



# ALLIES

Newsletter for Members and Friends



## Hamline University's Ambulance Company

By Jack K. Johnson

*World War I began in August 1914 when Germany invaded France by way of neutral Belgium. As world events cascaded out of control, President Wilson declared American neutrality, but by 1917 it seemed likely that the U.S. would be drawn into the maelstrom. When Congress finally declared war on April 6, 1917, it became an all-out fight that, for the next two years, directly touched every segment of American society, including its colleges and universities. Hamline University of St. Paul had an enrollment of only 400 students in 1917, but its response to the war effort belied its modest size. Among other things, it formed an unlikely ambulance company that not only became the first military organization to leave the state, but was eventually decorated by the French government for distinguished service on the Western Front.*

### War Fervor

Campus routines were shaken in late March 1917 when Dean Loren Batchelder announced during a morning assembly that US entry into the European war appeared imminent.

The men of Hamline, he said, should start getting acquainted with the customs of military life. Gregory Walcott, a philosophy professor who had spent the previous summer at a reserve officers' training camp in Plattsburgh, N.Y., stood up and called for volunteers to inaugurate military training at Hamline. That afternoon about 100 men showed up in the gymnasium and began drilling under the direction of Walcott and others with previous military experience.

When war was officially declared a week later, the impact was immediate. A dozen students promptly enlisted. Several enrolled in the Officers' Training Camp organized in May at Ft. Snelling. Sixteen students from farms were allowed to return home to speed food production, receiving credit for the entire semester and given the grade earned to date. Track and baseball schedules were canceled for the rest of the season because enlistments and officer training had depleted the teams. Under the auspices of the Red Cross, Hamline women organized classes on first aid and nursing. None of this was unusual. A wave of patriotic enthusiasm had swept the country and  
*Story continues on next page*



Hamline's ambulance unit before departure to Camp Crane. The flag was made by Hamline women. (Minnesota Historical Society/Hamline University archives)

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The Ford M1917 ambulance. It was a standard Ford Model T with a wooden extension for three patients on stretchers or five in sitting positions. The Model T worked well because it was light, durable, easy to repair, and able to traverse rough terrain. (comvec.org)

colleges everywhere saw similar activity in the spring of 1917. Hamline, however, added one more thing: an ambulance company.

The unit's creation seems as unlikely as it was amazingly swift. In May 1917, Louis Herrick, professor of romance languages and literature, provided the War Department with an inventory of resources in personnel and services available at Hamline to support the war effort. All colleges were asked to do likewise, but Herrick, designated as campus Adjutant, was first to respond. The War Department, in turn, quickly cabled Herrick, informing him that sponsors were sought for ambulance units. Shortly thereafter during chapel, he announced that colleges and universities elsewhere were organizing ambulance units for service in France. The men for this service, he said, "must be conspicuous for character, decision, pluck, intelligence and long experience on rough roads."

Scanning the room, he asked if there were volunteers for such an endeavor at Hamline, and nearly every man present stood up. Names were taken and half an hour later Herrick boldly telegraphed his contact in Washington: "Hamline Unit Complete and Ready for Service." Ready or not, the timing was perfect: the Army wanted, right now, to constitute a newly created United States Army Ambulance Service (USAAS).

Warren Gammell, a student from Madison, Minnesota, who was also in the Minnesota National Guard, helped Herrick line up a worthy roster for Hamline. The final list included star athletes and student leaders. Army physicals were given June 10 to 38 prospects and only two were rejected. The rest were duly sworn in and ordered to stand by for training.

On Saturday evening, June 16, 1917, Hamline President Samuel Kerfoot hosted an emotional farewell dinner for the unit at the St. Paul Athletic Club. According to an ac-

count by Herrick, when Kerfoot rose to bid them God-speed, he told them with choking voice "to uphold in France the best traditions of the college and of true Christian gentlemen." "We hope to have you all back with us again, but . . . if any of your souls . . . should go to heaven from France . . ." Unable to continue, he sank into his chair and the dinner was over."

Upon leaving the Athletic Club, they formed ranks and, led by Gammell (who had been named First Sergeant), joined in a spirited parade that included a group of Hamline women dressed in white with American flags draped over their shoulders. They made their way to the train station where, amid cheers, tears and handshakes, they boarded a special coach and departed into the night. They were the first military organization to leave the state. Officers from Ft. Snelling came to see them off.

