

MUSEUM FEATURE



A LOOK INSIDE THE UNITED STATES ARMY AIRBORNE AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS MUSEUM

BY JAMES BARTLINSKI

Established in August 2000, the United States Army Airborne and Special Operations Museum (ASOM), located in Fayetteville, North Carolina, is the nation's only institution devoted exclusively to the history of the U.S. Army's airborne and special operations forces. This award-winning museum boasts a dynamic collection of more than 5,000 artifacts, from the early origins of America's airborne and special operations forces to the current war on terrorism.

One of the highlights of the museum is a life-size depiction of a village in Normandy, France, soon after Hitler's "Atlantic Wall" was breached on D-Day (5–6 June 1944) by the fearless and determined paratroopers of the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions. Included in this dynamic diorama is a vintage World War II C-47 "Skytrain" airplane, suspended over the Nazi-occupied village with an American paratrooper in the door, poised to jump into history.

Another "must see" exhibit is the dramatic re-creation of the action on Hill 420, near the Korean village of Wonton-ni. On 31 May 1951, 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team paratrooper Cpl. Rodolfo "Rudy" P. Hernández, despite being severely wounded, continued to deliver deadly fire into the ranks of the onrushing Communist assailants. After a cartridge ruptured in the chamber of Hernández's M1 rifle, he jumped from his foxhole, bayonet fixed, and charged the enemy. He killed six aggressors before falling unconscious because of his wounds. Hernández's attack momentarily stalled the enemy advance, enabling his unit to launch a counterattack and retake lost ground. For his actions on Hill 420, Corporal Hernández was awarded the Congressional

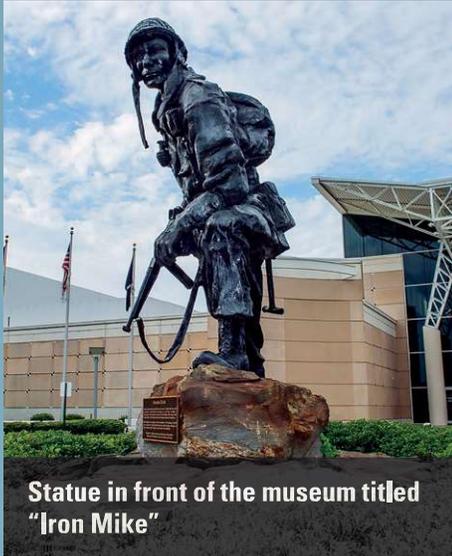
Medal of Honor. Before his death in December 2013, Hernández worked directly with the museum staff to ensure the diorama's historical accuracy.

Equally compelling is a reproduction of a Viet Cong prisoner of war (POW) camp in the dense jungle of South Vietnam's U Minh Forest, also known as the "Forest of Darkness." Here, visitors see Special Forces 1st Lt. James "Nick" N. Rowe held in a bamboo "tiger cage." In December 1968, after five years of captivity, Lieutenant Rowe escaped his Vietnamese captors. Because of his experience as a POW, Rowe was selected by the Army to design its Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) training program, which is now an integral part of the Special Forces Qualification Course.

The ASOM recounts these stories and many more in its efforts to preserve the history and material culture associated with the extraordinary feats of these elite airborne and special operations soldiers. By doing so, the museum stays true to its primary mission to educate and professionally develop our soldiers while also providing the nation an accessible and innovative venue to explore the Army's airborne and special operations past, present, and future.

