



# INNOVATIVE READINESS TRAINING

Premier Military Training for a  
Secure and Prosperous America



MARCH 2026 | NEWSLETTER

## IRT Leadership Team Explores Historical Connections and America's Story

On March 12, the Office of the Secretary of War (OSW) Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) leadership team toured the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, DC. This team-building event connected IRT leadership to the broader historical and cultural contexts that shape our nation. Presentations by Dr. Cohen and Major Blazich, Ph.D., offered expert insights into significant artifacts and themes, enriching the team's understanding of the museum's collections and their relevance to the IRT mission.



*The OSW IRT Team stands around the curated exhibits presented to the team.*

Captain Clayton Noble, Army National Guard IRT Deputy Program Manager, coordinated the event in collaboration with Smithsonian staff, strengthening an ongoing partnership. This collaboration has supported meaningful efforts, including a support activity last year where IRT partnered with the museum to inspect, identify, and catalogue historical ordnance, a task critical to preserving the integrity of the museum's collections.

The day began with the IRT leadership team exploring exhibits spanning three thematic floors: The Engine of Transformation, The American Ideal and Lived Experience, and Leadership, Legacy, and National Identity. Participants reflected on how these artifacts related to their own lives and communities, examining innovations in agriculture, industry, transportation, and pivotal moments of American leadership and resilience.

As participants explored the exhibits, they reflected on the importance of viewing history through diverse perspectives, from technological advancements that shaped communities to the sacrifices made during defining moments in American history. The day concluded with a viewing of three extraordinary artifacts: a hollowed-out softball used to smuggle radio equipment to aid prisoner-of-war escape efforts during the Second World War, a war drum captured from the British during the War of 1812, and a piece of molten glass and concrete from Hiroshima. These artifacts reminded the team of the courage, resilience, and often somber realities of history.

The IRT team extends its gratitude to Captain Noble, Dr. Cohen, and Major Blazich, Ph.D., for their leadership and collaboration in making this event possible, and to the Smithsonian for its ongoing dedication to preserving and sharing the nation's history.

To learn more about the IRT program, visit [irt.defense.gov](http://irt.defense.gov).

### UNITY OF PURPOSE

IRT strengthens joint coordination and hands-on military training that ensures real-world readiness and mission success in complex contingency environments.

### ACCOUNTABILITY & INNOVATION

IRT increases fiscal discipline, ensuring best use of DoW resources for cutting-edge military training and threat resilience for American communities.

### READINESS & LEADERSHIP

IRT develops strong military leaders who are prepared to meet the challenges of deployment, mission success, and deterrence abroad.

### IRT TRAINING HIGHLIGHTS

Civil Military Partnerships  
Joint Working Group  
Team Building

### IRT LEADERSHIP TEAM

Colonel James Hogan, Director  
Colonel Stephen Rubright, Deputy Director  
Major Melford Simpson, Operations Officer  
Chief Master Sergeant Mathew Forster, Superintendent

### MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP

#### Kenneth Cohen, Ph.D.

Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, Chair, Division of Military and Society

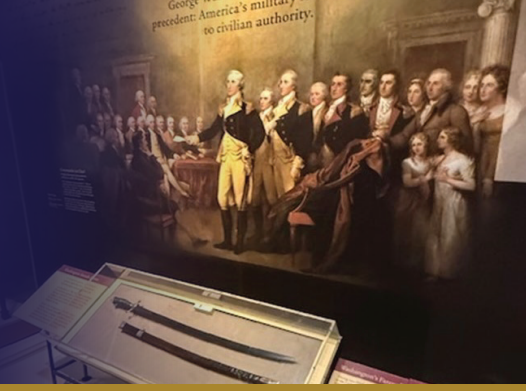


"Our team views the IRT visit as the next step in building a long-term relationship. Museums are vehicles for community outreach, engagement, and development, and in that way, I think our two units share a common mission that we can both benefit from pursuing collaboratively when possible"



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## IRT LEADERSHIP TEAM REFLECTIONS: QUOTES FROM THE SMITHSONIAN TOUR

