THE WWII VANGUARD

MUSEUM OF LAHIJAN

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THE FIRST AND ONLY WW2 MUSEUM IN IRAN

THE WWII MUSEUM OF LAHIJAN

Founded in 2017 by Caren Omidi, the WWII Vanguard Museum of Lahijan is dedicated to preserving and presenting the history of the Second World War through historical artifacts, military uniforms, documents, and personal objects. Its collection brings together material from different countries and theatres of the war, offering visitors an opportunity to examine the conflict through the objects and equipment of the people who experienced it.

The museum covers several aspects of the war, from the European theatre to the experiences of the Allied and Axis armed forces. Its exhibits include military uniforms, equipment, historical memorabilia, and objects associated with the soldiers and civilians of the period.

Particular attention is given to Iran's role during the Second World War. Located in Lahijan, in the province of Gilan, the museum also explores a less familiar part of the conflict: the 1941 Allied invasion and subsequent occupation of Iran, as well as the country's importance to the Allied war effort through the Persian Corridor. Through its collections, the museum seeks to present this history and its connections to the wider events of the war.

THE ONLY WWII MUSEUM IN IRAN

Join us as we delve into the rich tapestry of Iran's involvement in WWII, from the Anglo-Soviet invasion of 1941 to the historic Tehran Conference of 1943. Against the backdrop of lush forests and fertile plains, Lahijan emerged as a pivotal hub of wartime activity, a fact often overshadowed by the broader narrative of the war.

Through meticulous curation and painstaking research, the WWII Vanguard Museum brings to life the untold stories and forgotten heroes of Iran's wartime experience. With each artifact and exhibit, we strive to illuminate the complex interplay of geopolitics, diplomacy, and human endeavor that defined this turbulent era.

As you embark on this immersive journey through history, we invite you to reflect on the enduring lessons of the past and the profound impact of global conflict on our shared humanity. Welcome to The WWII Vanguard Museum of Lahijan, where the echoes of the past resonate with the promise of a more informed future.

ROOMS OF THE MUSEUM

Axis Room

Western Allied Room

Gun Room

The Soviet Room

Iran Room

Library

Cinema Room

Office

THE BUILDING AND MEMORIALS

The US Army Checkpoint

The Allied Checkpoint features a Willys M38 jeep, representing American military aid provided to Iran in the years following World War II. It also displays signs of the U.S. Army Persian Gulf Command and the British Army's Persia and Iraq Force, commemorating the Allied presence in Iran during the war.

The WW2 Memorial

The World War II Memorial honors American Army personnel who lost their lives during four major campaigns of the war: Sicily, Normandy, the Netherlands, and Belgium. It commemorates their sacrifice and the role of American soldiers in the liberation of occupied Europe.

The US Army
Persian Gulf Command Memorial

The Dick Winters Airborne Memorial

The Wojtek Memorial

The museum features three additional memorials: the U.S. Army Persian Gulf Command Memorial, commemorating the Persian Corridor and its vital role in delivering Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union; the Wojtek Memorial, honoring the famous bear adopted by Polish soldiers in Iran who served with the Polish Army during World War II, including the Battle of Monte Cassino; and the Major Dick Winters Memorial, dedicated to the American officer widely known through the historical television series Band of Brothers. The memorial serves an educational purpose, introducing visitors to Winters and the real historical events and soldiers behind the series.

THE AXIS ROOM

The Axis Room at our museum offers a comprehensive exploration into the history of Nazi Germany and its pivotal role in World War II. Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany during the 1930s marked a significant turning point in global history. Fueled by economic turmoil, political instability, and widespread discontent, Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazi Party, capitalized on these conditions, promising to restore Germany's former glory and pursue an aggressive expansionist agenda. This period of escalating tensions culminated in Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939, triggering the outbreak of World War II and plunging Europe into a devastating conflict.

From 1939 to 1941, Germany engaged in a series of notable battles and campaigns across Europe, showcasing its Blitzkrieg tactics and military prowess. The invasion of France in 1940, resulting in the fall of Paris and the establishment of the Vichy regime, underscored Germany's rapid advances. Meanwhile, the Battle of Britain saw intense aerial combat as Germany sought to subdue the Royal Air Force and pave the way for a cross-channel invasion. In Eastern Europe, Operation Barbarossa, Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, marked a significant turning point in the war. Despite initial successes, the campaign faced challenges in the harsh conditions of the Eastern Front, shaping the course of the conflict.

Our Axis Room presents a comprehensive overview of these pivotal events, offering insight into the motivations, strategies, and consequences of Germany's actions during this tumultuous period. Through a diverse array of artifacts, documents, and multimedia exhibits, visitors gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of World War II and the enduring legacy of the Axis powers.

On display are WWII-era German and Italian uniforms meticulously framed to showcase their intricate details, alongside photos and newspapers documenting Nazi officials and their war crimes. Visitors can explore a timeline of events leading up to World War II, as well as the battles and campaigns of 1939 to 1941, through a curated collection of documents and newspapers. Additionally, footage of wartime Europe is presented on television screens, accompanied by informative explanations for visitors. The exhibit also features figures from Rommel's Afrika Korps, including tanks, half-tracks, and vehicles from the North African campaign, providing a tangible connection to the realities of war for soldiers and civilians alike.

THE AXIS ROOM

Authentic WWII-era German and Italian uniforms are meticulously displayed in frames, allowing visitors to appreciate the intricate details of each uniform.

The exhibit features detailed replicas of figures from Rommel's Afrika Korps, showcasing tanks, half-tracks, and vehicles utilized during the North African campaign of World War II. Additionally, visitors can explore a collection of authentic documents, ID cards, books, and papers from German soldiers and citizens, providing insights into life during the Nazi era.

The display includes an array of German helmets, equipment, and militaria from the Axis powers, offering visitors a close look at the tools and gear used by German forces during World War II.

Room of The Western Allies

The Western Allies Room provides a comprehensive overview of the vital role played by the Allied forces in the Western Front during World War II. This theater of conflict involved nations such as the US, Great Britain, Commonwealth nations, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, and Germany. The room also focuses on the Italian campaign and the Mediterranean theater of WWII.

Visitors will gain insight into the turning point of the war, witnessing Allied victories in North Africa and Sicily in 1943, and pivotal events like the Battle of Normandy in June 1944. This campaign, also known as D-Day, marked the largest seaborne invasion in history and led to the liberation of Western Europe from Nazi occupation. Explore the meticulously recreated battlefield maps, personal accounts, and multimedia presentations that bring this historic event to life.

Additionally, the room showcases various other battles and Operations, including Market Garden in the Netherlands and the Battle of the Bulge. Market Garden, an ambitious airborne operation, aimed to secure key bridges and pave the way for an Allied advance into Germany. The Battle of the Bulge, a surprise German offensive in the Ardennes forest, tested the resilience of Allied forces during the harsh winter of 1944-45.

Immerse yourself in history as you explore authentic artifacts, such as American, British, and French uniforms, helmets, military equipment, and personal items used by soldiers during the war. From the rugged terrain of North Africa to the beaches of Normandy and the snowy forests of the Ardennes, each exhibit offers a glimpse into the courage and sacrifice of those who fought for freedom. Don't miss the opportunity to experience firsthand the bravery and determination that defined the Allied effort in the struggle against tyranny.

