Boeing Center](#) at the [National World War II Museum](#) is to start at the top. Climb up to the fourth-floor viewing bridge and let yourself take in the aerial vista of huge antique warplanes suspended in the cavernous interior, illuminated by daylight through the 96-foot-high glass wall.

During Monday's preview tour of the mega-exhibit, Owen Glendening, the museum's associate vice president of education and access, pointed out that no matter where you look in the building, designed by New York-based architect Bart Voorsanger, it's hard to spot a right angle. The jagged effect, Glendening said, implies the disruption of war.

That oblique visual energy is amplified on the exterior of the silvery iceberg-like structure near the corner of Camp Street and the Pontchartrain Expressway. The tilted application of corrugated sheet metal cladding lent an attractive yet aggressive punch to what could have been big, blank walls. Congratulations to Mr. Voorsanger for the relatively simple, yet powerful design that's become an instant feature of the CBD cityscape.



[National WWII Museum, U. S. Freedom Pavilion preview tour](#)

Take a preview tour of the new U. S. Freedom Pavilion Boeing Center at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans which is scheduled to open to the public Sunday Jan. 13, 2013. Featuring interviews with Owen Glendening, the museum's associate vice president of education

The scene was bustling Monday inside the silver berg, as a small army of construction workers labored to finish the project before the invitation-only ribbon cutting on Saturday (Jan 12). The new museum wing opens to the public Sunday (Jan. 13) at 9 a.m. Everywhere in the multi-tiered interior, helmeted men and women were at work. In a tall, telescoping bucket truck, workers gently brushed the dust from 70-year old aircraft. Elsewhere a rigging expert repelled like an action hero from the nine-story ceiling, making an inspection of the thick, industrial cables that held aloft one of the heavy aircraft.

"My Gal Sal," a bomber with a 104-foot wingspan, weighs in at something like 15 tons. The building

and access; Tom Czekanski, director of collections and exhibits and Paul Parrie, associate vice-president of operations. For more information visit [www.nationalww2museum.org](http://www.nationalww2museum.org).

seems to have been designed to wrap around the machine gun-bristling, reptile-colored colossus that hangs at the highest altitude in the display. In my view "My Gal Sal" is the gem of the collection.

Make it your first stop.

The Boeing aircraft company -- the same folks who built "May Gal Sal" seven decades ago -- contributed \$15 million to help pay for the new pavilion. Twenty million more dollars were provided by the U.S. Department of Defense, via the Congress.

### **The new U. S. Freedom Pavilion: Boeing Center at the National World War II Museum**

- **What:** A major exhibit of vintage aircraft and vehicles, plus interactive digital displays and a high-tech theatrical submarine history presentation.
- **Where:** Part of the National World War II Museum campus, 945 Magazine St.
- **When:** Opens to the public Sunday (Jan. 13). Regular hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.
- **Admission:** Adults, \$21; seniors, \$18; children from K to 12th grade, college students and military, \$12. Adults may add a second day for \$5, others \$4.
- **More information:** Call 504.528.1944 or visit the museum website at [www.nationalww2museum.org](http://www.nationalww2museum.org).

their lives. According to the literature provided by the museum, another nickname was the "Flying Coffin." As you gaze at the silent, still artifact, imagine being a teenager, manning the cramped ball turret beneath the bomb-gorged belly of the plane, as you are pelted by anti-aircraft cannon and beset by enemy fighters.

A B-17 will fly over the exhibit's ribbon-cutting ceremony between 10:45 and 11 a.m. Saturday (Jan. 12).

### **Red Tail**

Long range escort fighters such as the sleek, silver North American P-51 Mustang made matters a little better for bomber crews as the war went on. The bright red tail and the name "Bunnie" painted on the fuselage of the National World War II Museum's Mustang identify it as one belonging to Roscoe Brown. Brown was one of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen, a group of African-American pilots who overcame widespread prejudice to aid in the allied victory. A generation that may have never heard of the Tuskegee Airmen were dramatically acquainted with their roles in World War II by the 2012 movie "Red Tails," starring Cuba Gooding Jr. and Terrence Howard.

[Some movie critics didn't much like the film](#), but I did. To my mind, it was a war movie that was, in part, about vintage war movies. The computer-generated air combat scenes were pure 21st century, but the rest of the script was unironically old-fashioned. And the P-51s were utterly cool.

### **My Gal Sal**

The pristine Boeing B-17E is a ghost. Bombers like Sal were flown by the thousands from the U.S. to England to do battle with the Nazis. But Sal didn't make it. Caught in an Atlantic storm, the crew was forced to land the bomber on an ice flow in Greenland. The Boeing waited in ice-cold suspended animation like a woolly mammoth for decades before being recovered in 1995 and restored.

