

# Warfare History Network

## Keeping WWII History Alive

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This past spring, I had the honor of speaking (for the third time) at the Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table, a regular gathering at historic Ft. Snelling in St. Paul, Minnesota (they meet at 7:00 pm on the second Thursday of every month from September through May).

Run by Colonel (Ret.) Don Patton and former Army Special Forces Major Doug Bekke (who is also curator of the Minnesota Military Museum at Camp Ripley), the HRT is an impressive effort to keep alive the memory of the world's greatest conflict.

One of the oldest (if not the oldest) and largest (if not the largest) organizations of its type in the country, the Minnesota HRT continues to grow in monthly program attendance, now averaging close to 500, and even more on certain topics. The example originated in Minnesota has prompted the creation of similar groups around the United States.

The World War II History Round Table was conceived in early 1987 to perpetuate the knowledge of this time period; its first meeting was held in October of that year. The concept followed the long-established, successful and nationwide Civil War Round Tables. Dr. Deutsch, a renowned WWII scholar, asked Colonel Patton to serve as Executive Director and organize the Round Table. Dr. Deutsch agreed to develop lectures based on the World War II history courses that he taught at the University of Minnesota from the late 1940's until his retirement in 1972.

Generally speaking, the program begins with a speaker who presents the broad overview of a topic (in our case, the topic was the Battle of Anzio), who is then followed by a panel of veterans who had taken part in the action being featured. A question-and-answer period then follows.

Over the past 23 years, many prominent scholars, historians, and authors have spoken to the group, including Ivan Musicant, three-time recipient of the Samuel Eliot Morrison

Award for Naval History; Tom Buell, a fellow recipient of the award; former Minnesota governor and U.S. Navy veteran Harold Stassen; flying ace Ken Dahlberg; Iwo Jima flag-raiser Chuck Lindberg; Abe Baum (Task Force Baum), Gen. Jack Vessey (retired chairman, Joints Chiefs of Staff) ,Southern France invasion planner Maj. Gen. John Guthrie, authors Ken Heckler, Dennis Showalter, Ed Miller, Adrian Lewis, Harry Yeide, Rick Atkinson, and many others.

The organization also provides an extensive outreach program, with local speakers presenting talks to various civic organizations and clubs about Minnesota during World War II. A Speakers Bureau was also created to send veterans and historians into the schools to supplement classroom instruction. Another program supported schools by giving student assignments for projects to interview veterans about their WWII experiences. These educational programs have been an ongoing commitment of the HRT's board of directors.

In 1990, the HRT organized a major commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of World War II. This involved fund-raising through veterans' organizations in order to create an exhibit highlighting the contributions of Ft. Snelling and Minnesota during the war. The campaign was so successful that the "temporary" exhibit is now a permanent fixture at the Ft. Snelling Visitors Center that is viewed by over 75,000 school children and visitors annually.

Additionally, the HRT has also sponsored battlefield tours. In the past, these have included visits to Normandy, the Battle of the Bulge, and Italy.

Each time I have presented at the HRT, I come away invigorated and with a deep appreciation for the amount of time and effort that Patton, Bekke, and their devoted cadre of volunteers put into this important, enormous, and ongoing task.

With the number of World War II veterans diminishing at an ever-increasing rate, round tables such as this provide an important forum in which these brave men and women can pass on their stories to a rapt audience hungry to learn more.

If you'd like to learn more about the HRT, perhaps make a contribution (and maybe get a few tips on starting a similar venture in your area), visit their website: [www.mn-ww2roundtable.org](http://www.mn-ww2roundtable.org).

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Editor