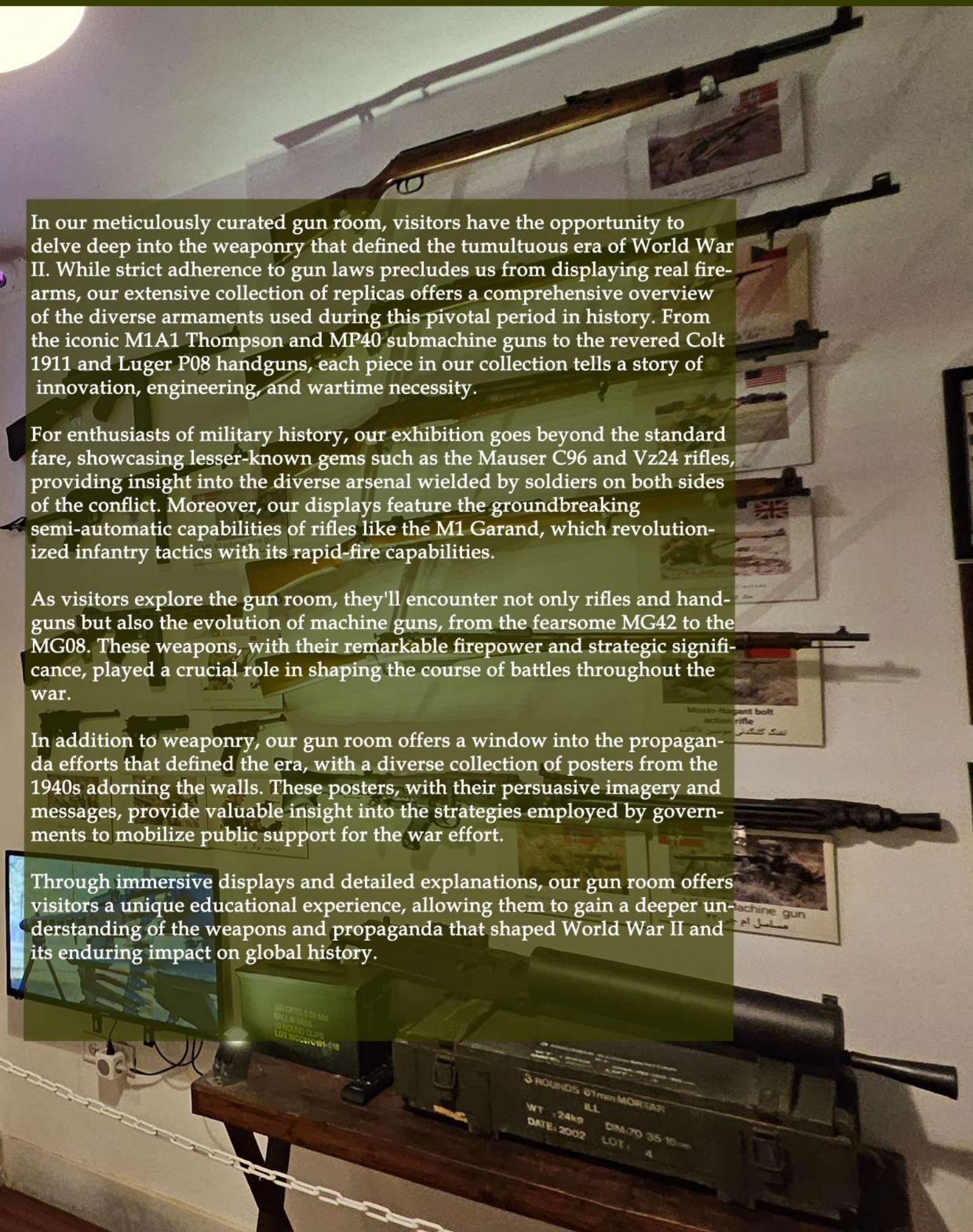
THE WESTERN ALLIES ROOM

The Western Allies Room showcases American and British uniforms worn from 1940 to 1945, offering a glimpse into the wartime attire of soldiers. From the olive drab uniforms of American G.I.s to the khaki battledress of British servicemen, each garment reflects the bravery and resilience of those who fought in World War II.

The Room of the Western Allies, including the main exhibition room and the adjoining hallway, displays a collection of American, British, and French World War II uniforms, with a particular focus on the U.S. Army, Airborne forces, Army Air Forces, Navy, and Marine Corps.

The exhibit showcases original items used by soldiers during World War II, offering visitors a firsthand glimpse into the equipment and artifacts utilized during the conflict. Additionally, a diverse array of uniforms worn by American, British, Commonwealth, French, and Dutch soldiers during WWII are meticulously displayed, accompanied by comprehensive information detailing the significance of each item.

THE GUN ROOM



In our meticulously curated gun room, visitors have the opportunity to delve deep into the weaponry that defined the tumultuous era of World War II. While strict adherence to gun laws precludes us from displaying real firearms, our extensive collection of replicas offers a comprehensive overview of the diverse armaments used during this pivotal period in history. From the iconic M1A1 Thompson and MP40 submachine guns to the revered Colt 1911 and Luger P08 handguns, each piece in our collection tells a story of innovation, engineering, and wartime necessity.

For enthusiasts of military history, our exhibition goes beyond the standard fare, showcasing lesser-known gems such as the Mauser C96 and Vz24 rifles, providing insight into the diverse arsenal wielded by soldiers on both sides of the conflict. Moreover, our displays feature the groundbreaking semi-automatic capabilities of rifles like the M1 Garand, which revolutionized infantry tactics with its rapid-fire capabilities.

As visitors explore the gun room, they'll encounter not only rifles and handguns but also the evolution of machine guns, from the fearsome MG42 to the MG08. These weapons, with their remarkable firepower and strategic significance, played a crucial role in shaping the course of battles throughout the war.

In addition to weaponry, our gun room offers a window into the propaganda efforts that defined the era, with a diverse collection of posters from the 1940s adorning the walls. These posters, with their persuasive imagery and messages, provide valuable insight into the strategies employed by governments to mobilize public support for the war effort.

Through immersive displays and detailed explanations, our gun room offers visitors a unique educational experience, allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of the weapons and propaganda that shaped World War II and its enduring impact on global history.

THE GUN ROOM

Discover iconic World War II firearms like the M1A1 Thompson and Colt 1911 in our museum's replica collection. Explore the evolution of machine guns with replicas of the MG42 and MG08, alongside 1940s propaganda posters.

From the innovative M1 Garand to lesser-known gems like the Vz-24 , our museum showcases a diverse array of WWII rifles and handguns. Gain insight into the weapons that shaped history and explore their enduring impact.

THE SOVIET ROOM

The Soviet Room is one of the key exhibits at the WWII Vanguard Museum, dedicated to exploring the significant role of the Soviet Union during World War II, particularly on the Eastern Front. This carefully curated exhibit invites visitors to delve into the challenges and sacrifices faced by Soviet forces during one of the most critical theaters of the war.

The exhibit features authentic Soviet military uniforms, equipment, and other wartime artifacts that reflect the resilience of the soldiers who endured the harsh realities of battle. These items provide a tangible link to the experiences of those who fought, highlighting the immense efforts required to resist and ultimately push back the Axis forces.

The Soviet Room also examines major battles and campaigns, including the pivotal Battle of Stalingrad and the Siege of Leningrad. Through detailed information panels, visual aids, and multimedia displays, the exhibit offers a comprehensive look at the strategic, social, and human dimensions of the Soviet war effort.

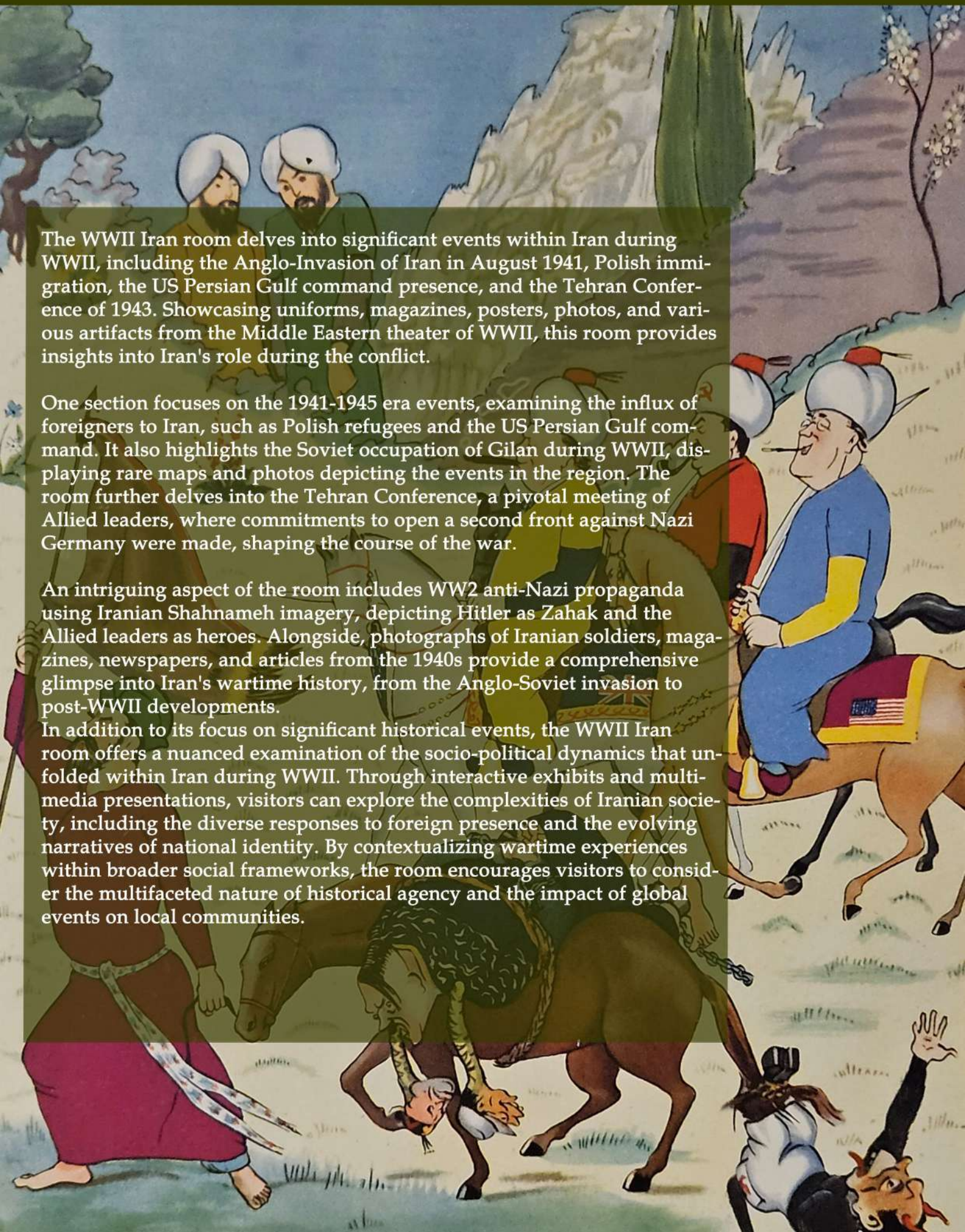
By focusing on this critical aspect of World War II, the Soviet Room enriches visitors' understanding of the broader conflict while honoring the enduring legacy of those who participated in these historic events.

