

Old Hickory

Old Hickory Association Newsletter



Chronicle

May / June 2010

30th IDV of WWII Reunion Is A Wonderful Time!



The 30th Infantry Division Veterans of WWII held their annual reunion in Nashville, TN on March 4 – 7, 2010. There were six stalwart and handsome Old Hickory men who were in attendance who helped to set up the display, man the bar and provided a color guard. Those "Iron Six" OHA Members attending were: Neil Trivette, Walt Sowinski, Ken Hyatt, Ray Oakes, Clint Yarbrough and Paul Gill.

The display room this time was small but still afforded adequate space to show our usual array of WWII items. The hospitality suite was "next door" in a separate larger well lighted room sporting round tables



with ample chairs for the guests to sit in. With the sounds of Glenn Miller drifting in, the hospitality suite was always crowded and Walt, Ken, Neil and Hash made sure no one went away thirsty. Emma Potter presented the "bar crew" with liters of Pepsi, a can of bean dip and boxes of "donut holes" so her boys and their guests wouldn't go hungry... thank you!



It was great to visit with some old friends like Mr. & Mrs. Frank Towers, Mr. & Mrs. Francis Currey, Buster Simmons, the Sibley family, Emma Potter, Bill Casey and to make new some friends like Mike Pachuta, 119th Inf. Reg., G Company or Marion Sanford 30th Recon whose comment was, "My job was to find the Krauts, start a fight with them

and then get out of the way so the regular division boys could finish the fight." He also lauded the bar guys for being able to make a really tasty bourbon manhattan which he enjoyed more than once! Also in attendance was Matt Rozell, an upstate New York high school teacher who with his students developed a WWII



oral history website as part of a school project. This incredible online project was integral to finding the Holocaust survivors who've attended these reunions.



On Saturday evening, the banquet room was resplendent with the veterans, their families and guests. Aply emceed by Frank Towers, the evening progressed without a hitch. Micha Tomkiewicz, a Holocaust survivor, was one of the guest speakers along with General Bob Robinson who spoke about attending the reunion to honor the memory of his father, Pfc. W.A. Robinson, 120th IR, 30th Infantry Division. Two of the guests, one from Holland and one from Belgium also delivered short thank you talks to the assembled attendees. One of the

most touching and appreciated moments of the evening banquet was the Tommy Oglesby eulogy delivered by Buster Simmons. Buster was very complimentary of Tommy's military service, the dedication Tommy had for the Veterans Association (continued on next page)

and Buster made sure we all knew what a great loss Tommy's passing was to this country. All in all, the pervasive tenor of the evening was quite happy with guests taking many pictures of the veterans, their guests and the OHA Color Guard. The 1945 Holocaust survivors were presented with Certificates of Honorary Membership in the 30th Infantry Division Veterans of WWII group by Frank Towers and Buster Simmons to the tumultuous applause of the attendees.



Paul Gill, Clint Yarbrough , Neil Trivete and Walt Sowinski stole away from their reunion duties to pay a visit to Mr. J.C.Maxey at his home in Tullahoma which was about 50 miles away. Maxey looked really good although he did allow that he's had some medical troubles which have kept him from attending the reunions. He is hoping to attend the Raleigh reunion in August so make sure ya'll are there to greet him.

The photo (shown above) of Buster was NOT taken at this reunion but is emblematic of how Buster "got on" with all the pretty young hotel staff women who assisted us in the reunion organizing, setup and event planning. I have to admit that Buster has a good thing going with all these pretty women and all of us were and are really, really jealous! Oh well, on to more info... It was decided that next year's reunion of The 30th Infantry Division Veterans of WWII will be at the same Holiday Inn in Nashville... sooooo, mark your calendars now so you can see Buster in action!

Tennessee Reunion Unites Holocaust Survivors With Their 30th Infantry Division Liberators!



Nearly 65 years ago a group of American soldiers advancing through Germany came upon a train loaded with 2,500 starving Jewish prisoners. Pictured left, is Micha Tomkiewicz talking with Medal of Honor recipient Francis S. Currey whose WWII service with the 30th Infantry Division is well known and appreciated by all of the "Old Hickory" family. For Frank Towers, who was serving as the liaison officer in the 30th Infantry Division, know as "Old Hickory" the day he organized a convoy to take those people to freedom was just another day in the war. But several years ago, some of the Holocaust survivors, who were only children at the time, began contacting their liberators through the Internet.

