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Midway Village: Scenes from the 'Largest WWII Reenactment in the U.S.'

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- Saturday's Eastern Front battle opened with heavy maneuvering of Lend-Lease vehicles like this M5A1 light tank and M3 75mm gun motor carriage (courtesy of Roberts Armor Museum).

By John Adams-Graf

The popular World War II Days returned to Midway Village in Rockford, Illinois, this past September. Promising to be bigger and better than ever, the event actually surpassed estimates with more than 1,200 reenactors, representing the soldiers of the United States, Great Britain, France, Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Germany, Italy and Japan. Heavy equipment ranged from about a half a dozen armored vehicles to dozens of Jeeps, trucks motorcycles and weapons carriers—nearly 70 vehicles in all!

Large-scale battles occurred depicting actions on both the eastern and western fronts each day in addition to skirmishes in the historic village. Reenactors presented a special program on the Battle of the Bulge that depicted the strategy and decisions involved from the points of view of both the Allies and German forces.

World War II Days visitors also had the chance to hear actual speeches of General Patton, as portrayed by Denny Hair, of Hockley, Texas. One of the country's foremost experts on Patton, this was Hair's first appearance at the event and was very popular with both the audience and reenactors.

The "Behind The Lines" tour took place on Friday evening with guides leading guests through the Village and various encampments. The woods surrounding the village were filled with impressive defensive positions created by the various units. Slit trenches, machine gun emplacement and mess areas all accurately depicted life on the front during the War.

Saturday night featured a USO-style Dance at Veterans Memorial Hall. This year, the dance featured Rockford's own renowned big band, "Moonlight Jazz Orchestra." Demonstrations, displays and a small vendor's area occupied several buildings and a section of the village.



— 101st Airborne troopers on the morning before the battle.



— Rousing speeches urging commitment to Mother Russia stirred the hearts of Infantry soldiers. The presence of a T34/85 (courtesy of the Oshkosh [WI] Military Veterans Museum and Education Center), however, more than stiffened their resolve!



- Around 1PM on Saturday afternoon, a lot of movement occurred in the German camps, with troops mobilizing in a hasty manner. Here, an infantry section of Grossdeutschland soldiers piled into an original Ford-built Horch E6A truck and a reproduction R75 motorcycle to race to the front where they immediately deployed for action.



- Behind-the-lines activities included all of the chores typical of a soldier's life, like this SS soldier getting a haircut.



— More than 70 vehicles participated in weekend event including dozens of the allies' workhorse—the venerable Jeep.



— German MG-34 defensive position greeted anyone entering the woods where dozens of small encampments depicted living conditions of WWII soldiers.



— Saturday's first large battle pitted hundreds of Soviet infantry and motorized troops against Third Reich aggressors.



— British infantry during arms inspection.



— Mix of Soviet volunteers at the morning roll call.

Plan for 2014:

Next year's event will occur Sept. 20-21. For more information, visit www.midwayvillage.com or write:

Midway Village
6799 Guilford Road
Rockford, IL 61107

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