THE SOVIET ROOM

The Eastern Front Room at the World War II Vanguard Museum features a range of World War II and Cold War-era Soviet and East German uniforms, as well as helmets, medals, books, and ID cards, offering a glimpse into the attire and personal belongings of soldiers from this pivotal period. The room focuses on two historical periods: the Eastern Front during World War II and the postwar era and Cold War, particularly the political and military developments that brought much of Eastern Europe under Soviet influence after 1945. It also explores the changing military uniforms, equipment, and personal items of the Soviet and East German armed forces throughout these decades.

The room also showcases a collection of photographs depicting Soviet commanders and battles from 1941 to 1945, providing visual insights into the key figures and events of the Eastern Front. Additionally, visitors can view statues of Lenin and Stalin, emblematic figures of the Soviet era, further immersing themselves in the historical context of the period.

THE IRAN ROOM



The WWII Iran room delves into significant events within Iran during WWII, including the Anglo-Invasion of Iran in August 1941, Polish immigration, the US Persian Gulf command presence, and the Tehran Conference of 1943. Showcasing uniforms, magazines, posters, photos, and various artifacts from the Middle Eastern theater of WWII, this room provides insights into Iran's role during the conflict.

One section focuses on the 1941-1945 era events, examining the influx of foreigners to Iran, such as Polish refugees and the US Persian Gulf command. It also highlights the Soviet occupation of Gilan during WWII, displaying rare maps and photos depicting the events in the region. The room further delves into the Tehran Conference, a pivotal meeting of Allied leaders, where commitments to open a second front against Nazi Germany were made, shaping the course of the war.

An intriguing aspect of the room includes WW2 anti-Nazi propaganda using Iranian Shahnameh imagery, depicting Hitler as Zahak and the Allied leaders as heroes. Alongside, photographs of Iranian soldiers, magazines, newspapers, and articles from the 1940s provide a comprehensive glimpse into Iran's wartime history, from the Anglo-Soviet invasion to post-WWII developments.
In addition to its focus on significant historical events, the WWII Iran room offers a nuanced examination of the socio-political dynamics that unfolded within Iran during WWII. Through interactive exhibits and multimedia presentations, visitors can explore the complexities of Iranian society, including the diverse responses to foreign presence and the evolving narratives of national identity. By contextualizing wartime experiences within broader social frameworks, the room encourages visitors to consider the multifaceted nature of historical agency and the impact of global events on local communities.

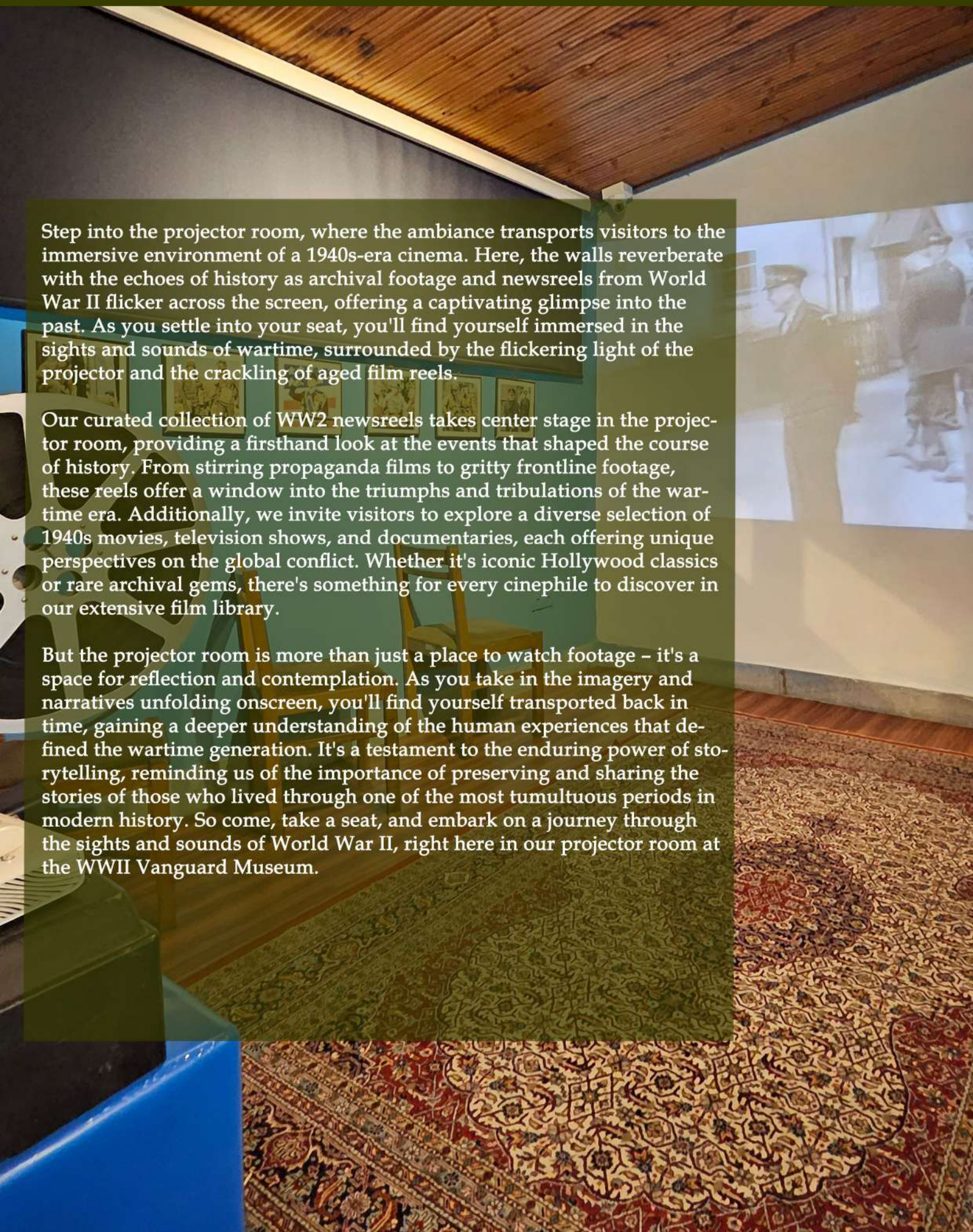
THE IRAN ROOM

In the Iranian room, visitors can explore a diverse array of artifacts, including uniforms, magazines, posters, photos, and items from the Middle Eastern theater of WWII.

The room features a notable section on the 1941-1945 era, focusing on the foreign presence in Iran. Highlights include the immigration of Polish refugees in 1942, the US Army's Persian Gulf command, and the Soviet occupation of Gilan during WW2, showcasing rare maps and photos.