The long-range B-17, called the "Flying Fortress," helped take the war to Hitler with a vengeance, but many, many bomber crews paid the price with

In a way, the World War II Museum's current P-51 is an actor, just like Gooding and Howard. Of all the aircraft in the exhibit, it is the only reproduction. Glendening explained that the restoration of a real P-51 is under way, but until it's finished, the authentic fiberglass replica will hang in its place. Glendening said that the replica has already stood in for a real Mustang during a restoration at another museum.

Brown will attend Saturday's ceremony.

### **Submarine Experience**

Back on the ground floor of the new exhibit, look for the "Final Mission: The U.S.S. Tang Submarine Experience," a wrap-around, multimedia presentation staged in a replica submarine. Since only 27 visitors can attend each 15-minute presentation, expect a line – all tickets for the Sunday, Jan. 13, shows have sold out.

The high-tech theatrical environment reproduces the last mission of the Tang, during which the commander audaciously surfaced in the center of a Japanese convoy and began firing torpedoes toward enemy ships. Visitors man various battle stations in the dimly lit submarine set, as an enveloping authentic computer-generated version of the action takes place overhead.

The museum's associate vice-president of operations Paul Parrie, who was fine-tuning the complicated exhibit Monday, said that in addition to the simulated rumbling of the diesel submarine engines that visitors will feel through the floor, he hopes to incorporate the scent of salt water and burning electrical wiring into the show by opening day.

Without going into too much detail, the show has a chilly conclusion. The Tang fires its last torpedo and is on the brink of escape, when an ironic tragedy takes place. Of the almost 90 Tang crew members, only 10 percent survive. At the poignant conclusion of the engaging show, visitors will be able to consult the I.D. they were issued at the start to determine if they were among the lucky ones. That grim conclusion adds an appropriately dour tone to what might have been -- in an age of authentic computer combat games -- a mere amusement.

There's an extra \$5 admission charge to attend the U.S.S. Tang Submarine Experience.

### **Sherman tank**

Not everything was in place in the new museum wing during my Monday preview. As workers hurried to clear and clean the expansive exhibit floor, a World War II supply truck, half-track armored vehicle, a partial B-24 bomber fuselage emblazoned with a painting of a nude woman and an operational Sherman tank crowded the museum warehouse waiting to move to the exhibit.

Notice as you tour the Freedom Pavilion Boeing Center that there are no examples of enemy equipment on display like you'd find in other parts of the museum. At its core, the new exhibition is all about America's mid-20th century ability to meet the needs of a history-altering industrial war by producing what President Roosevelt called an "arsenal of democracy."

Nothing exemplifies that industrial prowess like the Sherman tank. As Tom Czekanski, the museum's director of collections and exhibits, pointed out as we wandered amid the rolling artifacts stored in the warehouse, the Germans had lots of tanks that were more powerful and deadly than the Sherman. But few were as reliable or easy to produce. After D-Day, Czekanski said, it was the humble Sherman that allowed the allies to charge across the continent toward Germany and the conclusion of the war.



#### [Ride in a Sherman tank from the National World War II Museum](#)

Ride along as Tom Czekanski, director of collections and exhibits at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, drives "Draftee," a Sherman tank, to its new home at the U.S. Freedom Pavilion: The Boeing Center.

Czekanski said that the Sherman would be driven from its warehouse home to the museum on sometime before the opening. Caution New Orleans drivers, at 33-tons, it's not a vehicle you want to cut off in traffic.

I told Glendening and Czekanski that it was oddly nostalgic for me to inspect the Sherman, because, as a child, a similar tank was used as a sort of monument in a neighborhood park. The heavy iron artifact also served as a sort of playground defacto equipment. At times, a Sherman tank was, in a way, my jungle gym.

#### **What Would You Do?**

America's view of war may be more complicated than when the Sherman tank was installed in my

neighborhood park decades ago. The Freedom Pavilion Boeing Center engages our complex emotions about war in an interactive video display titled simply "What Would You Do?" Like all contemporary museum exhibits, the Freedom Pavilion includes several examples of electronic-age displays and interactive opportunities. There's a searchable Congressional Metal of Honor recipient database, touch-screen digital tours of aircraft cockpit interiors and a 31-foot jumbo digital screen for a continuous historical film loop.

But I predict "What Would You Do?" will be the most effective, because it takes technological wonder a step further by allowing visitors to voice their own values.

Museum patrons line up like game show contestants to watch a series of videos that outline historical conundrums. For example, actor Wendell Pierce describes the question of bombing France in preparation for D-Day. If the Allies bombed the railroad yards and other targets, Pierce explains, they would impede the Nazis' ability to fight back during the invasion. But if they bombed, they would accidentally, but inevitably, kill some of the very civilians that they hoped to liberate.

Presented with that dilemma, visitors will be able to vote on what to do. The video screen displays the outcome of the vote immediately as a sort of crowd-sourced social conscience.