SDI SUSAN DAVIS INTERNATIONAL

How SDI Showed the World the New World War I Memorial

"FIRST COLORS"

Situation

The World War I Centennial Commission (WW1CC) hired Susan Davis International (SDI) to lead public relations outreach for the First Colors Ceremony of the new World War I Memorial in Washington, D.C. The event featured a formal flag raising and served as the Memorial's public opening.

Designed to introduce the new Memorial to the public, the flawlessly executed program shared powerful interviews, historical video segments and musical vignettes from the period to engage diverse audiences with great impact and universal appeal. It concluded 'live,' with the official first flag raising followed by a spectacular fly-over by the U.S. Air Force "Hat in the Ring" Squadron and an emotionally resonant wreath-laying ceremony.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the event was rescheduled from December 2020 to April 2021 and required a virtual setting for remarks from speakers such as President Joe Biden and Interior Secretary Deb Haaland. SDI was presented the additional challenge of successfully driving media to the on-site ceremony amidst health concerns related to public gatherings and featured a roster of guest speakers unable to attend personally.

Approach

SDI was able to quickly build on our depth of knowledge of Memorial planning and spokesperson resources by leveraging prior work. A communications plan was developed which included addressing the messaging challenge of the strong possibility that the Memorial might not be able to open to the public in conjunction with the event because of weather-related construction delays. SDI's initial media strategy and messaging were developed with that in mind, focusing exclusively on the program viewing opportunity. After about ten days, the Commission's contractors were able to confirm the opening in conjunction with the event. Messaging was enhanced with this information, generating much stronger media and public appeal. Because COVID restrictions limited in-person attendance, messaging focused both on program viewing opportunities and the public opening of the Memorial.

SDI ensured blanket coverage of the Memorial's opening prior to the event. Targets included international media, top general news outlets in the U.S., syndicated media with broad reach, cultural and travel media, and military media. Interviews were scheduled both in person at the Memorial and via Zoom and telephone. SDI prepared interview information materials and proposed message points based on the interests of various reporters.

Results

Media attention on the World War I Memorial in April 2021 was extensive. On account of SDI's media outreach and scheduled interviews, information about the program livestream and the Memorial resulted in:

- 500+ print stories and 600+ broadcast stories in the United States
- Coverage in all 50 states and 10 countries on five continents

Outlets such as AP, the New York Times and Gray TV created coverage that appeared in multiple outlets across their networks and syndicates. Other top coverage included The Guardian, CNN, FOX News, PBS News Hour, ABC News and the Washington Post. Military outlets covering this story included Military.com, Stars & Stripes, Military Families Magazine, Connecting Vets and American Legion Online. The New York Times and The Guardian published lengthy features on the Memorial's opening.

A dozen outlets were on-site for the event, including CBS News, CNN, Getty Images, CQ Rollcall and Stars & Stripes. DC's ABC affiliate WJLA was on-site for the entire morning with live coverage during its morning show. Coverage lasted through Memorial Day, as C-SPAN and Fox News Sunday prepared special segments from interviews and footage captured during the event.

SDI's ongoing, collaborative work was credited by the Commission as a vital component in engaging public support, providing broad-based awareness and advancing education while meeting ambitious branding and fundraising goals.