The Tehran Conference in the Iranian room marks a crucial WWII event, where Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill met from November 28 to December 1, 1943, after the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran. This pivotal conference, held at the Soviet Union's embassy in Tehran, led to the commitment to open a second front against Nazi Germany, including an invasion of France.

THE PROJECTOR ROOM



Step into the projector room, where the ambiance transports visitors to the immersive environment of a 1940s-era cinema. Here, the walls reverberate with the echoes of history as archival footage and newsreels from World War II flicker across the screen, offering a captivating glimpse into the past. As you settle into your seat, you'll find yourself immersed in the sights and sounds of wartime, surrounded by the flickering light of the projector and the crackling of aged film reels.

Our curated collection of WW2 newsreels takes center stage in the projector room, providing a firsthand look at the events that shaped the course of history. From stirring propaganda films to gritty frontline footage, these reels offer a window into the triumphs and tribulations of the wartime era. Additionally, we invite visitors to explore a diverse selection of 1940s movies, television shows, and documentaries, each offering unique perspectives on the global conflict. Whether it's iconic Hollywood classics or rare archival gems, there's something for every cinephile to discover in our extensive film library.

But the projector room is more than just a place to watch footage – it's a space for reflection and contemplation. As you take in the imagery and narratives unfolding onscreen, you'll find yourself transported back in time, gaining a deeper understanding of the human experiences that defined the wartime generation. It's a testament to the enduring power of storytelling, reminding us of the importance of preserving and sharing the stories of those who lived through one of the most tumultuous periods in modern history. So come, take a seat, and embark on a journey through the sights and sounds of World War II, right here in our projector room at the WWII Vanguard Museum.

THE PROJECTOR ROOM

Step into our projector room, where the ambiance transports visitors to the immersive environment of a 1940s-era cinema. Here, archival footage and newsreels from World War II flicker across the screen, offering a captivating glimpse into the past. As you settle into your seat, surrounded by the flickering light of the projector and the crackling of aged film reels, prepare to be transported back in time.

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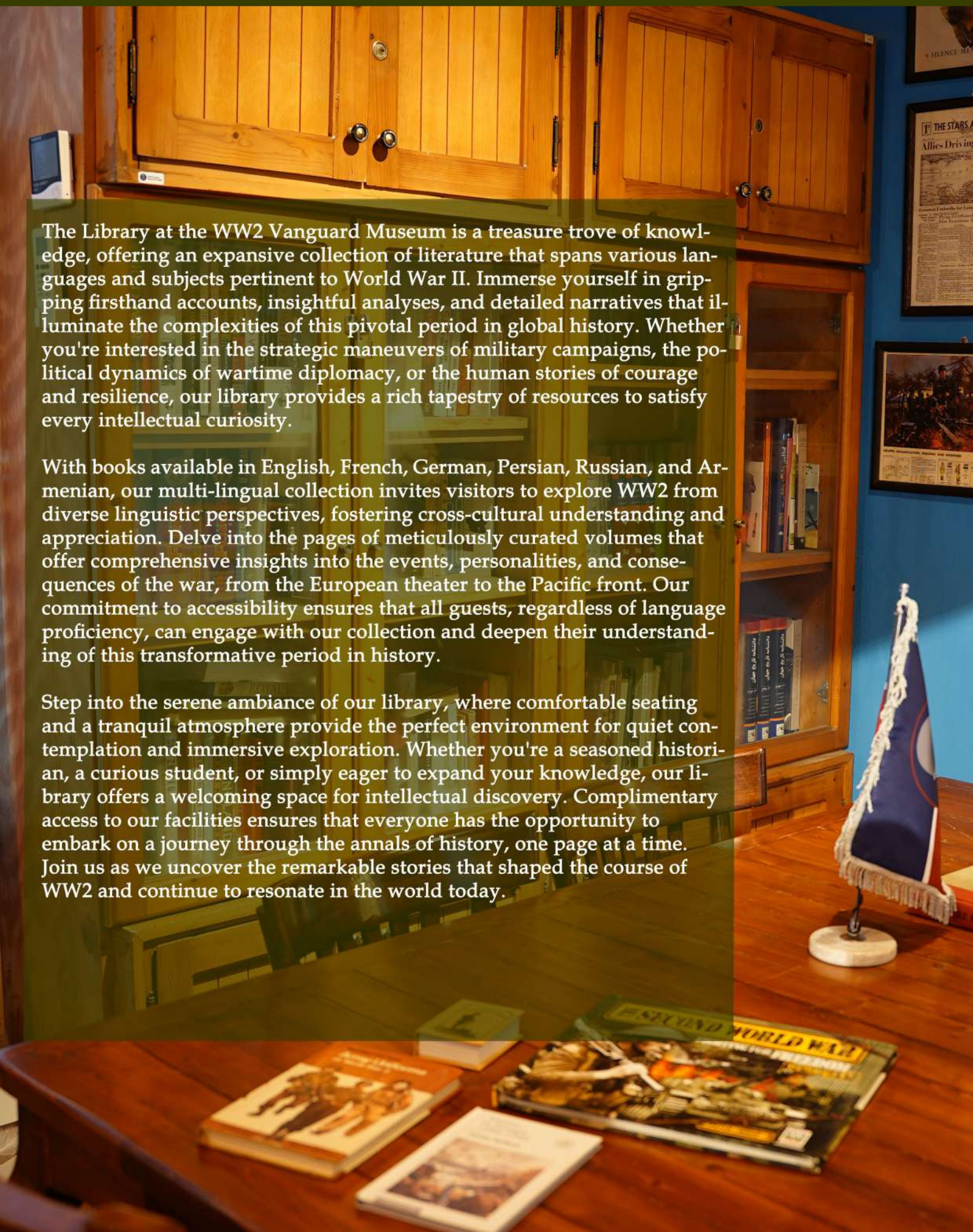
THE LIBRARY



The Library at the WW2 Vanguard Museum is a treasure trove of knowledge, offering an expansive collection of literature that spans various languages and subjects pertinent to World War II. Immerse yourself in gripping firsthand accounts, insightful analyses, and detailed narratives that illuminate the complexities of this pivotal period in global history. Whether you're interested in the strategic maneuvers of military campaigns, the political dynamics of wartime diplomacy, or the human stories of courage and resilience, our library provides a rich tapestry of resources to satisfy every intellectual curiosity.

With books available in English, French, German, Persian, Russian, and Armenian, our multi-lingual collection invites visitors to explore WW2 from diverse linguistic perspectives, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. Delve into the pages of meticulously curated volumes that offer comprehensive insights into the events, personalities, and consequences of the war, from the European theater to the Pacific front. Our commitment to accessibility ensures that all guests, regardless of language proficiency, can engage with our collection and deepen their understanding of this transformative period in history.

Step into the serene ambiance of our library, where comfortable seating and a tranquil atmosphere provide the perfect environment for quiet contemplation and immersive exploration. Whether you're a seasoned historian, a curious student, or simply eager to expand your knowledge, our library offers a welcoming space for intellectual discovery. Complimentary access to our facilities ensures that everyone has the opportunity to embark on a journey through the annals of history, one page at a time. Join us as we uncover the remarkable stories that shaped the course of WW2 and continue to resonate in the world today.

THE LIBRARY

Explore the vast knowledge housed within the Library at the WW2 Vanguard Museum, where an extensive collection of literature awaits your discovery. From gripping firsthand accounts to insightful analyses, immerse yourself in the complexities of World War II through a diverse array of books spanning multiple languages and subjects.

Dive into a world of intellectual exploration at our multi-lingual library, where books in English, French, German, Persian,and Russian, offer a unique perspective on the events and consequences of WW2. Whether you're interested in military strategies, political dynamics, or human stories of courage, our curated collection provides a rich tapestry of resources for scholars and enthusiasts alike.

THE OFFICE

Our office is more than just a workspace—it's a place that tells a story. Every corner of this room invites conversations, showcasing a tapestry of photos from our trips, mementos of history, and the thoughtful gifts we've received along the way.

The walls are adorned with images that capture the essence of our museum's mission—preserving the memories of WWII and sharing them with the world. From snapshots of diplomatic visits to moments shared with veterans and students, the office serves as a visual journey through time and purpose.

On display are unique gifts and tokens of appreciation, each with its own story, generously given by visitors, friends, and collaborators from across the globe. These items symbolize the connections we've built and the shared passion for history that unites us all.

This room is not just an office—it's a hub of inspiration, where ideas are exchanged, and memories are cherished. Whether it's a quiet moment of reflection or a lively discussion about our next exhibit, the office stands as a testament to the museum's evolving legacy.