*Walking through the voting rights timeline at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History was a deeply moving experience. As a Marine Corps officer, I've sworn an oath to support and defend the Constitution, but seeing the long and arduous fight for the right to vote laid out before me gave that oath a new, more profound meaning. It was a stark reminder of the preciousness of our democratic rights, rights that are tragically not a given in many parts of the world. My mind immediately went back to my middle school years in Venezuela, back in 2004. I remember the turmoil and the feeling of powerlessness as democratic norms were eroded. We never had the chance to visit a museum that celebrated the power of the individual vote; such a concept was actively being suppressed. To stand here now, as a citizen and a Marine in a country that memorializes the fight for suffrage, is a powerful testament to the ideals we serve. It reinforces my commitment to protecting the democratic principles that so many have fought and died for, and that my immediate family was persecuted for in Venezuela.*

Captain Emanuel Mendez,  
IRT Marine Corps Active Duty and Marine Corps Reserve Program Manager

*"THE Star Spangled Banner is one of my favorite exhibits to visit in Washington D.C. What began as a simple collection of fabric meant to symbolize the experiment of young nation inspired a poem that has become a cornerstone of the collective American experience. That flag is now one of the most recognizable symbols in the world. The song is sung daily by millions of Americans from baseball games to patriotic events to promotion and retirement ceremonies. When our Olympians win gold, it is displayed and played for the world. It can be easy to miss the simplicity of huckle cloth and verse, but they have inspired generations to stand up in service and, when called upon, to offer the ultimate sacrifice. Knowing the history of our flag makes the honor of wearing it on my shoulder daily that much more meaningful."*

Major Edward Brouch,  
IRT Air Force Reserve Program Manager

*This recent Joint Working Group was very worthwhile and informative. Having the ability to team up with my IRT teammates and complete the activity at the Museum allowed us some time to get to know each other and enhance our working relationships.*

Commander Shaun Shillady,  
IRT Navy Active Duty and Navy Reserve Program Manager

*This visit to the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History was a great opportunity for the IRT leadership team to come together, not only to explore the history that unites us but to strengthen our connections as a team. By reflecting on the resilience, innovation, and leadership showcased in these exhibits, we were reminded of the values that drive our mission and the unique perspectives each of us brings to our work. It was an honor to coordinate and lead such an inspiring and unifying experience.*

Captain Clayton Noble,  
IRT Army National Guard Deputy Program Manager

*Taking time to remember, reflect, and learn about the history of our nation is so important and having the opportunity to do in our nation's capital was especially memorable. I particularly enjoyed seeing artifacts and reading articles about those who came before us to serve, defend, and improve the United States. The highlight was having the Smithsonian historians provide commentary and share unique artifacts with us such as the "melted" debris from the atomic bomb. Great day tethering past and present service together as we seek to improve our military's readiness while supporting our American communities.*

Colonel Stanmire,  
IRT Air Force Reserve Command Service Responsible Official

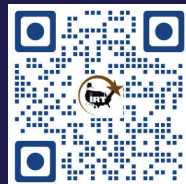
*"Walking through the transportation exhibit at the American History Museum, particularly the 1920s D.C. market section, was a deeply personal experience. My family has deep roots in Washington, D.C., and the exhibit brought to life the stories I grew up hearing. My great-grandparents settled here after emigrating from Sicily, and my grandfather even worked at A. Litteri's, a local market still in operation today. Seeing the exhibit was a powerful reminder of my family's history and the vibrant community they helped build."*

Mrs. Christina Jackson,  
IRT Contract Support Team

### IRT EVENTS & SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

- Mar 1: Kodiak Arctic Care, Final Planning Meeting
- Mar 16: Operation Forest Sentinel, Mid-Planning Meeting
- Mar 24: Task Force Reef Rescue, Final Planning Meeting
- Mar 30: Shepard Point, Final Planning Meeting

More information on missions at:



### FY26 IRT PROGRAM MANAGERS

Major Penny Cannon  
Army Reserve | Army Active Duty

Captain Scott Thurman  
Army National Guard

Captain Emanuel Mendez  
Marine Corps Reserve | Marine Corps Active Duty

Commander Shaun Shillady  
Navy Reserve | Navy Active Duty

Major Nathaniel Horwitz-Willis  
Air National Guard | Air Force Active Duty

Major Edward Brouch  
Air Force Reserve