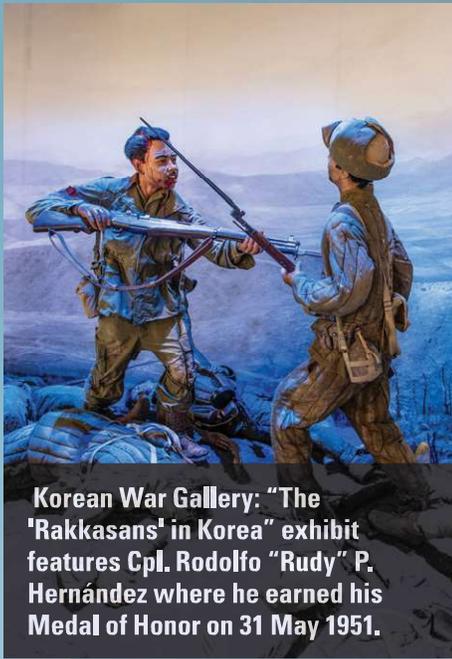
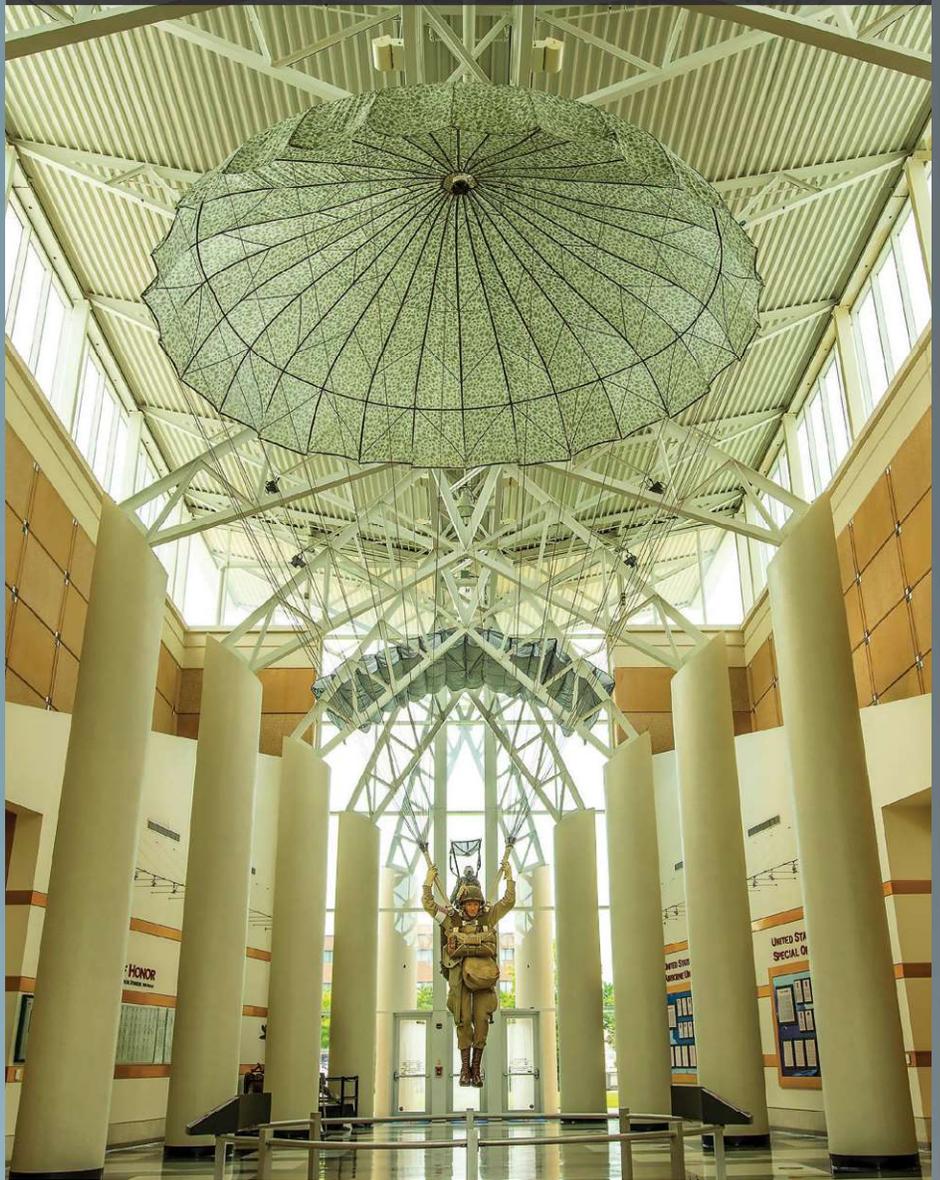


JAMES BARTLINSKI is the director of the U.S. Army Airborne and Special Operations Museum.