THE OFFICE

Our museum office is more than a workspace—it's a room alive with stories and connections. Photos from our travels and historical projects line the walls, each capturing moments that define our mission to preserve and share WWII history. Visitors are often drawn to these images, which reflect not only our dedication to this era but also the bonds we've formed with historians, veterans, and enthusiasts around the world.

The room also holds a selection of gifts and memorabilia, sent to us by visitors and collaborators from diverse backgrounds. Among these treasures are unique Catholic items, including medals and framed images, which reflect the role of faith in wartime history. These pieces sit harmoniously among the other memorabilia, adding another layer of depth to the stories this room tells, while honoring the personal and spiritual dimensions of those who lived through WWII.

THE HALLWAYS

Step into the corridors of the second and first floors, where the walls come alive with the vibrant tapestry of political history from the era of World War II. Here, our meticulously curated exhibits offer visitors a multifaceted exploration of the key players, pivotal events, and evolving media landscape that defined this tumultuous period in global history. As you stroll along these corridors, you'll encounter insights into the personalities and ideologies that shaped the course of the war, from the towering figures of Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin to lesser-known leaders whose contributions were no less significant.

Our displays go beyond mere surface-level presentations, delving deep into the intricate web of geopolitical alliances, diplomatic maneuvers, and propaganda campaigns that unfolded on the world stage during World War II. Through a diverse array of artifacts, archival documents, and multimedia presentations, we offer visitors a comprehensive understanding of how media—both traditional and emerging—played a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, mobilizing support for the war effort, and disseminating information in an era of unprecedented global conflict.

Moreover, our exhibits extend beyond the confines of World War II itself, providing valuable insights into the broader historical context that set the stage for the conflict. By examining media representations of pre-war years and drawing parallels with previous conflicts such as World War I, visitors gain a deeper appreciation for the complex interplay of factors that led to the outbreak of World War II. Whether you're a seasoned historian, a student of political science, or simply a curious observer of history, our 2nd and first-floor hallways offer a rich tapestry of knowledge and reflection, inviting you to embark on a journey of discovery through the corridors of political history.

THE HALLWAYS

The hallways of the WWII Vanguard Museum are a striking visual journey, dedicated to the leaders and pivotal figures who shaped the course of the war. Lining the walls are framed photographs of WWII generals, heads of state, and other influential figures, each one accompanied by concise captions detailing their role in the conflict. These portraits serve not only as a tribute but also as a learning experience, inviting visitors to reflect on the strategic decisions and human stories behind the war's events.

In addition to the portraits, the hallways boast a selection of wartime magazines and propaganda posters that vividly capture the spirit of the 1940s. These carefully curated items immerse visitors in the atmosphere of the era, shedding light on how media and messaging played critical roles during WWII. Walking through these hallways, one feels the gravity of history and the profound impact of those who lived and led through it.

MUSEUM ARTIFACTS

German uniforms WW2

Helmets and headwears of WW2

Unifroms and displays of WW2 soldiers

Rare Iranian artifacts from WW2

German ID cards and papers from the Nazi era

Rommel's Afrika Korps figures 1941-1943

Magazines, Newspapers and articles from the 1940s

Showcases and displays of WW2 items

MUSEUM ARTIFACTS

Featuring the American M41 field jacket with M37 wool shirt and trousers, widely used throughout World War II, alongside the late-war M43 uniform and cold-weather garments, including the Melton overcoat and Mackinaw coat worn during the Battle of the Bulge.

An M1942 reinforced uniform alongside the M41 field jacket, wool shirt, and trousers, representing the standard field clothing worn by American infantrymen during World War II, and M1942 unreinforced paratrooper uniform, representing the distinctive equipment worn by soldiers of the 82nd Airborne Division during the campaigns in Sicily, Salerno, and Anzio.

Featuring an American L-1 flying suit, a U.S. Navy sailor's uniform, an American Army lieutenant's khaki uniform, and an HBT (Herringbone Twill) utility uniform, showcasing the variety of clothing worn across different branches of the U.S. military.

MUSEUM ARTIFACTS

French artillery cap WW2

M1 American helmet found in Bastogne

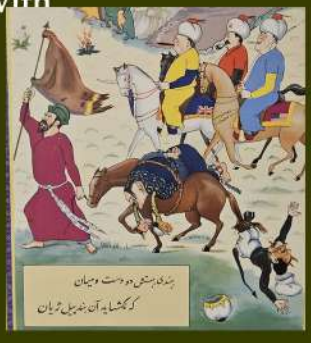
German Stahlhelm WW2

US Persian Gulf Command symbol

US Army Sergeant in The Persia Gulf Command in Iran WW2 with an A-class coat.

A Persian Gulf Command shoulder patch—handmade by a local Iranian during World War II.

The Persian Gulf Command of the US cup with a map of Iran



The Iranian Shahnameh used as WW2 anti-Nazi propaganda

A picture of two Iranian soldiers in the 1930s

World War II–era Iranian gas mask

EVENTS AND VISITORS

Ambassador of Italy visits the WWII Vanguard Museum of Lahijan – July 2023

Inauguration of the Kakas Memorial, the Hungarian Memorial in Lahijan – March 2024

Since its inauguration in 2021, the museum has hosted over 1,000 local students

84th Anniversary of Lahijan in World War II, with City Officials and a Survivor – August 2025

76th Anniversary of Operation Husky in Sicily – 2019

80th, 81st and 82nd Anniversary of D-Day in Sainte-Mère-Église, Normandy

80th Anniversary of Operation Market Garden in the Netherlands –September 2024

Meeting WWII veterans and honoring them on D-Day 80th and the 78th Anniversary of Operation Market Garden

Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran

Operation Countenance, the Allied invasion of Iran during World War II, was conducted from August 25 to August 31, 1941. The operation aimed to secure Iranian oil fields and establish the Persian Corridor—a critical supply route for delivering aid to the Soviet Union fighting on the Eastern Front. The Iranian military, outmatched by the superior numbers and technology of the Allied forces, offered limited resistance. The campaign saw coordinated advances from British forces in Iraq and Soviet forces from the Azerbaijan and Turkmen SSRs. By August 30, a ceasefire was negotiated, and Iran formally surrendered on August 31.

The invasion was driven by three key motives:

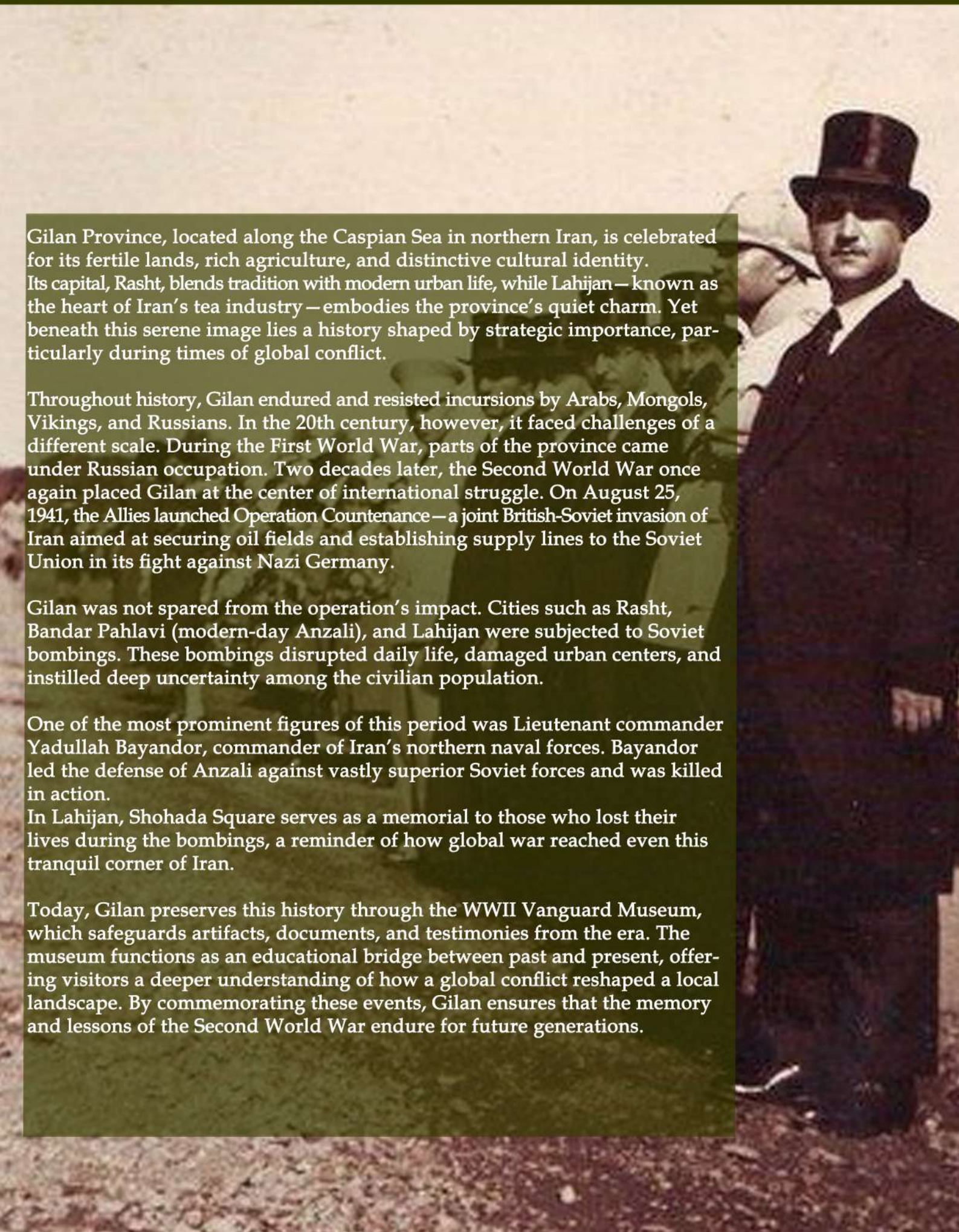
1. Geopolitical Ties with Germany: In the 1930s, Iran's growing trade and ideological connections with Nazi Germany raised concerns among the Allies. They feared Germany's influence could undermine their war efforts in the region.