### Training at Camp Crane

Their destination was Allentown, Pennsylvania, where the Lehigh County Fairgrounds had been converted into a makeshift Army camp. This was to be the USAAS training center, named Camp Crane after a former Surgeon General. Troops were flooding in. Hamline arrived June 23 and was billeted in a sheep barn that had been sanitized and painted. They shared their crowded barn with similar units from New York, Iowa, Washington, and California. The Hamline outfit was designated as S.S.U. 68, later changed to 568. S.S.U. stood for Sanitary Squad Unit, but in everyday parlance it was called an Ambulance Service Section, or simply Section 568.

About 40 colleges and universities—all of them larger and better-known than Hamline—sponsored ambulance sections in the USAAS. Sections had also been organized by a few cities, civic organizations, and industrial corporations.

Conversion into soldiers for Uncle Sam began promptly, with the military motto "Hurry up and wait!" in full force. They double-timed everywhere and then waited in endless formations for whatever came next. They learned to march, exercise, peel potatoes, dig trenches, eat "tinned Willy" (canned corn beef), and pitch a pup tent. There was also first aid, map reading, signaling, driving, and disassembly/reassembly of a Model-T ambulance. They were not trained to fire weapons, since ambulance men were not armed. Marches into the countryside to build fitness and endurance were frequent. During a rough four-day march and bivouac in August, mostly in rain with full packs, they hiked 18 miles through the mud in four hours. "Our section of husky Hamline men set a record for the whole 20 sections by not having a single man drop out," boasted Harold Curtis in a letter to his mother.

They worked hard and they played hard. Weekends were filled with recreational activities but sports took center stage. Inter-college rivalry was intense and, for a small college, Hamline was remarkably conspicuous. In a



big track meet on July 4, 1917, Roy Kline was the sensation of the day, propelling Hamline to a third place team finish, right behind Michigan and Penn State. Earl "Curley" Cramer was first string fullback for USAAS' football team, which included 15 All-Americans. In its victory over a Marine Corps team at Franklin Field in Philadelphia (which replaced the regular Army-Navy game that year), Cramer rushed through the opposing line "like a 310mm shell," according to a USAAS historian. Ira "Ike" Haaven, was captain of USAAS' winning basketball squad.

### The Long Wait

The ambulance corps attracted the adventurous by offering quick and certain action in Europe. "France in six weeks!" was the slogan as men arrived at Camp Crane. By September 1917, Section 568 was primed and ready to go. Some other sections had already left. Weeks passed. Frustration grew. Camp routines had become tiresome. Marches to Guth Station, a field training site complete with muddy trenches, were particularly irksome. Entertainments hosted by the Red Cross and YMCA provided some diversion but the waiting dragged on. By Thanksgiving, morale had sunk. Several men vented their exasperation in a letter to President Kerfoot, who paid the unit a visit, sent personal notes of encouragement, and provided a huge box of homemade treats at Christmas, but he could do little else.

Snows came in January and the men were moved from their animal barn into a new barracks. Then the Army made an offer: up to 300 volunteers could leave immediately for France and fill openings in ambulance sections already overseas. Some sections voted to break up and go for a speedy departure; others wanted to wait and stay together as a unit.

"Red" Phillips described his conflicted feelings in a letter penned to President Kerfoot. "It hurts us just as much as it will you and the folks at home," he wrote, "to break up that which has bound us so closely together for nine months, but . . . another three months in this camp and I wouldn't dare look another man in the eye. It's sapping . . . everything worthy of live red-blooded American boys." After much deliberation, two students opted to transfer; the rest decided to stick it out and remain intact. The gamble paid off. Word was received in February to prepare to embark.

### Finally Over There

They sailed from New York on March 28 on *RMS Olympic*, a huge British liner that had been converted into a troopship. Packed into the lower decks, they slept in hammocks swung over the mess tables. After landing at Brest on April 4, they went by train to St. Nazaire where they assembled their ambulances. Each section had 20 ambulances. The chassis and the boxy wooden body were shipped separately and had to be joined together. Morale by now had turned around. Writing home from



Section 568's silk banner, presented to the unit by the French 28th Division. (Hamline University archives)

"somewhere in France" on April 9, Harold Chase asserted "We are in a great fight and our united effort is what counts. I made the greatest decision of my life when I decided to join the service. I am mighty proud to be here."

