

World War I Commemoration

In the stories of what binds us together as Americans, nothing is as consequential for the integrity of the nation as the decisions and commonalities of those whose lives were fated to be played out on wartime battlefields. Our memorials and monuments exist to help all remember what history teaches. It's commonly held that World War One (WWI) remains our nation's forgotten war. With the approaching Centennial of WWI in 2018, Susan Davis International was hired by the United States World War One Centennial Commission to reintroduce the critical importance and lasting impact of the war to broad target audiences, using the anniversaries of the U.S. entry into WWI and the Armistice to remind Americans about the war and our participation in it. The mission held a new historical purpose: to remedy the absence of a legacy national memorial to WWI that would educate Americans and foreign visitors alike.

SDI worked with the Commission to create and execute two overarching signature events anchoring the Commission's goals. In 2017, the first signature program honored our country's entry into the war with a signature event at the only existing WWI museum in the U.S., located in Kansas City, Missouri. The second turned attention to Washington, DC, to commemorate the Armistice and provide a "First Look" at the commissioned national memorial and memorial site.

The United States World War I Centennial Commission, Kansas City Summary:

The Commemoration events that took place on April 6, 2017 at the National World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, marking the centennial of the U.S. entry into World War I, offered an opportunity to make great progress in achieving the Commission's Congressionally authorized mandate. The Commission sought to use the Centennial Commemoration event in Kansas City as a springboard for all the activities and outreach to follow. A key goal was enhancing the level of public awareness to create a more fertile landscape for seeking support and funding for the World War I Memorial to be built in the Nation's Capital.

SDI was tasked by the Commission with first creating and then implementing a plan for all aspects of the national commemoration ceremony—as well as the creation and execution of a national strategic media and public affairs plan. Following extensive research and outreach to key stakeholders, SDI created by weekly draft program presentations and provided critical plan updates to the Commissioners and at

Commission staff meetings and held weekly and then daily calls with Commission staff.

Once the plan was approved, SDI created a strategic site and operations plan and built a team of Kansas City subcontractors selected to ensure top tier performance while working within the Commission's budget. The logistics plans detailed the work with local vendors, law enforcement and partner organizations as well as coordination with local city, state and federal officials. The plans also included but were not limited to development and management of a site security plan, pre-ceremony and ceremony logistics, creation and promotion of a public ticketing reservations system, a viable inclement weather plan, a transportation plan including parking and shuttle services, management of the guest list, show production, special guest management, guest seating and room block and logistics coordination for the hotels near the Museum. Also, of critical importance, SDI created a plan for special guest management, which included advance liaison, check-in and VIP seating, and executed the plan on site. SDI also developed, managed and executed the VIP lunch reception for key dignitaries and special guests.

Further, SDI worked closely with the Commission on the design and production of the printed program, invitations and all other event-related collateral. SDI also developed a comprehensive signage plan that included all necessary site directional signage as well as parking lot and general event signs such as the Step and Repeat and Sponsor logo signage. SDI coordinated with the Commission and Museum staff to ensure all commitments to donors and sponsors of the ceremony or the Commission were fulfilled.

SDI worked with the Artistic Director to ensure that all technical requirements for the production were met according to the Commission's budget parameters. SDI also managed production, technical and stage management support, as well as pre-ceremony and ceremony paper-walkthroughs and advance site walk-throughs. SDI and our subcontracted team members continuously monitored the budget, sought in-kind support from several entities and adjusted to accommodate production demands, while remaining within the Commission's budget limitations.

This event included a significant stakeholder component with national education programs for students and other Commission educational and cultural partners; Congressional and elected official outreach; diplomatic outreach to facilitate participation of ambassadorial representatives from the Allied Nations; and outreach to U.S. military leadership, and the broad universe of military service organizations and veterans service organizations such as the American Legion and the VFW. The events were livestreamed which greatly increased the number of citizens of all ages

and locations, beyond the thousands in attendance, who were able to experience the program and learn the history of World War I in a compelling way. The broad and effective stakeholder outreach component also achieved the Commission's goal of creating increased awareness of the future World War I Memorial to be built in Washington, DC, to support fundraising efforts.

“First Look” at the World War I National Memorial, Washington D.C.

Summary:

SDI was tasked by the WWI Centennial Commission (WWICC) to leverage the Armistice Centennial to generate interest and support among targeted constituencies in a yet-to-be-built memorial to this century-old long-neglected war. To do so, SDI created a series of eight signature “First Look” themed events that took place November 8-12, 2018 to introduce target constituencies to the future National World War I Memorial in Washington, D.C. at Pershing Park. The specific mission for each signature event was to re-educate the public about American participation in the Great War, educate targeted publics about the new Memorial, interest new donor prospects, and activate special interest organizations.

The biggest challenge was to generate excitement for a Memorial that did not physically exist. And this had to occur during Veterans Day Week while competing with thousands of Armistice Centennial and Veterans Day activities throughout the region and across the country. To further complicate the planning process, President Trump made plans to schedule a parade down Pennsylvania Avenue, which for a period of time brought the Commission's planning to a halt. When the parade plan was dismissed, the plan had to be redone and the planning window for SDI's work in support of the Commission's goals was greatly reduced.

