SDI SUSAN DAVIS INTERNATIONAL

American Battle Monuments Commission

SITUATION

The American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) awarded a contract to Susan Davis International (SDI) for public relations and associated services in support of ABMC's year-long centennial commemoration. Established by Congress in 1923, ABMC serves as the guardian of America's overseas commemorative military cemeteries and memorials and ensures the memory of those who perished overseas defending our nation will never fade. The contract required SDI and its subcontractor Loma Media to work collaboratively with the ABMC Public Affairs Team to increase awareness of ABMC among key U.S. audiences, increase understanding of its mission, and create interest in learning about ABMC through ABMC's digital presence. ABMC's small public footprint in the U.S. coupled with the predominance of its properties located overseas created a public relations challenge.

APPROACH

Drawing from SDI's initial stakeholder analysis, the team built a strategic plan around public education and outreach that centered on a messaging strategy, partnership and relationship building, event design and execution, media outreach, social media, visual branding elements, and website property efficacy. The plan laid the groundwork to operationalize these segments and commission resources to build awareness, visibility, and understanding of ABMC's role with a national audience. SDI established connections with MSOs, VSOs, service academies, and other affiliated organizations, creating opportunities for Commissioners to address military stakeholders.

To effectively tell the story of ABMC at 100 required multiple communication elements. A logo was created to visually define the centennial along with high-profile branded materials for both official use and event branding. A comprehensive partnership/relationship-building plan was developed to grow existing relationships and create new ones to access new audiences through partner platforms. Events were created around centennial resources, a centennial documentary, and a coffee-table book. The documentary was premiered across the country in events designed to convey ABMC's centennial messages to new audiences and organizations. SDI employed a focused, carefully calibrated invitation outreach plan as a strong marketing communications tool to raise awareness of ABMC with those who attended the events as well as those who didn't. Coupled with intensive follow-up activities, the invitations served as introductions to ABMC, its mission, and its anniversary. The volume of both individual and organizational outreach by design built or refreshed awareness and laid the foundation for further U.S.- focused outreach.

Media strategies were companions to all special events, which provided connectivity to key media markets and stand-alone interview opportunities. As part of the documentary tour media strategy, SDI placed an op-ed SDI drafted for Commission representatives in the most relevant, significant outlet for each market of the tour. SDI drafted press releases and developed targeted media

outreach plans for individual Commission members aimed at their local news outlets and publications from their alumni universities.

SDI provided social media support services to position and socialize the centennial. Social media strategies were developed as a cost-effective way to reach diverse, micro-targeted audiences to build both affinity and communities of interest. Throughout 2023, SDI crafted various content and graphics targeted to core ABMC followers and extended audiences.

To bolster ABMC's digital presence, a website update and reskin capitalized on new webpage designs, and the platform was migrated to an enhanced performance environment.

RESULTS

Awareness of ABMC's history, mission, and accomplishments was increased through national and regional outreach to both individuals and organizations using the documentary as a vehicle/rationale for building and strengthening connections.

Relationships were renewed and built with aligned organizations, centennial screening cohosts, constituencies and guest audiences, professional peers, public institutions, and relevant embassies and national landmarks. SDI tapped into organizations that had a natural affinity with the agency and whose communications platforms, membership vehicles, meetings, and conferences could provide ABMC partnering and presentation opportunities.

Collaboration with relevant organizations and institutions brought great results on large and small scales. Speaking opportunities were secured for Commission leadership at top-tier military events and U.S. service academies. ABMC received invitations to repeat documentary screenings and collaborate on new projects. And ABMC had offers to participate in conventions and share information on third-party websites and social media, and requests for ongoing connectivity. The foundation had been laid for building on and continuing new and refreshed relationships, and the seed of common interest had been planted.

Media strategies resulted in media opportunities for podcasts, and radio and TV station interviews including Federal News Network and a one-on-one interview by Brett Baier with the ABMC Secretary that aired on Fox News "Special Report." Media pitching also resulted in several high-profile and in-depth features on the agency, including CBS Sunday Morning and Military History Quarterly.

SDI also advantaged the North American Precis Syndicate with an article on the centennial anniversary that reached all 50 states and key ABMC markets and generated at first count more than 1,600 placements in digital and print outlets read by nearly 178 million Americans.

In addition to messaging generated for the American public, a primary ABMC target, social media outreach built awareness of landmark events and historical remembrances attached to the centennial and ABMC's solemn, eternal mission.