The five-week stay at St. Nazaire enabled the men to become better acquainted with French culture and language, but it was also a time of change for five Hamline men who were transferred to other sections that were under strength. Three, including Warren Gammell, went to Section 606, an outfit from Maine, and two were sent to Fordham University's Section 553. These kinds of shuffles continued for the rest of the war as necessity arose. In June they convoyed their ambulances through the Loire Valley to a USAAS base camp at Ferrières-en-Gâtinais, southeast of Paris. There they were placed in command of Lt. Myron Wick, a former American Field Service (AFS) man. The AFS, along with the American Red Cross Ambulance Service and the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Service, were volunteer ambulance organizations that preceded USAAS units in Europe. These units were gradually integrated into the USAAS.

### Into the Heart of Battle

On July 3, Section 568 was attached to the French 28th Division, then based in the Vosges Mountains to the northeast. As it turned out, most USAAS sections served with French Army divisions, where the need was most acute. Each French Army division had its own corps of doctors, corpsmen, attendants, and stretcher bearers, with a three-tiered system of care: first-aid shelters were set up near the front; somewhat farther back were central aid stations that also provided triage; farthest to the rear were base or evacuation hospitals for the most severely wounded or ill. As terrain allowed, ambulances carried the wounded directly from front line shelters to the central aid station and, if needed, from there to a hospital. Driving on the front within the first two tiers was harried and nearly always dangerous, frequently amid

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shell fire and often in darkness over bomb-cratered roads. It was not for the faint of heart; courage and stamina were essential qualities. Ambulance drivers worked in pairs, 24 hours off, 24 hours on. Whether on- or off-duty they were never far from the battlefield.

In early summer 1918, German forces launched an all-out offensive against Allied positions on both sides of Reims in Champagne. Their goal was to secure positions south of the Marne and to draw Allied reserves away from Flanders, enabling the Germans to break through lines defending Paris. Germany's Marne Offensive had initial successes, but by early August the initiative passed to the Allies. Buoyed by the infusion of fresh American troops, Germany was forced to retreat to earlier positions across the Aisne and Vesle Rivers. Thus began a resolute but costly Allied advance that Germany was unable to stem. The Meuse Argonne Offensive that autumn pushed enemy forces past their last, fortified defenses, cutting them off from essential supplies.

Section 568 was in the center of the action. They worked on the front lines in the Aisne and Meuse-Argonne sectors, September 2 to October 4, and in the Meuse-Argonne sector, October 19 to November 2, 1918. The duties were perilous and the stress relentless. They worked in cycles, transporting the wounded through devastated landscapes—often as shells whizzed overhead—before collapsing for 24 hours of fitful sleep and whatever diversions could be found in a war zone. They lived in dugouts and cellars. They shared the roads with supply wagons, horse-drawn artillery, fresh troops and bedraggled war-weary troops. The sight and smell of death was commonplace. Harold Curtis, although now in Section 606, mirrored the experiences shared by all Hamline ambulance men when he vividly described the weariness he felt: "The last drive we were on went three days straight, with no relief. The Boches are shelling this place hot and heavy. . . . Sometimes I am so worn out that the bursting of shells nearby does not wake me."

Then everything fell silent for a few days until November 11, 1918, when at 11 a.m. bells pealed throughout France. An Armistice had been signed. It was over.

### Aftermath

For the work carried out under heavy bombardment of explosives and gas during the battles of October 19 to November 2, Section 568 earned the French *Croix de Guerre* with Silver Star in 28th Division Order No. 12.839, dated January 13, 1919. A silk unit banner decorated with the medal was presented by French General Francois Marjoulet at Metz on February 26. Ten members of the unit also received individual *Croix de Guerre* medals. This was a rare honor, not given lightly.

Following the Armistice, the men of Section 568 stayed with the 28th Division, moving first to Metz and later Thionville to assist with hospitals there. In April they returned to Ferrières for out-processing and on May 7 em-

barked from Brest for home. They were discharged from service at Camp Dodge, Iowa, on May 24, 1919. A few days later, Roy Stemsrud returned to his alma mater and presented the unit flags and medal to the college during chapel. He was one of 12 Hamline men who had remained with the unit to the end. Four of the original group had been killed in action, including its prime organizer, Sgt. Gammell.

