

# National Museum of the Civil War Soldier

Petersburg, Virginia

**Role:** Architect for New Museum

**Building Area:** 25,000 sf

**Description:** The National Museum of the Civil War Soldier in Petersburg Virginia was designed to celebrate the life and work of the ordinary soldier during the Civil War by coupling a distinctive building with compelling exhibits.

Set on a ridge, the museum's white brick exterior contrasts the surrounding woods. Rising high above the granite paved entrance plaza, and clearly visible to arriving visitors, is a distinctive dome and cupola. The dome is covered with monel, a light silvery alloy that reflects sunlight with a soft luster. Substantial but understated, the dome provides a beacon and a center to the building and caps the octagonal entrance lobby.

The soaring space inside the lobby is also softened, this time by natural finish maple paneling and wide floor-to-ceiling windows which frame the landscape and naturally wooded areas surrounding the building. The combination of natural materials with the dramatic domes and distant views creates a space that is at once light and airy, monumental and human-scaled.

The new museum is beautiful, but it is also functional, solving a number of difficult design challenges. The building must work as a museum exhibit space, as a memorial, and as a visitor center for the Pamplin Historical Park. It also has to serve practical functions: selling tickets, serving meals, offering gathering space for groups, selling gifts, and providing bathrooms. In addition, it is designed to be easily expanded. The resulting spaces are open and functional, elegant and inspiring, but also easy for visitor to use.

Once inside, the museum exhibits immerse the visitor in a series of stories that use images, sound, and light to describe how a typical soldier was challenged and transformed by the war. Visitors will find activities and programs that move them beyond the role of observers to that of participants. The signature experience is the Trial by Fire theater which immerses the visitor in the chaos, confusion, and fear of a Civil War battle-including commands shouted by officers, whizzing bullets, and artillery passing overhead.

The new museum unites dramatic and personal exhibits with an equally dramatic and yet human-scaled building, a combination that will truly help us remember the soldiers of the Civil War.