2. Control of Oil Resources: Iran's vast oil reserves were critical to the Allied war machine. Securing these resources ensured they would not fall into Axis hands.

3. The Persian Corridor: Establishing a reliable supply line through Iran was vital for transporting weapons, food, and other materials to the Soviet Union under the Lend-Lease program.

The invasion marked a turning point for Iran, leading to years of occupation and reshaping its domestic and international standing. The occupation significantly impacted Iran’s political landscape and economic trajectory, while highlighting its strategic importance during the global conflict. This chapter of history underscores the complexities of Iran's wartime role and its enduring influence on regional geopolitics.

Gilan and Lahijan during WW2



Gilan Province, located along the Caspian Sea in northern Iran, is celebrated for its fertile lands, rich agriculture, and distinctive cultural identity.
Its capital, Rasht, blends tradition with modern urban life, while Lahijan—known as the heart of Iran's tea industry—embodies the province's quiet charm. Yet beneath this serene image lies a history shaped by strategic importance, particularly during times of global conflict.

Throughout history, Gilan endured and resisted incursions by Arabs, Mongols, Vikings, and Russians. In the 20th century, however, it faced challenges of a different scale. During the First World War, parts of the province came under Russian occupation. Two decades later, the Second World War once again placed Gilan at the center of international struggle. On August 25, 1941, the Allies launched Operation Countenance—a joint British-Soviet invasion of Iran aimed at securing oil fields and establishing supply lines to the Soviet Union in its fight against Nazi Germany.

Gilan was not spared from the operation's impact. Cities such as Rasht, Bandar Pahlavi (modern-day Anzali), and Lahijan were subjected to Soviet bombings. These bombings disrupted daily life, damaged urban centers, and instilled deep uncertainty among the civilian population.

One of the most prominent figures of this period was Lieutenant commander Yadullah Bayandor, commander of Iran's northern naval forces. Bayandor led the defense of Anzali against vastly superior Soviet forces and was killed in action.
In Lahijan, Shohada Square serves as a memorial to those who lost their lives during the bombings, a reminder of how global war reached even this tranquil corner of Iran.

Today, Gilan preserves this history through the WWII Vanguard Museum, which safeguards artifacts, documents, and testimonies from the era. The museum functions as an educational bridge between past and present, offering visitors a deeper understanding of how a global conflict reshaped a local landscape. By commemorating these events, Gilan ensures that the memory and lessons of the Second World War endure for future generations.

Poles in Persia

During World War II, the Polish people endured immense hardship as their nation faced simultaneous invasions by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Despite the loss of their homeland, the Polish spirit of resistance persisted, contributing significantly to the Allied war effort across Europe and North Africa.

Exodus and Resilience

Following the German invasion in 1939, thousands of Polish military personnel and civilians fled through neighboring countries like Romania, Hungary, and Yugoslavia. Many regrouped in France, and after its fall, in Great Britain, forming the Free Polish Forces under the leadership of General Władysław Sikorski. These forces later distinguished themselves in pivotal battles such as Monte Cassino in Italy.

Soviet Oppression and Loss

Under Soviet occupation, Polish officers and elites suffered devastating losses, including the 1940 Katyn Massacre, where thousands were executed by the NKVD. This was followed by mass deportations of Polish citizens to Siberian labor camps, where countless lives were lost to harsh conditions and systemic brutality.

A New Front with Anders' Army

The German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 prompted a temporary alliance between the Polish government-in-exile and the USSR. The Sikorski-Mayski Agreement enabled the formation of the Polish II Corps, or Anders' Army, composed of released Polish prisoners and exiles. Evacuated to Iran in 1942, they trained and regrouped before joining Allied campaigns in Italy.

Legacy in Iran

The Polish diaspora left a lasting legacy in Iran, where Polish soldiers, refugees, and civilians found temporary sanctuary. Cemeteries across Iran, such as those in Anzali, Tehran and Isfahan, stand as solemn reminders of this chapter, honoring the resilience and sacrifices of those who endured exile to fight for freedom.

This story of perseverance and unity amidst adversity illustrates the enduring strength of the Polish people during one of history's darkest times.

Wojtek The Iranian soldier bear

During the chaos of World War II, amidst the turmoil and tragedy, there emerged an extraordinary tale of camaraderie and companionship. Enter Wojtek the Bear, a Syrian brown bear whose remarkable journey intertwined with that of the Polish army, leaving an indelible mark on history. Wojtek's story began in the spring of 1942, when Polish soldiers, journeying from the Soviet Union to Iran, encountered a young Iranian boy clutching a bear cub. Moved by the cub's plight, the soldiers traded provisions for the bear, marking the beginning of Wojtek's extraordinary odyssey.

As Wojtek grew under the care of his newfound comrades, his presence became a source of joy and morale for the Polish troops. Named Wojtek, meaning "Happy Warrior," the bear quickly endeared himself to the soldiers with his playful antics and endearing personality. Under the tutelage of his caretaker, Peter Prendys, Wojtek learned to salute, wave, and march alongside his human companions, earning him the honorary rank of corporal within the Polish army.

But Wojtek's contributions extended beyond mere amusement; during the Battle of Monte Cassino in May 1944, he reportedly carried artillery shells and ammo crates, mirroring the actions of his fellow soldiers. His bravery and dedication were commemorated with a change in the company's insignia to depict a bear carrying an artillery shell. Despite his imposing stature, Wojtek's gentle nature endeared him to all who knew him, his playful demeanor a welcome respite amidst the horrors of war.

Following the war's end, Wojtek and his comrades faced the dilemma of his resettlement. Concerned for his well-being and wary of political exploitation, they opted to send him to the Edinburgh Zoo in 1947. There, Wojtek continued to captivate visitors with his charm, enjoying his daily regimen of beer, candy, and cigarettes, reminiscent of his days with the soldiers. His legacy lives on in the hearts of those who knew him, immortalized in film, literature, and statues erected in his honor across Poland and Scotland. Wojtek's story serves as a poignant reminder of the bonds forged amidst adversity and the enduring spirit of friendship that transcends species.

The Persian Gulf Command

The Persian Gulf Command was crucial in World War II for its role in managing the flow of U.S. Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union via the "Persian Corridor." Established formally in December 1943, its origins trace back to the U.S. Military Iranian Mission in September 1941, led by Colonel Raymond A. Wheeler of the Army Corps of Engineers.

Challenges and Achievements

Operating in a challenging Iranian environment already under British and Soviet occupation, the command dealt with extreme heat, sandstorms, and difficult terrain. Despite these obstacles, it facilitated the transfer of critical supplies to the Soviet Union. Between 1942 and 1945, the U.S. sent 192,000 trucks, thousands of aircraft, tanks, weapons, and large quantities of fuel and ammunition through this corridor. These supplies were vital to Soviet success on the Eastern Front.