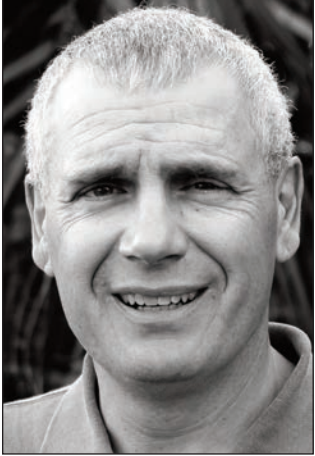
A few months earlier, in a letter to his father, Harold Curtis reflected on his service: "I am mighty proud," he wrote, "to be an American today, and am glad . . . you readily gave your permission when I felt the call. . . . Our unit suffered a ten percent loss, which is heavy [but] I have seen much . . . and learned much." For Curtis, and Stemsrud, and all the others who returned to tell their stories, life would never be the same.

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## DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

By Jeff Thielen



Working in public service for 30 years provided me with many lessons on working with staff and volunteers, preparing budgets, and managing projects. What it did not prepare me for was the constant need to raise funds to meet the basic mission of the organization.

It is easy in any organization to sit back and allow the status quo to rule the day. We have a museum; we are open to the public; why do we need to do anything else?

It costs money to create new exhibits; must we always have new ones?

This museum is fortunate to have staff and volunteers who are passionate about improving and expanding on what we have. They take our mission—to preserve a record of Minnesota's military history and to educate the

public about it—very seriously. That brings me back to the constant need to raise funds and the amount of time spent by staff and board members to raise those funds.

Everyone knows the mantra “safety is everyone's business;” however, with a small non-profit, “fundraising is everyone's business,” and includes staff, volunteers, and to some extent members.

If you are a member of this organization you support our mission with your membership dues and gifts to the organization, but do you support the organization with your enthusiasm for the mission? Do you share your passion for the mission with others?

I want to challenge each of you to share your passion for this organization with at least one other person who is not aware of the museum. Invite them to visit, invite them to join as a member, and invite them to support us with a gift. Remember, with a small non-profit like ours, fundraising is everyone's business.

On Thursday, November 13, Minnesotans once again have the opportunity to support their favorite non-profits during “Give to the Max” day. Gifts to this organization on that day will be matched dollar for dollar by a St. Paul Foundation grant.

Please make this your personal “steel pot challenge” and help support our mission.

Thanks for your continued support.

## OUT OF THE ARCHIVES

By Chad Conrady



Things are moving along pretty well at the archives. The biggest news is that the archive now has a presence on ArchivesSpace, an online archival finding aid program, and at present I have the finding aids for the National Guard muster rolls and payroll records, and the museum's collection of the Yank Magazines and PS Magazines available. These finding aids were created using the archival standard method of description

and Library of Congress Subject Headings and Authorities to create an index that make the collections more searchable. This doesn't necessarily mean that every soldier listed throughout these records will be listed in the index for every collection that they are a part of, but there is enough detail to assist a researcher in locating a collection for their needs. The archival finding aids will eventu-

ally be accessible through the museum's archives website, which is currently under development. However, right now you'll be able to access the finding aids, review archival use and reference policies, and also submit forms making reference requests or contacting me for a donation of archival materials. I am hoping that this will provide me the opportunity to work with the donor to develop a richer history behind new archival materials that are gifted to the museum.

Another project that has been in the works is the World War One muster rolls which have been digitized with the assistance of Minnesota Reflections. One of my volunteers has recently finished entering background data for the muster rolls, which means that the information just needs to be verified by Minnesota Reflections before it will be accessible to the general public. Also new to the archive, is a developing partnership between the Minnesota Historical Society and the National Guard that will formally recognize the Minnesota Military Museum's role as an official repository for new Minnesota National Guard records. Moving forward, I will continue to process the current collection of records from the Adjutant General's Office and the National Guard, and I anticipate being able to start work on the personal papers of Colonel E.B. Miller and Colonel Ken Murphy.



