Veterans and Residents Gather in Grafton for Historic Dedication

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
June 6 2026 3:32 PM


FORCE















ALTON - Veterans, elected officials, and community members gathered Saturday morning, June 6, 2026, in Grafton to dedicate the National Memorial of Military Ascent, a monument honoring veterans and the broader wartime service and sacrifice of Americans, in a ceremony held on the anniversary of D-Day.

“Thank you all for coming out today to honor our veterans and dedicate this memorial,” Mayor Mike Morrow said.

Alton Mayor Goins said the timing of the dedication added to its significance.

“It was especially meaningful that this dedication took place on the anniversary of D-Day June 6,” Goins said Saturday. “Seeing the statues and reflecting on the sacrifices, courage, and heroism of those soldiers was both humbling and inspiring. Their bravery and willingness to face unimaginable challenges helped secure freedom for generations to come.”

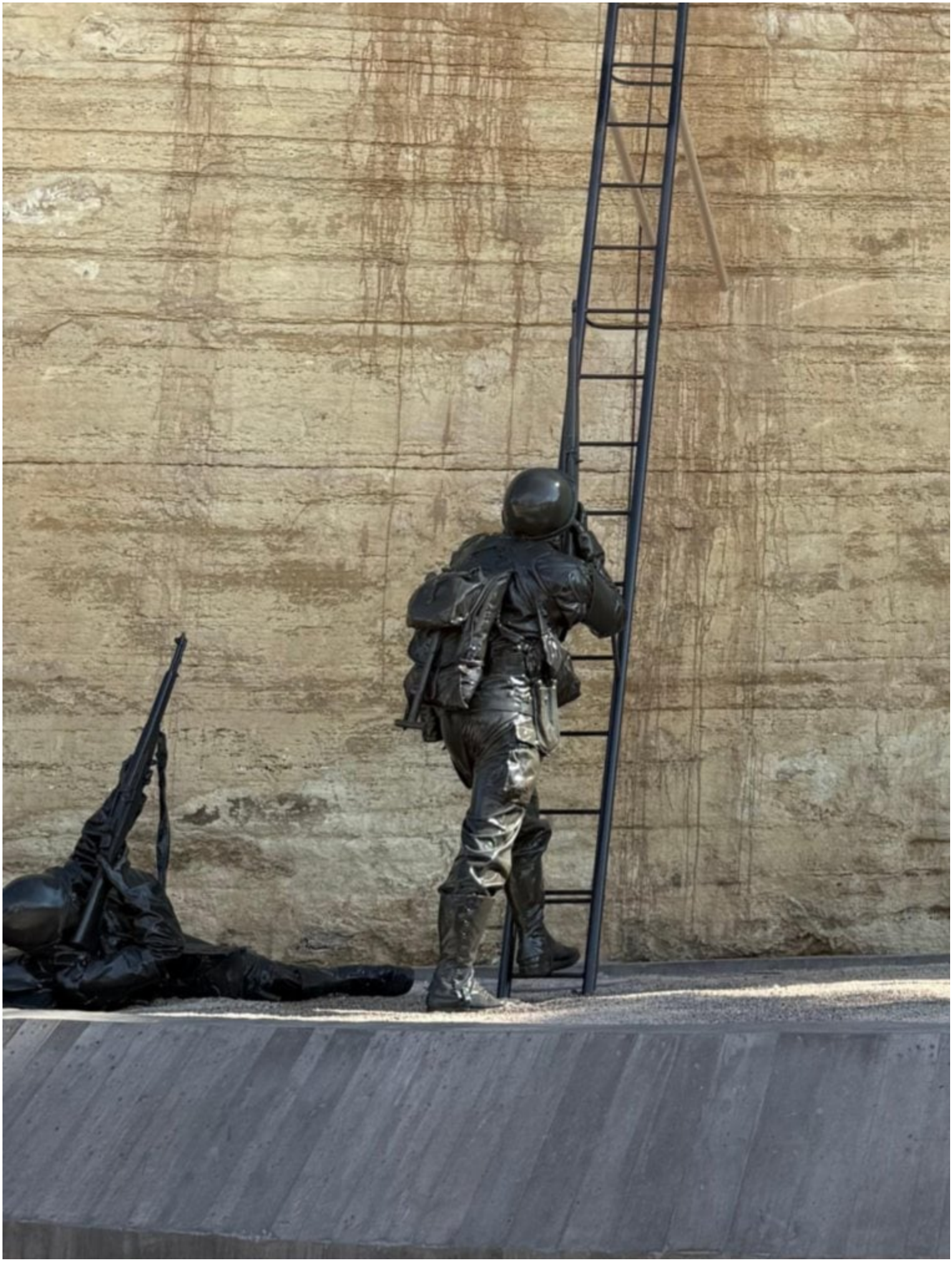
He added, “It was an honor for my wife and me to be here to be part of such a meaningful tribute to our nation’s heroes. Congratulations to Mayor Mike Morrow and the City of Grafton for this remarkable achievement.”


MOUNTAIN


HELWIG


















MOUNTAIN
HELWIG

Morrow introduced guest speaker Lt. Gen. Jered P. Helwig, identified during the ceremony as the deputy commander of U.S. Transportation Command at Scott Air Force Base. According to the introduction, Helwig entered the Army in 1994 after being commissioned through the ROTC program at Wheaton College in Illinois and has served in the United States and overseas, including combat deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq.

“This memorial represents one small piece of an overall large battle,” Morrow said. “We dedicate this memorial today to the combined spirit of the American people, for everyone who ever served in uniform, their families, and all those who support them in manufacturing, on farms, and in the home. This memorial is for you.”

Morrow said work is continuing to finish Phase I of the project and that fundraising is beginning for Phase II, the NMMA military museum.

“The museum will feature the Vietnam era SEAL Team Assault Boat that was built here in Grafton at the Grafton Boat Works in 1968,” he said. “This boat was one of 22 STAB boats that were built in Grafton and served in Vietnam, and is a Purple Heart boat.”

He said the boat was donated to the NMMA by John and Donna Jadwinski and is on permanent display.



