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ARTS & CULTURE

## Little-known museum tells story of Jews in the American military



National Museum of American Jewish Military History  
A display in the "Hall of Heroes" exhibit shows Jewish recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor.

By Tom Tugend

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LOS ANGELES, Aug. 24 (JTA) — On a quiet side street in northwest Washington, a world away from the millions of tourists who throng the Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial and U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, stands the modest, little-visited National Museum of American Jewish Military History.

"My whole goal is to bring people here, to have people talk about" U.S. Jews who served in the military, said Edwin Goldwasser, a retired Florida lawyer and Korean War veteran who recently was named president of the museum.

Along the walls and in display cases are eclectic collections of photos and artifacts illustrating the contributions of Jewish men and women to America's armed forces, from the Revolutionary War through the most recent wars fought by the United States.

There is a mess kit dating from 1880, a portable ark and altar carried by Jewish chaplains during World War II, a memorial to 18-year old Sanford Lester Kahn, who was killed during the 1944 Normandy Beach invasion, and a large photo blowup of three World War I vintage Jewish female marines, known as Marionettes, being inspected by a fearsome-looking female sergeant.

A section on Rescue and Renewal tells of the concentration camps and the GIs who liberated them — and of the young American Jewish sailors who manned the "illegal" immigrant boats to Palestine.

Archivist Thomas Wildenberg is a font of information.

"Did you know that there were 12 Jewish women in the first officers' graduating class of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in 1942?" he asked.

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"Did you know that Simon Suhler was decorated in the Indian wars and that four Jewish Union soldiers received the Medal of Honor during the Civil War?"

The museum was chartered by Congress in 1958 and is operated by the Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America, whose offices are in the same building.

The veterans organization was founded in 1896 as the Hebrew Union Veterans Association, partially to refute a widely circulated article by Mark Twain that labeled American Jews as unpatriotic and unwilling to fight in the country's wars.

After checking War Department figures showing that Jews served in a larger percentage than their share of the population, Twain issued a lengthy retraction and apology.

Goldwasser hopes to boost attendance by attracting some of the Jewish school and synagogue tours which now visit the U.S. Holocaust museum, while Wildenberg is preparing a new exhibit of aerial photographs taken by a Jewish Air Force man during World War II. *For information about the military history museum, log onto [www.nmajmh.org](http://www.nmajmh.org) or phone (202) 265-6280.*

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