**ALLIES****CURATOR'S NOTES**

By Doug Bekke



Work continues on many projects. Progress has been very slow on the military badges exhibit. There are so many badges—especially from the Air Force, where there seems to be no end. It has been quite difficult identifying them, locating them, obtaining them, and then writing correct descriptive texts. It was a great relief to complete the medals exhibit last spring. It will be a much greater relief to complete the badge exhibit. This

project has been going on for over three years. Many thanks to museum volunteers Kerry, Becky, and Paul for the patience and hard work on it.

The museum's special exhibit on the 34th Infantry Division will soon close. In February it will be modified and moved to exhibit space in the new Camp Ripley Education Center.

I have been collecting contact information and stories from Vietnam veterans for a new special exhibit on Vietnam that will open in July 2015. This fall and winter I will be contacting veterans to do interviews for the exhibit. I continue to seek more Vietnam veterans' stories from all

branches of the service from anytime between 1945 and 1975.

Work continues on a new special WWI exhibit. In September, I was again in France visiting WWI battlefields. France is a such beautiful country, but it is sobering to study a battle and then stand on a battlefield and imagine what it was like 100 years ago. In the forests, the trenches often still exist, some still 6 or 7 feet deep. Often clumps of barbed wire, not taken by farmers to line their fields and pastures, still remain in or near the trenches.

For many years I have tried to find the means to restore the WWI German howitzer that has been rusting away outside the museum. On my trip to France last year I was very lucky to find what I believed to be a hub for the howitzer's missing wooden spoked wheels. The hub had been dug up on the Somme battlefield by the son of the owner of the B&B where I stayed. After verifying that it was the correct hub I was able to purchase it. After boxing it up, I carried the 75 pound hub back to the U.S. on the airplane in my "excess" checked baggage. The hub is now in Michigan being replicated and restored. We hope to have the completed wheels around Christmas. Next summer the wheels can be added to the gun then the gun can be more easily moved to a shop for restoration in time for the opening of the WWI exhibit.

Over the summer, museum volunteer John Deuhs, worked on adding many more pistols and revolvers to the museum's handgun exhibit. We hope to finish the project this fall. There is no shortage of things to be done. Thanks very much to the volunteers who donate their time and skills.

**99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion Commemorated**

A new commemoration marker has been added to the growing number of similar monuments and plaques dotting the museum's landscape. This one is dedicated to the 99th Infantry Battalion (Sep), a unit of Norwegian-speaking Americans organized at Camp Ripley in 1942 for the express purpose of supporting clandestine operations in German-occupied Norway during World War II. The unit recently received special recognition as part of Memorialization ceremonies held at Camp Ripley on October 5. A short history of the unit is available on our website, [www.mnmilitarymuseum.org](http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org). Click on Resources in the left hand menu and then click on History Sketches.

**We get a tug**

Some people get hugs. In August we got a "Tug," which is the commonly used name for a 1962 US Air Force Tow Tractor. It was donated by Art Wolch of Little Falls after he retrieved it from a scrap pile in Wyoming. He spent over a year restoring it to original condition. According to Jeff Thielen, it will be a "working artifact" that can be used as needed to move some of our larger objects outdoors.

# DONOR HONOR ROLL, July-September 2014

## MEMORIALS

Given by:	In Memory of:
194th Tank Reg. Assn.	MSG (Ret.) Richard E. Karlson
Richard and Betty Hayes	MSG (Ret.) Richard E. Karlson
Betty Masoner	James Henry Hage
Doug Bekke	COL Jeff Nelson
Linda Spangrud Douville	CSM (Ret.) Leroy Spangrud

## ARTIFACT DONATIONS

### The museum gratefully acknowledges donations of artifacts from the following:

Craig Bangs ▪ Jerry Beilby ▪ Marcella Cheeseman ▪ Steven Curtis ▪ Roger D. Davis ▪ Jay Doyle ▪ Virgil Egerman ▪ Don & Karen Engel ▪ Julie Eszlinger-Jensen ▪ Marge Faherty ▪ Devon Hall ▪ Patrick Halloran ▪ Adeline Harvey ▪ Eve Johnson ▪ Wayne Johnson ▪ Nancy Lindgren ▪ Paul Meyer ▪ Minnesota Historical Society ▪ Lucy Nord ▪ Philip Potter ▪ Michael Putzier ▪ Paul Sailer ▪ Joseph Sanganoo ▪ Jack Schneider ▪ Sarah Weiser ▪ Art Wolch ▪

