

Military History Comes Alive in Los Angeles

Los Angeles is a top tourist destination. It's the entertainment capitol of the world with beautiful weather year around. But if you've already been to Disneyland and are looking for a unique experience, then visit the **American Society of Military History Museum** (ASMH). Travel just 12 miles east of downtown Los Angeles, and you'll find this non-profit military history museum with over 175 military vehicles & outdoor exhibits dating from 1933 to the present.



The Display

Since 1962 the ASMH has been dedicated to preserving America's military history. It is the largest Military History Museum & Restoration Center in the Western United States, and its outdoor display complex takes the museum visitor through time and traces the development of military equipment, which has affected world history.

Among the display pieces are 25 tanks, including WWII Sherman tanks, M-60 tanks, and mobile anti-aircraft guns. There are also WWII Half-tracks, troop transports, jeeps, and field ambulances. And you'll find cannons, 8" Howitzers (both self propelled & towed), bombs, missiles, Humvee's, fixed naval guns, naval landing craft and assorted other heavy equipment from different periods. There is also an original anti-aircraft gun emplacement from the USS Missouri battleship, and a Huey helicopter gunship from the Vietnam War.

Most of the equipment is from the U.S. military. The exhibits serve as a fun environment allowing visitors a unique opportunity to get an up-close look at some of the world's most impressive pieces of history. Each year the museum participates in many Los Angeles community events including Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Veterans Day. The ASMH also supports other non-profit organizations such as the Leukemia Society, Race L.A., and the USMC Toys for Tots annual toy drive. In 2008 educational tours were given to over 4.000 school children including boy scouts & girl scouts.

Donald Michelson

The Museum is the brainchild of Donald Michelson. During World War II, Michelson went through Officer Training School and became a Quartermaster Officer. For 22 years following WWII, Michelson ran the PX System for the National Guard PX. In September 1962 he opened his first military museum at the Exposition Park Armory. He began working on the museum full time in 1970. Later the museum moved

to the Reserve Center in Bell, CA. And in 1978 the museum moved to its current site in the Los Angeles County Whittier Narrows Park complex.

The equipment was acquired in a variety of ways over the last 40 years. Some was purchased, some was donated, and some is on loan from the government. But every vehicle has its own story.

Michelson still works at the museum and serves as its Executive Director at the age of 92. He says: "The museum is a tribute designed to honor our veterans and active military personnel. But we also help our community by providing volunteer opportunities to handicapped and disadvantaged people, schools, veterans, and senior citizens."



Craig Michelson

Craig Michelson serves as the museum's Curator. It is a labor of love for Craig, who is Don's son. Craig spends his time restoring vehicles, and displaying them at events.

Craig also gives his time to teach auto-body and repair techniques to volunteers from local high schools, the LA County Senior Citizens Program, LA County Probation Department, and Career Partners.

The younger Michelson states: "We pay tribute to all the brave young men and women in uniform today, and recognize the immeasurable contributions of those in previous generations who have dedicated their lives to defend our nation. We're the only museum of this kind on the West Coast. We're doing a public service. It's nice to preserve these steel soldiers for future generations."

Hollywood Calls

Since the 1960's the Michelson's have made these museum pieces available for films and television. They've supplied military equipment for over 800 productions including **M*A*S*H**, "**Tora Tora Tora**", "**Pearl Harbor**" and many more. The museum is also a regular contributor to programs on The History Channel. In fact, Craig and the museum were featured in the History Channel program "Combat Garage". Craig Michelson drove the M-60 tank, which famously "ran amuck" crushing cars in Chicago on an episode of NBC's "**ER**". And recently they provided the "hero vehicle" for the latest Indiana Jones film, "**The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull**" (2008).

Fun Facts

Additionally, companies that create models, toys, remote control tanks, and video games travel from all parts of the globe to take measurements of these hard to find battlefield headliners of yesteryear.



Five employees help the Michelson's run the office & facility. But the museum would not stay open if it weren't for the help of the six regular volunteers, and 60 on-call specialists and Living History volunteers who participate at special events in genuine uniforms & gear.

The museum receives no government funds or corporate sponsorship, and they are always looking for volunteers who can assist with the preservation, upkeep and restoration of these larger than life battlefield heroes.

The museum is also available for events including veteran organization meetings & reunions, and corporate events & fundraisers. Additionally, there are "Birthday Boot Camp" parties where kids are put through their paces by a real life Army Drill Instructor with the backdrop of authentic military equipment.

By John Elliott

Military Museum/American Society of Military History (ASMH)

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