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National World War I Museum at Liberty Memorial Unveils Newly Acquired Ford Model T Ambulance

The National World War I Museum at Liberty Memorial is pleased to announce the addition of a restored WWI-era Ford Model T Ambulance to its permanent collection. The rare artifact will help Museum visitors learn more about a unique role Americans played during the Great War.

“Even though America held a neutral position at the start of the war, many Americans volunteered to drive ambulances overseas,” says Senior Curator Doran Cart. “Adding the ambulance to our collection allows us to share the compelling story of volunteer ambulance drivers whose altruism impacted the war even before our country became an official participant.”

The 1918 Ford Model T ambulance donated to the Museum was built for overseas service, but the war ended before it was sent to France. It was restored precisely to its war-time appearance by the donor, Preston Heller of Ohio, whose father, Preston B. Heller, served as an ambulance driver overseas during World War I.

"We are delighted that Mr. Heller donated this rare historic object to the National World War I Museum at Liberty Memorial," says President & CEO Brian Alexander. "New artifacts allow us to share even more stories from the Great War. We encourage anyone who owns a piece of history from World War I to consider making a donation to the Museum."

Located on the west side of the Museum's main galleries, the ambulance is over 7' tall, 15' long and 5' wide. All parts are original to the war period, except for the exact reproduction of the mahogany wood box, canvas details and tires.

The ambulance was unveiled at the Museum during a special event on March 12, 2012. Walt Disney's daughter Diane Disney Miller, along with family and friends, helped celebrate its unveiling, as the ambulance represented an important experience in Walt's young life.

About the Ford Model T ambulance in World War I

The Ford Model T ambulance was built on the Ford Model T light truck chassis. Its lightness, durability and ease with which it could be repaired and its parts interchanged gave it a superior rating in field use. The French ordered 2,400 Ford ambulances while the United States ordered an additional 5,340, including the ambulance on display at the National World War I Museum.

Cruising along at about 30 miles per hour, the Model T ambulance could traverse shell-pitted roads and torn terrain fairly quickly with its single driver. The ambulances could accommodate three stretchers in the back or allow four wounded soldiers to sit comfortably. However, ambulances often transported more soldiers under tough conditions.

The volunteer ambulance driver was often romanticized, during and after the war. They gave nicknames to their trusty "Tin Lizzies" including "Maude," "Old Number Nine," "Hunk-o-Tin," "Flivvers," and "Elsie." Writer and WWI veteran William Seabrook wrote that "the ambulance driver works over, under and upon it. He paints it and oils it and knows every bolt and nut, its every whim and fancy."

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