## CONTRIBUTIONS

**Renewing Members:** Winifred Anderson ▪ Roger Avery ▪ Adrian Beltrand ▪ William Casey ▪ Harold Fiala ▪ Jack Heidman ▪ Larry Herke ▪ Larry Mongan ▪ Donald Pettitt ▪ Susan Rasmussen ▪ David Smith ▪ Kenneth Swanson ▪ Robert Swetz

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This year's Give to the Max Day is Thursday, November 13, 2014. Give to the Max Day was created in 2009 to increase giving to nonprofit organizations across Minnesota and move more giving online. Since then, it has become an annual tradition, a time for Minnesotans to come together to raise as much money as possible within a 24-hour period. Last year, \$17 million was raised for 4,437 nonprofit organizations and schools statewide. Over \$3,200 was given to the Minnesota Military Museum that day, in spite of a website crash that lasted all afternoon. We have been assured that the computer glitch has been fixed.

To participate, go to GiveMN.org and type in Minnesota Military Museum as your "cause." Or, go to our homepage at [mnmilitarymuseum.org](http://mnmilitarymuseum.org) and click on the Give to the Max Day logo.

## SPOTLIGHTED RECENT DONATIONS



**Jim McDuff** from Kansas has been a great friend of the museum. He is one of the nation's largest dealers in unit crests and military insignia. When he finds Minnesota-related crests he often donates them to us. After years of looking, he found, and in September donated, a 1920s-30s crest from the 68th Infantry Brigade MNNG. This screw back enameled crest depicts a standing Gopher. It is very rare and only the second one in the museum's collection. **Harold Fiala** from Cold Spring has been a longtime museum supporter. He recently donated a very early U.S. M-1905 Springfield bayonet. It retains its original pre-1918 unblued blade, which is very hard to find. It is the best example in the collection.

Last July at the Flying Cloud Air Show, I met **Major General Pat Halloran**, who was originally from Chatfield. He entered the Air Force in 1949 and flew 100 combat missions in Korea. He was selected to fly the secret U-2 Reconnaissance Aircraft and flew missions over Cuba and Vietnam. He was later selected to fly the new Mach 3, SR-71 Reconnaissance Aircraft. The museum is very happy to receive from MG Halloran one of his SR-71 flight suits complete with all insignia, service photos, and a bio.

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## Veterans featured every month at the museum

Seven Minnesota veterans have been recognized by the museum since we began our “Featured Veteran” program last spring. A biographical sketch is written for each one and a special exhibit for each is presented in the museum’s Veterans’ Corner. Currently, we are featuring two vets who were also exceptional museum volunteers, Merl Fletcher and Ken Buettner. Also featured this year were Norman Arvidson, Donald Frederick, Jerry Huntington, Reuel Pietz, and Norman Sterrie.

You can read about them all by going to our website, [mnmilitarymuseum.com](http://mnmilitarymuseum.com), and clicking on the “Read More” text for the Featured Veteran box in the upper right corner.

## Writers wanted

We are seeking new writers for lead articles in this newsletter. It can be on any topic related to Minnesota military history. If you think you might like to write such an article, or have already written something that you would like to share more widely, please contact Jack Johnson at 651-430-9065 or email [johns032@umn.edu](mailto:johns032@umn.edu). We can provide assistance with copy editing and may be able to help with locating appropriate source material.

## Museum hosts History After Hours

On July 17, the museum hosted the second in a series of History After Hours socials in the historic Little Falls area. About 50 guests enjoyed wine, beer, and hors d’oeuvres while touring the inside and outside museum exhibits.

Special “hands on” stations manned by period actor volunteers enabled guests to fire a Civil War musket, pull the bolt back on a WWI machine gun, simulate firing an antique mortar, taste test a Meal-Ready-to-Eat (MRE), and assist WW II medics provide first aid to casualties with WW II equipment and supplies.



Steve Osman, dressed as a Civil War cavalry soldier, shows History After Hours visitors some of the weapons and accoutrements used by cavalry troops of that era.