Security and Strategic Events

Beyond logistics, the Persian Gulf Command ensured security for major events like the Tehran Conference in 1943. This historic meeting brought together Allied leaders Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin, underlining the collaborative spirit of the Allies.

Symbolism and Legacy

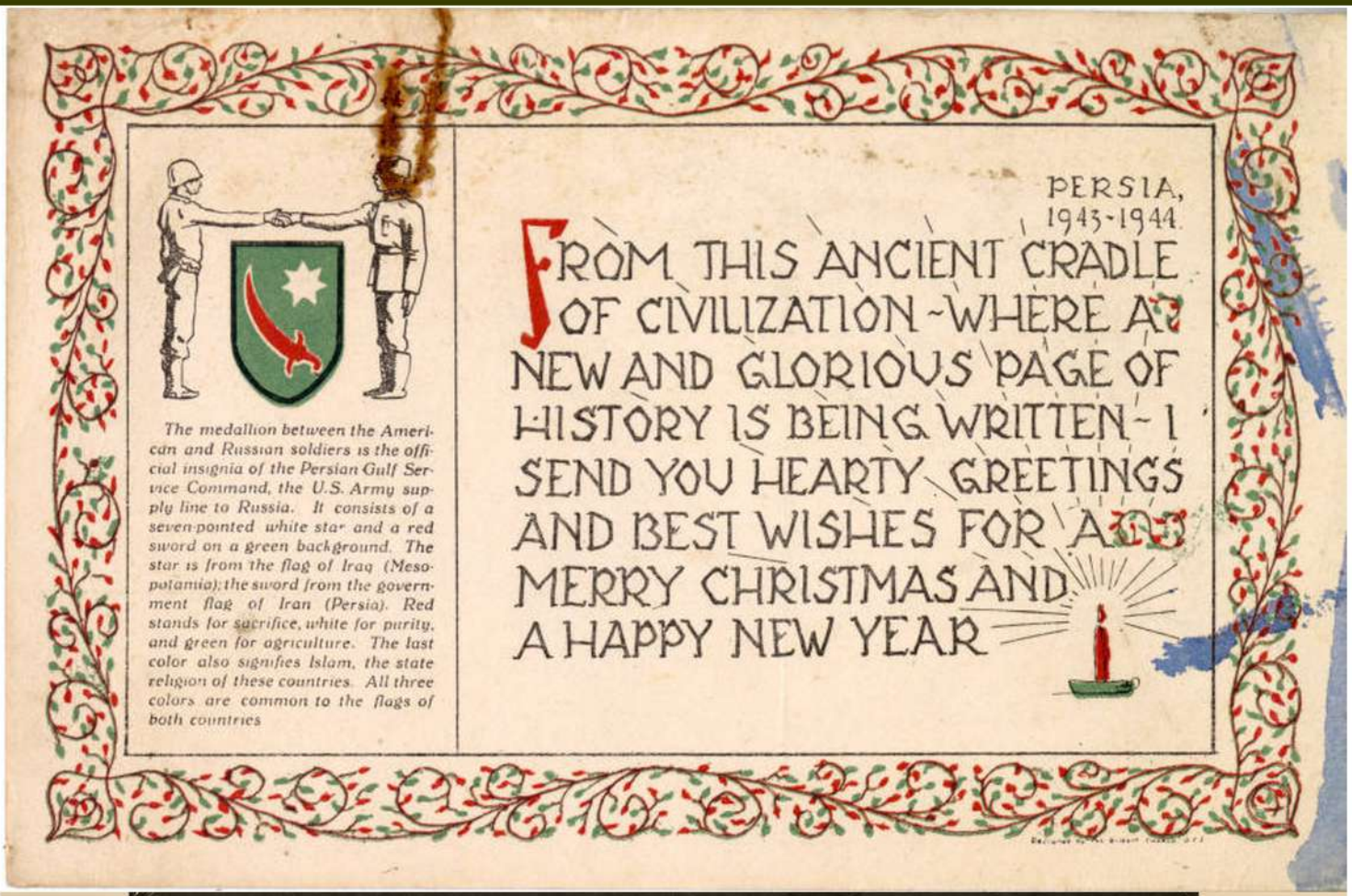
The command's insignia—a green shield with a white star and a red scimitar—reflected its mission and regional significance. Its efforts not only supported the war effort but also symbolized international cooperation during a critical time in history. The Persian Gulf Command's work significantly influenced the eventual defeat of the Axis powers, showcasing the importance of logistical and collaborative strength in modern warfare.

The Persian Gulf Command

Brig Gen S L Scott, Archbishop [Francis J.] Spellman, Maj Gen D H Connolly, Col E F Brown. (Second Row) Col T M Osborne, Col Roy C L Graham, Col Paul F Yount, Col A C Purvis, Maj B K Wyatt.

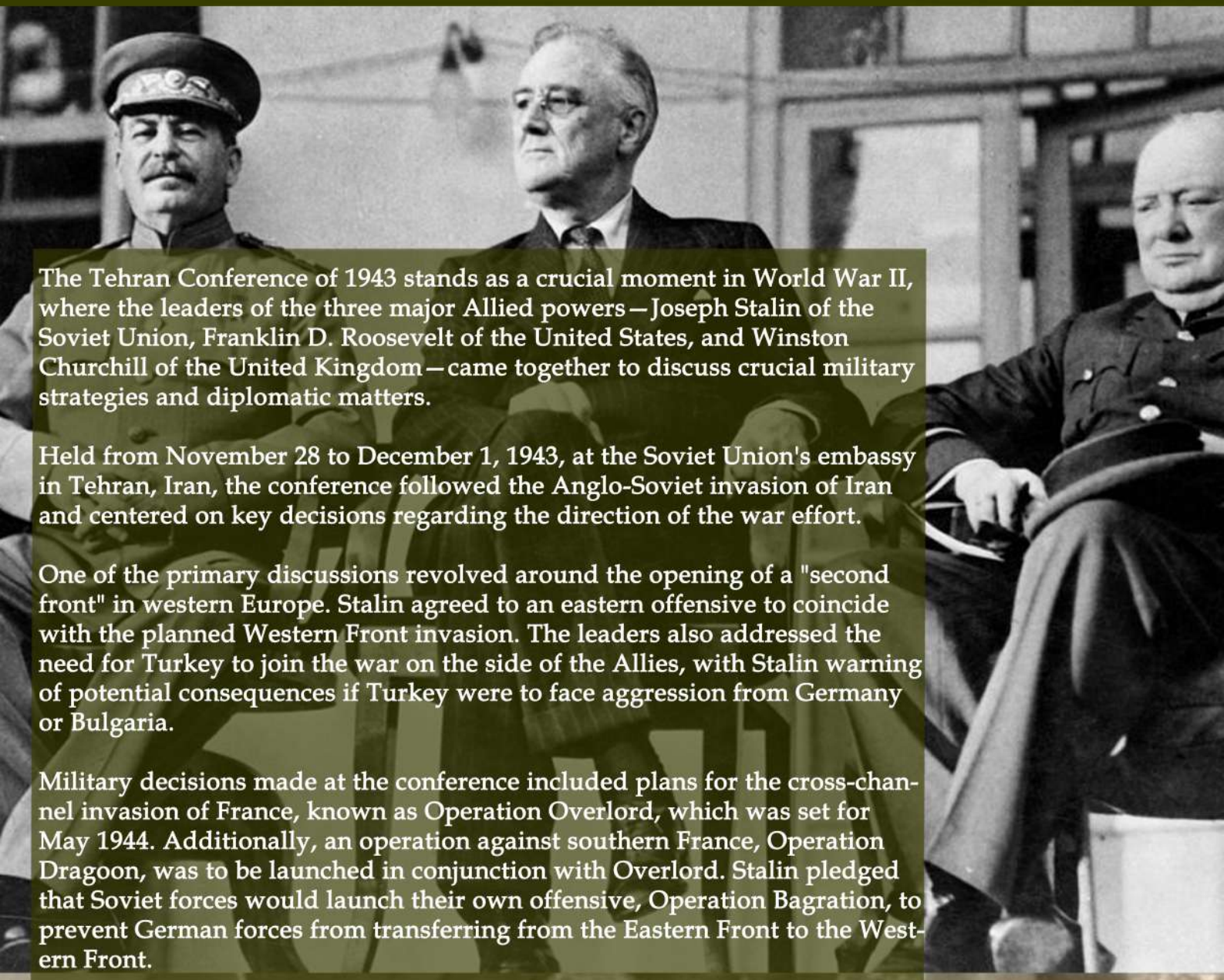
The President of the United States Franklin D. Roosevelt at Amirabad / The President and General Connolly during address [Close up of President Roosevelt and General Connolly seated in car.

