



THE HETTEMA GROUP



THE NATIONAL
WWII MUSEUM

Media contact for The Hettema Group:
Joyce Huyett Turner
626.253.2814
626.791.9201
joyce@huyettturner.com

For The National WWII Museum:
Liz Feldman
732.387.0515
443.683.0917
lfeldman@hillmanpr.com

News

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The Hettema Group: Presenting a Familiar Story in a Powerful New Way

Beyond All Boundaries
Speaks to Each Generation

When the National World War II Museum in New Orleans commissioned The Hettema Group to produce a new cinematic experience about WWII, they were presented with a daunting challenge: how to tell a story – that older Americans already know – in a fresh new way, and also grab the attention of a new generation.

“From the beginning, we knew this project would be something special. It’s an incredibly important story and we looked on our participation as a solemn responsibility. We wanted to make sure the presentation would resonate with people of all ages,” says Phil Hettema, President and Creative Executive, The Hettema Group. “In order to capture the imagination of the younger generation, we’ve used state-of-the-art technology and special theatrical effects to create an immersive, emotional experience. For older Americans, we absolutely made sure we got it *right*,” he added, “by working with leading historians, doing extensive research, utilizing archival photographs and footage, and ultimately paying homage by telling the story in the very words of those who were there.

“If you’re 13 years old, or 33 years old...18 or 72, you’ll walk in with a preconceived notion of what the war was, and what the war meant,” said Tom Hanks, who served as Executive Producer and narrator. “And you will leave with a different notion, with some degree of enlightenment.”

“What’s especially exciting is that in meeting this challenge, we’ve created the most sophisticated presentation that you’ll find in any museum in the world,” said Hetteema, who served as Show Producer and Creative Director. “What’s distinctive is the complexity of the production, and the number of different systems – multi-image projection, full surround audio, special theatrical effects, moving three-dimensional scenery; and a state-of-the-art Medialon Internet based control system that coordinates over two thousand individual cues throughout the 35-minute presentation, and it’s accessible remotely for diagnostic monitoring.”

Amazingly, it all operates automatically at the touch of one button. “The goal is to make all of that technology invisible to viewers as they are immersed in the telling of a powerful, emotional story,” said Hetteema.

The ground-breaking presentation, a five-year project – from concept to design and production -- by The Hetteema Group’s creative team incorporates state-of-the-art special effects immersing the audience in a unique cinematic experience. With life-sized props, animation, and atmospherics, as well as archival footage and sound effects, audiences will feel the tank treads rumbling across North Africa’s deserts, brush snow from their cheeks during the wintry Battle of the Bulge, and flinch at anti-aircraft fire as it tries to bring down *their* B-17 on a bombing run over Nazi Germany.

Dwarfing large screens in most traditional theaters, the Solomon Victory Theater screen at the National WWII Museum is 120-feet wide, and 30 feet high. Nine digital cinema DLP projectors, plus a full scrim screen, create a multi-layered spectacle for viewers.

The full surround custom audio system features 27 speakers transporting audiences to the sounds of the jungle, a B-17’s engine roar, bombs dropping, tanks rolling, and more. Theatrical effects include an anti-aircraft gun that rises, rotates and appears to fire above the audience, a 25-foot guard tower rises ominously before the audience from a deep pit below the stage, and a B-17 aircraft nose lowers from overhead rigging directly above the audience, in less than 12 seconds,

and six full-sized "Dragons Teeth" tank traps (large steel construction devices used to disable tanks) appear in the D-Day beach sequence.

The son of a WWII veteran, Hetteema began his research close to home – by talking to his dad, Dave Hetteema, 86, who served in the Army Air Forces as the pilot of a B-17, and flew 35 successful missions over Germany, at the age of 21.

"My dad's story is emblematic of literally millions of guys. What they did, what they accomplished – it's hard to conceive of today, the sacrifice of an entire generation and of our entire country.

Beyond All Boundaries provides that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to tell a story like that. I can't think of another story of such significance," said Phil. "While the scale of the war is massive, the personal stories of 44 individuals, including my dad, help to provide a very personal perspective on an epic, global story."

Dave's own war experiences contributed to an exhaustive research effort spanning more than 6,000 hours by the film's creative team.

"My dad and countless others like him helped define 'the American Spirit,'" said Phil. "The America that emerged after WWII: an America that does the right thing, stands up for the right things; that's the image that we like to carry of ourselves, that we aspire to."

Beyond All Boundaries opens November 7, 2009 at the National World War II Museum's Solomon Victory Theater, in New Orleans (www.nationalww2museum.org). In addition to narration by Tom Hanks, the true stories of 44 individuals in the film are voiced by 30 well-known actors including Kevin Bacon, Patricia Clarkson, James Cromwell, Blythe Danner, Viola Davis, Jennifer Garner, John Goodman, Neil Patrick Harris, Tobey Maguire, Chris Pine, Brad Pitt, and Gary Sinise, among others.

Of the 44 individuals whose WWII stories are featured, six are still living.

"As a storyteller in the entertainment business, it's really satisfying to tell a story of such monumental significance," Phil Hetteema noted. "Our aim is to make viewers think about what happened, and walk away with their own point of view about war. The cost of the war itself is hard to fathom."

65 million lives were lost in WWII: approximately the total populations today of California, Texas, and Louisiana combined. "That's a number that never ceases to astound people. One we hope they will not forget," said Hetteema.

The Hetteema Group (THG), founded by Phil Hetteema in 2002, specializes in creative design, production and architecture for the world of experiential entertainment, including museums, visitor centers, theme parks, and resort destinations. In addition to producing *Beyond All Boundaries* for the National WWII Museum, current client projects include DreamWorks' Dubai theme park, Harrah's Casino's Las Vegas observation wheel, the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry's *Explore: Red Planet, Blue Planet*; recent clients also include Resort World Sentosa, Samsung Everland, Busch Entertainment, Paramount Studios, Universal Studios and the Royal Hashemite Court of Jordan. New projects are also underway in China and Malaysia. For more, see www.thehettemagroup.com.

The National World War II Museum tells the story of the American Experience in the war that changed the world – why it was fought, how it was won, and what it means today. Dedicated in 2000 as The National D-Day Museum and now designated by Congress as America's National World War II Museum, it celebrates the American Spirit, the teamwork, optimism, courage and sacrifice of the men and women who fought on the battlefield and the Home Front. For more information, call 877-813-3329 or 504-527-6012 or visit www.nationalww2museum.org. Follow on Twitter at [WWIImuseum](https://twitter.com/WWIImuseum) or visit the [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/WWIImuseum) fan page.

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Editors note: Photos, images, and interviews available on request.