Statue in front of the museum titled "Iron Mike"

The museum's lobby with a World War II paratrooper mannequin descending



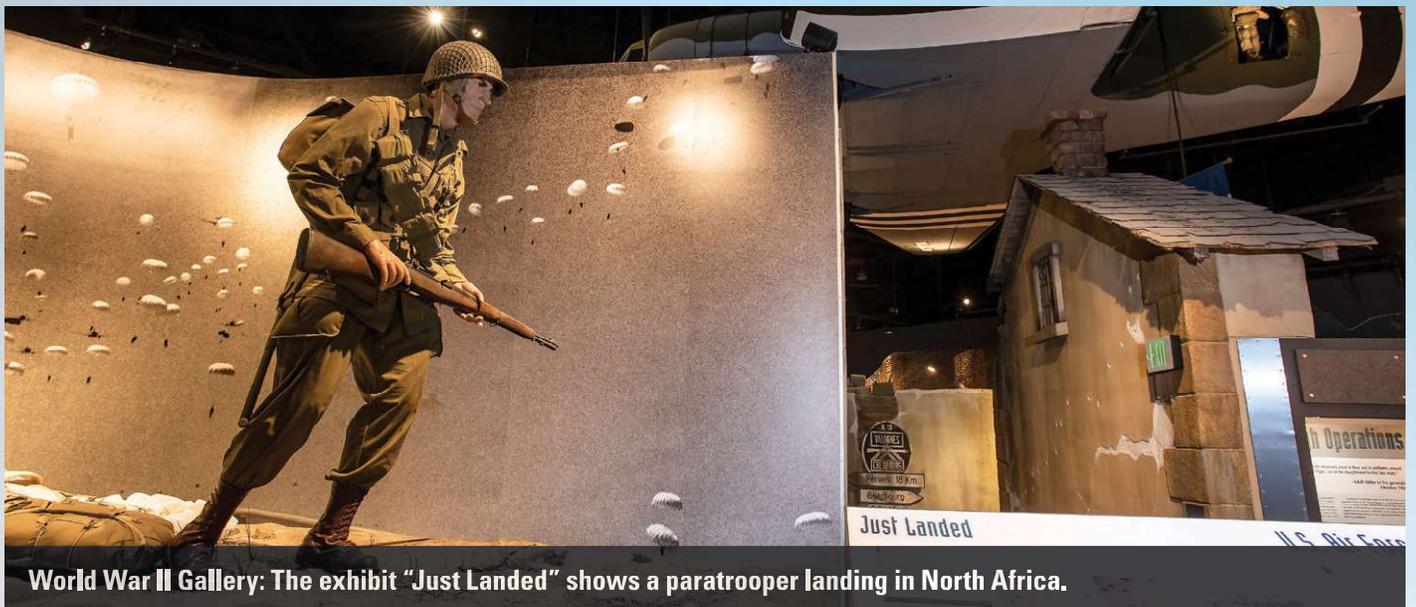
Korean War Gallery: "The 'Rakkasans' in Korea" exhibit features Cpl. Rodolfo "Rudy" P. Hernández where he earned his Medal of Honor on 31 May 1951.



World War II Gallery: An American-made CG-4A Waco glider offloading a Jeep



Vietnam War Gallery: The "Five Years to Freedom" diorama depicts Green Beret 1st Lt. James "Nick" Rowe in captivity.



World War II Gallery: The exhibit "Just Landed" shows a paratrooper landing in North Africa.



World War II Gallery: The Operation OVERLORD exhibit



Global War on Terrorism Gallery: "Leading the Northern Alliance" exhibit



Vietnam War Gallery: "The Courage and Compassion" diorama depicts the action on 8 November 1965 where Sp5c Lawrence Joel earned his Medal of Honor.