The Pershing Park site is a National Park Service property, thus imposing many public use and marketing restrictions upon the Commission. They were ultimately restricted to a 60-foot long, 90-foot wide tent, holding a maximum of 200 people at one time, plus a much smaller tent that housed the Memorial maquette and historical materials. Thus, all events were livestreamed.

SDI reached out to the Library of Congress; the Smithsonian; Pershing's Own U.S. Army Band; WWI re-enactment groups, the Red Cross; the Salvation Army; the Department of Defense; the National Museum of the American Indian; the Women in Military Service Memorial and American G.I. Forum to research WWI military history; home front history; WWI era music and food; the role of women, African

Americans, Native Americans, and much more. Utilizing this research, we shaped the program and identified and recruited the speakers.

SIGNATURE WWI COMMEMORATIVE EVENTS

1. **The Nation Served: Wreath Laying** Tribute to the States and Territories: The opening event of “First Look” was a wreath laying tribute to those from the U.S. states and territories who served in World War I.
2. **Women in Wartime: Tribute to the Women of World War I:** This event celebrated women on the frontlines and the home front.
3. **The Heroic Legacy: African Americans and Latinos of World War I:** This event reflected on the war’s impact on the African American and Latino communities, and the heroic legacy of their service.
4. **Tribute to the Homefront Luncheon:** This event recognized organizations that supported the war effort at home.
5. **Bravest of the Brave:** This event paid tribute to the service and commitment of Native Americans during the Great War.
6. **The Unveiling of The Soldiers’ Journey:** The capstone was a dramatic invitation-only event for major donors, military representatives from the United States and Commonwealth countries, VIPs, and special Commission guests. This memorial will be a 38- character sculpture by figurative artists Sabin Howard entitled *The Soldiers Journey*. We recreated the sculpture journey, person by person, over seven scenes. SDI wrote an original script and worked with the Army’s Pershing Own Band to set the script to music. The sculpture scenes were enacted by students dressed in period costume that we recruited from local colleges. For the finale, the students led the audience in the rousing and famous WWI song “Over There”.
7. **Military and Veterans Salute:** A salute to the military and veterans opened with remarks by U.S. World War I Centennial Commissioner Thomas Moe, a prisoner of war in Vietnam who was held along with U.S. Sen. John McCain.
8. **World War I Armistice Film Festival:** The day-long film festival showcased a diverse collection of five World War I-themed films.

SDI recruited network media talent to emcee the events; and organized a TAPS ceremony each evening at the site, which is ongoing.

Collateral Material

SDI custom designed and created programs for eight events, including a 12-page commemorative keepsake program.

<https://www.susandavis.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ww1-memorial-commemorative-program-11-2-18.pdf>

SDI also distributed poppy pins for all the guests and added to the authentic feel of the evening with programs provided to guests inside ammo cans, and WWI labels for reception wine.

To flawlessly execute eight events in five days, SDI created a strategic operations plan which entailed collaboration with the National Park Service, the Metropolitan Police, The Secret Service, the Executive Protective Service; the Mayor's Office, the Department of Defense, the Commissioners and a multitude of Commission contractors. The plan included a site security plan; all logistics; speaker and emcee identification, recruitment and management; creation and promotion of a public ticketing reservation system; partnership cultivation; inclement weather plan; guest management; participant liaison and events production; technical and stage management; pre-ceremony briefings; media relations; protocol; public affairs outreach and crisis management.

Marketing Outreach

As part of the effort to activate special interest organizations, leadership of more than 1,000 organizations was identified and invited to the various events via email with telephone follow up. Each event had a specially designed e-invitation. Invitees were also provided an overall "First Look" flyer to share with their organization members along with a link to a reservation site.

SDI communicated personally with the Department of Veteran Affairs, Department of Defense, Department of Labor (Veteran Affairs Team), 65 military service organizations, 609 veterans service organizations, 64 social, volunteer, or public service organizations, and 27 university organizations, all Congressional and Senate offices and all US Governors' offices. Social media was also used to build participation and awareness.

SDI employed a three-prong outreach strategy beginning with the identification of relevant organizations. A point of contact within each organization was contacted in early September to make them aware of the events and to request their assistance in disseminating information to their spheres of influence. The organizations were sent an email in mid-October inviting them to the event and providing material for distribution via the organization's communication channels (e.g., social media, website, e-newsletters). Finally, multiple follow up calls were made in early November.

This intensive outreach strategy was effective in addressing the impact of the reduced planning window, the highly competitive calendar of military-related events which take place around Veterans Day, and the fact that the site had not yet become broadly,

publicly recognized as the future home of the National World War I Memorial. These events made great progress in creating that recognition and site identification. The Memorial has broken ground; the fundraising is nearing completion and the sculpture is underway.