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The Daily Astorian Publisher/Editor David Pero forms ranks with the 4th Texas Regiment during the annual Civil War re-enactment Saturday at Fort Stevens State Park.

RE-ENACTMENT PROVIDES GLIMPSE OF CIVIL WAR LIFE

By DAVID PERO
The Daily Astorian

The bullet would have killed me — had it been real instead of imaginary.

Fortunately, it was imaginary, a part of a fun- and work-filled Civil War re-enactment this past weekend at Fort Stevens State Park.

The three-day event was sponsored by the Northwest Civil War Council, and for a day I joined as a first-time re-enactor.

The event featured 556 re-enactors including Union and Confederate soldiers, calvary and artillery, a medical corps, musicians and a large civilian camp. It all depicted life during the Civil War with re-enactors each in appropriate period dress, including myself.

It started with an invitation from our pressroom manager, Jim Stanovich. Jim is a longtime re-enactor and heads the NCWC's Confederate forces as battalion commander. His wife, Sharon, their daughter and grandson also participate, and he knew I'm a history buff with an interest in the Civil War period. I gladly accepted, but had to limit my participation to a single day rather than the full weekend.

Learning the ropes

First, I registered and became a member of the council to participate, and then I needed outfitting. To participate, I studied the council's 18-page guide with its safety rules, which is required reading, and it included a test that all re-enactors must pass. The council stresses safety above all else.

I headed to Fort Stevens Friday afternoon. Re-enactors were busy setting up their camps prior to opening day and I quickly found the Confederate forces with their rows of white canvas tents. No modern camping or cars are allowed in the re-enactment area.

Jim introduced me to Ryan McGee, the first sergeant of Company H of the 4th Texas Regiment, my home for the re-enactment. Ryan, who is from Oregon City, took me under his wing and outfitted me with loaner gear from the regiment all in the dress of the day for Confederates: baggy pants with suspenders; a long-sleeve, oversized, light cotton shirt; a heavier jacket; a cartridge box and cap



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David Pero, publisher and editor of The Daily Astorian, remains on the battlefield after suffering a pretend wound during the annual Civil War re-enactment Saturday at Fort Stevens State Park.



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During the annual Civil War re-enactment on Saturday at Fort Stevens State Park, David Pero, publisher and editor of The Daily Astorian, stands with the 4th Texas Regiment.

pouch; a belt with a "CS" buckle; a haversack to carry rations and other personal items; and a pair of brogans. The brogans are ankle-high hard leather boots with hard leather slick soles. In the Civil War days, the leather soles wore out quickly, and Confederate soldiers often found themselves marching into battle barefoot. I later noticed some of the re-enactors did just that. I also had a choice between the "forage" hat, which was the traditional gray-styled short-bill cap that many soldiers were issued, or a "slouch" hat, which were soft with wide brims that many soldiers brought from home. I chose the slouch hat.

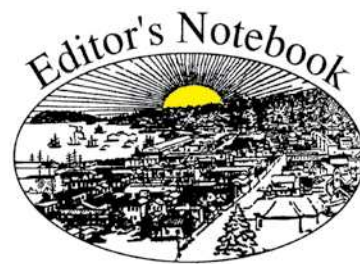
Preparations

Saturday morning I showed up early and was issued a loaner mus-

ket — an 1853 .58-caliber Enfield. I was also shown how to roll my own black-powder cartridges and was given percussion caps that are used to set off the black powder in the musket. Fellow re-enactors helped me finish getting ready for inspection, the traditional start of the day after revelry and breakfast.

I was shown how to salute and how to stand at attention with my musket as Col. Stanovich, Major Matt Bishop, and several other officers passed down our gray line. All could tell I was enjoying the day.

Then it was on to drill, where I was introduced to the regiment's formations and marches along with the commands of how to carry my musket in the various formations. We drilled with other regiments,



The event featured 556 re-enactors including Union and Confederate soldiers.

including several who joined from a re-enactors' council in Washington. It was tough to keep up with the veterans in the maneuvers, but they all helped and encouraged me as I slowly learned.

After drill, we headed back to camp and prepared for the upcoming public battle. Everyone drank water, rolled more cartridges and made sure our uniforms were complete and our muskets were clean. I was shown how to load and fire my musket by ripping open a cartridge and letting the black powder fall into it. In the Civil War, soldiers would also insert a Minié ball bullet into the musket and use the weapon's ramrod to force it down into the powder before putting on the cap, aiming and firing. But for safety in the re-enactment, ramrods are never used and there are absolutely no projectiles allowed in the muskets or cannons.

The battles

The trumpet sounded, the regiments formed. The colonel told us in a flashy Southern style that we were off to battle and to make our loved ones proud. It would be a glorious day, he shouted to the assembled regiments. We marched to the sound of the booming cannons and entered the battlefield.

Yankee re-enactors were across the way. We marched toward them in our battle line and saw the smoke puffs and heard the loud pops from their muskets. We responded with

several savage volleys of our own. Our assault moved quickly forward, forcing the Yankees to retreat. At that point I saw a musket aiming for me and I went down with a pretend wound. Our medical officer, C.B. Zohn, was quick to reach me and bandaged my arm with a cloth with a red stain on it. Minutes later I rejoined the battle in enough time to see our victory.

A lone trumpet played taps. We stood and saluted the crowd, Yankees and Confederates alike, and turned away to fire a volley in appreciation. With smiles we returned to camp for lunch and interacted with the public. There were also calvary and artillery demonstrations and the civilian camp was bustling with activity that ranged from a ladies tea to shopkeepers peddling their wares. We used a little of the time to rest before the afternoon battle.

In the afternoon, the tide turned. Confederate regiments assembled and marched into an ambush with a crossfire. Again we fired volleys of black powder at the Yankees but their fierce fire from two sides was too much. We retreated. As we did, we were outflanked and that was where I "died" on the battlefield with most of the rest of our troops. The Yankees won a clear victory.

Shoutouts

Afterward, I learned how to thoroughly clean the musket and turned in my uniform before saying goodbye to the new friends I made. Special shoutouts go to veteran re-enactors Ryan McGee, Mike Schroder, Mike Lewis, Joe and Chris Burns, Nate and Nick Woods, Tim and Nick Rentz and Troy Haslem, who were all beside and behind me in our formations and helped me at every turn.

My takeaways from the event were how hard the re-enactors work to make it as authentic as safely possible, and how much it made me think of what Civil War life was really like. The soldiers who fought that war were incredibly brave, fighting in a style that almost ensured casualties and death. They fought gallantly and without hesitation for their beliefs and for their honor.

Earlier in the day Col. Stanovich said it would be "a glorious day." Yes, Jim, it wholeheartedly was.



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