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Family joins husband in history lesson

By George Robinson

There he sat, solemnly, alone on a flat wooden wagon, slowly carving out his wooden pipe and cleaning his weapons in the hard grass and the hot high sun.

With his musket nearby, John Piland looked as though he was ready to plow a farm field. His black-rimmed hat, his blue overalls with black suspenders, this wasn't the look of a soldier, yet he is a sergeant in Uncle Sam's army in a time before anyone knew who Uncle Sam was.

"I got here last night and I've been preparing for battle for two days now," he said. "This is what it's all about."

Piland's face looked rugged enough, his expressions covered by the thick silver mustache that overlapped his lips and the not-quite-grown-in beard that gave him that 5 o'clock shadow.

For 17 years Piland has prepared and fought in some of this country's biggest battles — Gettysburg, Perryville, Spring Hill and the Wilderness campaign — these are some in which he has fought and sometimes, died.

Piland isn't 150 years old nor, has he been reincarnated. The 43-year-old Johnson City, Ill. native has been a Civil War reenactor since 1980, and he's been a lover of the Civil War since he was a kid.

"All the other kids were into the World War I and World War II toys," he said. "I had a Civil War set. They thought I was crazy. Some of them didn't even know what a Civil War was. I just love that period. It totally engrosses my play time."

Unlike some reenactors, the make-shift battles don't consume Piland to the point where he's whisked off in time, mentally, to 1862.

"I think if I did that, I wouldn't come back," he said. "That would be scary wouldn't it?"

This battle is small to Piland, considering the untold number of battles he's been in the 17 years he's participated. This was the Battle of the Barren, held Oct. 3-5 at Baker Hill in Bowling Green, Ky.

Although there was no official Battle for the Barren, a river northeast of Bowling Green, Kentucky's history in the Civil War was important in that it was a region wanted by both Union and Confederate armies. The state's major battle took place 150 miles northeast in Perryville.

Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston was the region's commanding officer controlling the Appalachian Mountains and choosing Bowling Green as his headquarters in September of 1861. By February of 1862, Union troops had surrounded Bowling Green and, under General Ulysses Grant, they forced out the Confederate army.

"That's what I represent," Piland said. "I'm a Union soldier."

Ironically, Piland's group is Company C of the 7th Tennessee Calvary, a Confederate regiment, but because of the scarcity of reenactors who want to be Union troops, Piland and his unit agreed to be Yankees for this battle.

"Nobody ever wants to put on the blue coats," Piland said. "If I were in New York, nobody would want to put on the gray coats. It's all..."
PRSSA meeting with speaker

Interested in public relations agency work? Would you like to find out more about the "real world" of public relations?

Then don't miss PRSSA's next meeting Thursday, October 16 at 6:30p.m. in Gordon Wilson room 307.

Eric Davis, a Western graduate who works for McNeilly, Pigott and Fox agency in Nashville, will be here to speak about his experiences in public relations agency work.

Holly Billingsly, program director for PRSSA, says that those attending the meeting are in for a real treat.

"Eric Davis is a very entertaining speaker," says Billingsly. "He puts on a great presentation."

Everyone is welcome to attend the meeting.

Ad Club News

On Tuesday, October 21, we will be touring Keller Crescent, the largest advertising agency in Evansville, IN.

Plan to meet in front of The Herald at 7:45 a.m. to depart.

The actual tour will take place from 10 a.m. to noon and we will then have lunch before returning.

Ad Club members will be given first priority, but if there are enough opening, anyone is welcome.

The sign-up sheet is located outside the Ad Lab, 314 GW.

For more information, call the Ad Lab noon to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

History lesson

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about what region you're in."

Throughout Piland's travels, he never endured a warm or cold night's sleep alone, at least not for the past 15 years.

Sitting on that flat wagon, stuffing tobacco in his pipe, Piland and his guest were greeted by a young, southern belle and her younger brother.

"Daddy, mom wants to know where you put our shirts," she said.

Piland brings along his 9-year-old daughter, Amy, his 5-year-old son, Cole and his wife Carol, whose traditional long-sleeved dress sweeps out from the waist down. This isn't home, but they don't mind.

"I miss the air conditioning sometimes," Amy said. "And sometimes it gets boring, but I just play with my baby dolls or find something to do."

Walking into their tent is like stepping into a time machine and being transported back to the days of hot cotton clothing, small cooking pans and period rugs and furniture.

"See this pan? I've cooked, ate and even washed my face in this old thing," John said. "This was the size that most of the soldiers used then. I was the first in my company to get one."

This day was also a first, of sorts, for another Piland family member, John's 16-year-old nephew, Eddie, followed his uncle to experience and participate in the festivities.

"History is one of my favorite subjects," Eddie said. "I was tired of hearing everybody talk about how fun it is. I wanted to go to one myself."

Although the actual battle was small, consisting of only a few dozen soldiers, the smoke-filled air, fading to expose the soldiers firing at one another, had a lasting effect on Eddie.

"I don't know how big these things are supposed to be, but that was great," he said. "It made me feel like I was really there. Just for a moment I closed my eyes and when I opened them I felt and believed it was 1860—something."

Under the cannon's blast, John and his unit dropped as dead soldiers do. Then they got up to battle again.

"When we get out here and start battling we shut out the audience," John said. "We sometimes forget there is an audience and we say things that might shock a blue-haired old lady."

It's evident that Piland and his Civil War comrades have a love and respect for the period unlike any other time or any other war.

"I love the rattle of musketry," he said, "a continuous roar, and the air fills with smoke. I love that. I love smelling that thick smoke and hearing the laughter before and afterward. It's truly the din of battle."