

DATE: 16 August 2024

TO: Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board
RE: Application for Removal of an Existing Artwork

PART 1 – CONTACT INFORMATION

Organization: Minnesota Military & Veterans Museum
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PART 2 - SUBJECT

USS Ward Number Three Gun

This large gun, from a World War I-era Navy Destroyer, fired on and sank an enemy vessel in the very early morning of December 7, 1941. The crew was comprised of Naval Reservists from Minnesota. After the war, the United States Navy agreed to loan the gun to the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs with the assurance that the state properly maintain it (please see supplemental materials, Part 2/Items A & B). The gun was installed on the State Capitol grounds in 1958. The gun is owned by the United States Navy.

In 2023, the Minnesota State Legislature allocated funds to the Minnesota Department of Military Affairs for the construction of a new 40,000 square foot Military and Veterans Museum on 32-acres at Camp Ripley (Just north of Little Falls). The new facility, to open in 2026, will replace a very modest museum at Camp Ripley that has served veterans and their families for more than 40 years.

This new facility, dedicated to veterans of all service branches, will be a more appropriate location for this military artifact.

The Museum's current collection includes extensive archives of the USS Ward and artifacts from the Minnesota veterans who served on-board (Part 2/Item C).

The Museum's commitment to Naval history is further evidenced by the recent acquisition, with the assistance of Governor Walz, of the sail and rudder of the USS Minneapolis-St Paul. The SSN-708 was a Los Angeles-Class nuclear submarine decommissioned in 2008.

The Navy approved this request and the Museum promptly dispatched four semi-trailers to Bremerton, Washington to retrieve these immense artifacts (Part 2/Item D). Extensive restoration is underway with work to be completed in time for the 2026 grand opening.

PART 3 – REMOVAL CONCEPT

As the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs is currently identified on the Navy's loan agreement, the Museum shared plans for the removal, restoration and relocation of the Ward gun with MDVA and has secured the department's endorsement (Part 3/Item A). MDVA has requested that the Navy draft a new loan agreement inserting Museum in place of MDVA.

In addition, representatives of the Museum (Part 3/Item B) and the Minnesota Navy League (Part 3/Item C) traveled to Washington D.C. to brief the United States Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHHC) who is also in support of the plan.

The Museum has commissioned a local conservator to issue a report on the current condition of the gun (Page 1 of this report provided as Part 3/Item D).

The museum will remove, restore and relocate this artifact according to standards set by NHHHC and prominently display it indoors at the new camp Ripley Museum for better long-term conservation and year-round interpretation (Part 3/Item E). As the centerpiece of the WWII exhibit gallery, visitors will be immersed in the sights and sounds that these Minnesota sailors would have encountered on December 7, 1941.

After the move, the former location of the gun will be seeded with grass (Part 3/Item F).

PART 4 – CONDITIONS AND CRITERIA

Generally, the new Military and Veterans Museum at Camp Ripley will be a more appropriate location for the USS Ward gun as it is a military artifact owned by the United States Navy. It is important to note that the story of the USS Ward and crew is featured on the first panel of the WWII Memorial (dedicated in 2007) just north of the Veterans Service Building on the State Capitol grounds (Part 4/Item A).

Current Museum board member and former MDVA Commissioner Larry Herke was in support of this plan and, prior to his retirement, had briefed the Governor's Office.

Further, this proposed move might align with the recent Capitol Mall Design Framework to develop a process that will create a Capitol Mall that is *more welcoming for more Minnesotans*.

If approved, the removal could begin later this year.

PART 5 - FUNDING

In May 2024, The Legacy Committee of the Minnesota State Legislature provided \$275,000 "for a grant to the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum at Camp Ripley for the restoration, relocation, and interpretation of the USS Ward Number Three Gun and World War II display. Funding can also be used for site reclamation and improvements at the location of the removed work."

There was broad, bipartisan support for this bill with Representatives Lillie, Newton, and Schultz and others signed onto the bill in the House and Senators Mitchell, Hawj and Howe in the State Senate.

The Museum will cover any additional costs with private funds.