

World War II Memorial

Atlantic Bas-Reliefs



Experience Your America

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

The World War II Memorial honors the sacrifice and determination of a nation and a generation during the middle part of the twentieth century. Located along the ceremonial entrance, one finds 24 bronze bas-reliefs created by sculptor Ray Kaskey. His work depicts both home front and battle scenes highlighting that sacrifice and determination. The following reliefs appear along the north side of the ceremonial entrance and illustrate images associated with the Atlantic Theater of the war.



Lend Lease

Prior to the United States entry into the war with Japan and Germany, many of its future allies, including Great Britain, Russia, and China, desperately needed assistance. Instituting the “Lend Lease” policy, President Franklin Roosevelt agreed to lease ships, tanks, jeeps, and food, with allied payment to follow after the war.



Bond Drive

On the home front during the war, Americans both young and old offered assistance to friends and family members fighting overseas; they raised “Victory Gardens” and held scrap drives. In order to raise money for the war effort, Americans participated in rallies and parades encouraging the sale of War Bonds.



Women in Military

Prior to the war, women could only serve the military in nursing and clerical positions. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, however, the military allowed women to serve as pilots and in other new non-combatant roles. Newly established units included the Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service, Women’s Air Force Service Pilots, Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps, and several reserve units.



Rosie the Riveter / Aircraft Construction

Due to a severe manpower shortage, factories increasingly employed women whose pre-war roles kept them at home. These women helped build the aircraft, ships, and tanks vital to the war effort. Nicknamed “Rosie the Riveter,” she substantially increased production of war material to unheard of levels.



Battle of the Atlantic

To hamper the transport of our industrial might across the Atlantic, the German Navy effectively utilized its U-Boat submarine force. Operating in groups called “Wolf Packs,” U-Boats sank over 2500 allied ships by war’s end. The implementation of the convoy system and the breaking of German codes substantially aided the allied victory in the Atlantic.



Air War / B-17

During the Second World War, aircraft became a vital instrument of warfare. Allied bombers, protected by fighter escort, destroyed enemy factories and infrastructure, including railroads and bridges. Sadly, enemy fighter planes along with anti-aircraft fire called “flak,” devastated thousands of aircrews. The B-17 “Flying Fortress” fought alongside many other famous planes, including the P-51 “Mustang”.



Paratroopers

Fighter, bomber, and transport aircraft each became a necessity to the Allied war effort. Transport aircraft, especially, introduced a new method of delivering troops to the front line. They dropped highly skilled airborne troops, called paratroopers, behind enemy lines at places such as Sicily, Normandy, Holland, and Germany.



Normandy Beach Landing

After nearly two years of attacking German held positions in France with bomber aircraft, the Allies launched the “D-Day” invasion on June 6, 1944. The joint Operation, codenamed “Overlord,” landed allied troops on the northern shores of France. Landing craft successfully delivered troops to Normandy shores heavily laden with beach obstacles and exposed to a most galling German fire.



Tanks in Combat

Following the invasion of Normandy, allied and American troops launched operation “Cobra,” breaking through German defenses. Tanks aided the infantrymen in the field and played an integral part in the “break-out” into France. The American M-4 “Sherman,” inferior to many German tanks in armor and armament, proved to be highly successful due to its large production numbers.



Medics in Field

During the American Civil War minor battlefield wounds often proved fatal. By the Second World War the survival rate of combat wounded improved dramatically due to advances in medicine and the use of Army Medics and Navy Corpsmen. Medics and Corpsmen often treated wounded under fire in the field, making them some of the bravest on the battlefield.



Battle of the Bulge

By mid-December 1944 the allies, standing on the doorstep of Germany, believed that Hitler’s army had all but lost. That belief changed when Hitler launched a massive offensive into Belgium breaking the allied line creating a large “bulge”. Dogged resistance by American units surrounded at key crossroad towns, along with German fuel shortages brought about the demise of Hitler’s December offensive.



Russians Meet Americans at the Elbe

Following the Battle of the Bulge and a winter of hard fighting, the allies plowed into Germany on all sides. On April 25, 1945, American and Russian armies finally met at the Elbe River. American troops there discovered how hard the war had been for Russia, finding women fighting in combat alongside men. The allied victory over Germany arrived twelve days later with its unconditional surrender.