

Thousands experience a blast from the past

By: Tom Conning

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German forces waited in trenches as automatic weapons and mortar fire echoed throughout the Pennsylvania countryside. These sounds meant the Allied forces were preparing for the invasion of North Africa during an educational re-enactment.



World War II re-enactors fire authentic weapons for visitors during The Army Heritage and Education Center's living history event, "Training for the North African Campaign" on Sept. 28, 2012. Photo by Tom Conning.

The Army Heritage and Education Center in Carlisle, Pa. hosted these activities, as well as a parachute demonstration, lectures by World War II veterans and other educational events during a living history event that took place Sept. 28 – 30.

This free public event educated the Army and the nation on the role of the soldier in the development and protection of the nation in an interactive way.

A member of The Ranger Group parachute team conducts a parachute demonstration during The Army Heritage and Education Center's living history event, "Training for the North African Campaign" on Sept. 29, 2012. Photo by Tom Conning.

Re-enactor Tom Kelly, a 90th Infantry Division Soldier, told visitors what it was like to be a mortar-man. He wore World War II garb, described K-rations and talked to guests about other hardships World War II Soldiers faced.



"We come here so we can interact and talk about the war," he said. "It's usually the first thing we say. Do you want to put on a helmet and see how heavy this thing is? Do you want to see what the soldiers ate?"



World War II re-enactor Tom Kelly describes K-rations to children who were visiting The Army Heritage and Education Center's living history event, "Training for the North African Campaign" on Sept. 29, 2012. Photo by Tom

Conning.

Kelly said his unit tried this approach to make information more understandable for children.

Another option for the public to learn about the war was through interactions with World War II veterans who participated in lectures and meet and greets.

William Lentz was 22 year-old R.O.T.C. cadet when the United States entered World War II. Three years later as an Army first lieutenant in a field artillery unit, he was in the middle of the Battle of the Bulge.

Lentz enjoys telling people about his experiences, he said. One story involved him firing his artillery piece at the enemy.

"I didn't actually destroy the weapon, I destroyed the attitude of the German soldiers who were on the guns, who ran like hell," he said. "It's worthwhile for the public to come and see what war - - what it might have looked a little bit like."

World War II re-enactors talk to visitors about authentic weapons during The Army Heritage and Education Center's living history event, "Training for the North African Campaign" on Sept. 28, 2012. Photo by Tom Conning.



The weekend on the Army Heritage Trail might have looked a little bit like war for 3,250 visitors to the three-day event.

Learn more about public education programs and lectures at usahec.org.



Children participate in an authentic World War II obstacle course during The Army Heritage and Education Center's living history event, "Training for the North African Campaign" on Sept. 28, 2012. Photo by Tom Conning.

World War II re-enactors describe and demonstrate how to fire a mortar at The Army Heritage and Education Center's living history event, "Training for the North African Campaign" on Sept. 29, 2012. Photo by Tom Conning.

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