The Persian Gulf Command



Jack Benny, American entertainer, and his troupe spent time in Iran to entertain the members of the PGC. He was joined by English-American actress Anna Lee, singer/dancer/actress Wini Shaw, and harmonica player Larry Adler.

Tehran Conference 1943



The Tehran Conference of 1943 stands as a crucial moment in World War II, where the leaders of the three major Allied powers—Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union, Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States, and Winston Churchill of the United Kingdom—came together to discuss crucial military strategies and diplomatic matters.

Held from November 28 to December 1, 1943, at the Soviet Union's embassy in Tehran, Iran, the conference followed the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran and centered on key decisions regarding the direction of the war effort.

One of the primary discussions revolved around the opening of a "second front" in western Europe. Stalin agreed to an eastern offensive to coincide with the planned Western Front invasion. The leaders also addressed the need for Turkey to join the war on the side of the Allies, with Stalin warning of potential consequences if Turkey were to face aggression from Germany or Bulgaria.

Military decisions made at the conference included plans for the cross-channel invasion of France, known as Operation Overlord, which was set for May 1944. Additionally, an operation against southern France, Operation Dragoon, was to be launched in conjunction with Overlord. Stalin pledged that Soviet forces would launch their own offensive, Operation Bagration, to prevent German forces from transferring from the Eastern Front to the Western Front.

One notable event during the conference was Churchill's presentation of a sword from King George VI to Stalin, symbolizing the unity of the Allied powers. Additionally, Churchill celebrated his 69th birthday during the conference, with Roosevelt and Stalin in attendance at a dinner party.

The Tehran Conference marked a pivotal moment in Allied coordination and strategy during World War II, setting the stage for major military offensives and shaping the course of the conflict in Europe.

A GLANCE INTO THE MUSEUM

US,Free French, British and commonwealth nations of WWII

A GLANCE INTO THE MUSEUM

From the Battlefield to the Bookshlef:Explore our gun room and library

A GLANCE INTO THE MUSEUM

1939-1945

A GLANCE INTO THE MUSEUM

1939-1945

WHERE IS LAHIJAN?

Lahijan, a city nestled near the Caspian Sea in Iran's Gilan province, is an appealing destination for those seeking a blend of tradition, nature, and history. Located on the northern slope of the Alborz Mountains, Lahijan is known for its unique architectural harmony and pleasant climate, which have made it a prominent tourist destination. The city's fertile lands have historically supported its role as a center of commerce, while also contributing to its rich cultural and historical landscape. For centuries, Lahijan served as the capital of East Gilan and played a vital role in Iran’s regional development.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Lahijan is its connection to Iran's silk and tea industries. The city’s name, rooted in the Persian words for silk and place, hints at its historical significance as a center for silk production. More notably, Lahijan was the first area in Iran to cultivate tea, a significant part of the city’s heritage. Visitors can explore the Iran Tea Museum and visit the mausoleum of Kashef-ol-Saltaneh, the man responsible for introducing tea cultivation to the region.

Lahijan’s appeal goes beyond its agricultural history. The city played a crucial role in the Jungle Movement and endured significant historical events. Today, its lush landscapes, from tea plantations to scenic mountains, offer visitors an opportunity to experience both the natural beauty and the historical depth of this region. For travelers interested in exploring a city where history, culture, and nature converge, Lahijan is an ideal destination.

HISTORY OF THE MUSEUM 2009-2021

Caren Omidi's journey toward establishing Iran's first WWII museum, "The WWII Vanguard Museum of Lahijan, is a story of passion, persistence, and serendipity.

In 2009, Caren's fascination with WWII was sparked by popular video games of the time. By 2011, at just nine years old, his interest deepened as he delved into the history of the war. Initially, he envisioned creating films about WWII, recreating famous scenes with a handycam and the help of his friends. Between 2011 and 2013, these short films kept him creatively engaged, and by 2015, he was formally studying filmmaking. However, a new opportunity reshaped his vision.

In 2013, Caren's parents purchased an old printing factory, Guilan Packet, to expand their industrial machinery business. Caren, captivated by the factory's abandoned office building with its wooden ceilings and spacious halls, initially saw it as a potential film set. However, a visit to the Freud Museum in Vienna in 2014 inspired him to transform the space into a museum.

Over time, Caren's interest in WWII shifted from filmmaking to curating history. On family business trips across Europe, he visited museums and antique shops in Normandy, Hamburg, Prague, and Paris, gradually amassing a collection of WWII artifacts. This col-lection grew steadily from 2018 onward and served as the foundation of his museum.

By 2019, Caren had developed a deeper scholarly interest in WWII, focusing on the Me-di-terranean and Western Fronts. He authored research on WWII airborne operations and participated in notable commemorations, including the 76th anniversary of Opera-tion Husky in Sicily and the 75th anniversary of Operation Market Garden in the Netherlands.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 delayed his plans to open the museum but provided him with an opportunity to further his research. By 2021, his collection had grown sig-nificant-ly, and with his mother's guidance, Caren officially opened "The WWII Van-guard Museum of Lahijan on May 18, 2021. His dedication turned a childhood dream into a cul-tural institution, bringing global history to a local audience.

HISTORY OF THE MUSEUM

Since 2017, the WWII Vanguard Museum has actively participated in major international commemorations and undertaken extensive visits to historically significant sites across Europe and beyond. Among these engagements were the 76th anniversary of Operation Husky in Sicily, the 75th anniversary of Operation Market Garden in Eindhoven, and subsequent commemorations of the 78th, 79th, and 80th anniversaries of Operation Market Garden. The museum also took part in the 80th anniversary of D-Day in Normandy (2024), the 80th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge in Bastogne, and the 81st anniversary of D-Day in Sainte-Mère-Église (2025). These milestones, underline the museum's commitment to honoring and preserving the memory of World War II.

Our exploration of important WWII sites has further included Monte Cassino and Venafro in Italy, the Balkans—particularly Greece and Bosnia—and Eastern Europe, where we visited museums in Moscow and Saint Petersburg to gain deeper insights into the Eastern Front's decisive role in the conflict. Alongside these international experiences, the museum has engaged directly with WWII veterans, collectors, reenactors, writers, and historians, enriching both our collection and the knowledge we share.

In Iran, the museum has remained equally dedicated to safeguarding the memory of the war by visiting and documenting several key memorials and cemeteries. These include the British and Commonwealth Cemetery in Tehran, as well as Polish cemeteries in Anzali, Tehran, and Isfahan. The information gathered during these visits has been published on our website, ensuring that these important sites of remembrance are preserved and made accessible to future generations.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE

During our journeys to major WWII commemorations — from the 80th and 81st Anniversaries of D-Day in Normandy to the anniversaries of Operation Market Garden and the Battle of the Bulge — we've had the honor of meeting many World War II veterans, the last of the Greatest Generation.

To express our gratitude, the World War II Museum of Lahijan launched the "Thank You for Your Service" Project, presenting veterans with a unique small Persian rug designed by Caren Omidi, manager of the museum. The rug features WWII divisional insignias and symbols, with the words "Thank You for Your Service" woven into its design — a tribute from Iran to the heroes who shaped our modern world.

HOW TO VISIT US IN IRAN?

1. Get a Visa– Apply for an Iranian tourist visa online (e-visa) or through an Iranian embassy/consulate in your country.

2. Fly to Tehran – Book a flight to Tehran IKA.

3. Travel to Rasht – From Tehran, take a domestic flight (1 hour), a bus (4–5 hours), or hire a private taxi/car to Rasht, the capital of Gilan Province.

4. Reach Lahijan – From Rasht, Lahijan is about 45 minutes by car/taxi.

That's it—you're in Lahijan!

Address:
Lahijan, Gilan, Iran- Langarud Highway, Qasab Mahalleh
Directly across the road from Abshar Hotel

Make sure to contact us if you would like a tour, need help getting to Lahijan, finding the museum, or even arranging a place to stay.

Phone and Whatsapp: +98 911 435 8147

Email 1: ww2vanguardmuseum@gmail.com

Email 2: carenomidiww2@gmail.com

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Langarud-Lahijan Road
Lahijan, Gilan Province
Iran

Opening Hours:
Monday to Friday
11 to 18

Caren Omidi, Founder of the WWII Vanguard Museum of Lahijan

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