That was the beginning of a new focus at the 30th Infantry Division's annual reunion, with survivors joining the veterans and telling their stories. At this year's reunion in Nashville, Towers was reunited with four of the people he rescued from that train. "We had read in Stars and Stripes about Jewish slave labor camps, but this was the first group we encountered," the 92-year-old said in an interview at the reunion on Friday. "It was really beyond our imagination that any sector of the human race could do to these people what had happened." Micha Tomkiewicz is now 70 and a professor of physics and environmental studies at Brooklyn College in New York City. He was only 5 years old on April 13, 1945, when he was liberated.

His memories of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, where he had been held until the Nazis tried to evacuate him and the others to prevent their liberation, are few. One memory is of the rats and the time he woke up the whole barracks screaming that they were eating him. Although he knew he had been liberated by the American Army, he said, "throughout my life, they were always an abstract concept. Now suddenly they've got shape, voice, life." George Somjen, now 80 and a retired professor of neurophysiology at Duke University, was 15 at the time and remembers it better. "We were, of course, terribly happy," he said, "but in that extremely emaciated state (I had lost 30 to 40 percent of my body weight), one has a very limited emotional scale. One doesn't feel much except, 'I am hungry.' 'I am thirsty.' 'I hurt.' "

A few years ago he read a newspaper article that featured a fellow survivor and came to hear of the reunions. On Friday, he recalled a 1997 trip to Germany where he revisited the town of Hillersleben, where the Americans first housed the survivors after they were taken from the train. His voice cracked as he told the group that his father, who had been with him on the train, died there, several days after liberation. Tomkiewicz, Somjen and the other survivors probably would never have met their liberators if it hadn't been for a high school history project. Several years ago, Hudson Falls (N.Y.) High School history teacher Matthew Rozell asked his students to collect the oral histories of local World War II veterans. Since those stories and pictures first went on the Internet, about 100 survivors who were on the train near Magdeburg and now live all over the world have contacted him as well as Frank Towers. "It's immensely satisfying to know that 65 years ago I had some part to play in the liberation ... of these people and in setting them up on the road to a new life," Towers said.

OHA Unit Event News

"Price of Freedom Museum" Event - June 4 - 5 - This is a Maximum OHA Effort: Don Shupe reports that "The Price of Freedom Museum" plans to make their June and November events annual events. On June 5th the Price of Freedom Museum will be doing a combined display with the Carolina Military Vehicle Preservation Association vehicle rally and will be offering overnight camping Friday and



Saturday with a cookout Saturday night. The plan is for the OHA to do exactly what we did this last June 2009 and then to do it again in November. The CMVPA (Carolina Military Vehicle Preservation Association) is planning on incorporating their first state wide annual meeting with the June Price of Freedom Museum event. This promises to be a huge event and should bring in a large number of vehicles from all era's. Event details continue to be created as the the display committee for the Museum meets and moves to finalize all the specifics of the combined event. This is a great venue for the OHA so let's make it a maximum effort event. All of you who'd like to attend this event need to contact Don Shupe and he will provide any and all the up to date info or answer any questions you may have. So, gomer, mark your calendars to be there...**Price of Freedom Museum CMVPA Display Event-June 4th & 5th, Contact: Don Shupe.**

On Veterans Day, A Salute To A Great American



Frank Deegan salutes during the American national anthem at a ceremony marking the liberation of Belgium in Fouron le Comte, Belgium, on Sept. 6. Deegan, who served with the 30th Infantry Division, was named an honorary citizen of the town for wounds he received during the liberation Sept. 12, 1944. On **Veterans Day**, we pause to remember the service of those who defend and have protected our freedoms.

Over the last 22 years, I've written dozens of stories and interviewed as many veterans who've battled on beaches and across deserts in the name of their nation. This space today is reserved for someone else -- one whose story only recently has snapped into focus for me. Sometimes, you find the best stories in the unlikeliest of places. Like right under your nose. And it's funny how a guy can collect and recount old war tales year after year, yet not really know the full story of a great American hero who's in the branches of his own family tree.

That's how it was for me. Until now. There are two **James Franklin Deegans** in my family. One of us is a hero, and it ain't me. The guy pictured here? Well, that's another story. He was 19 when he landed at Normandy Beach, a week or so after the great D-Day invasion. World War II, the Battle of the Bulge and the Germans tried like hell over the next few months to take him out. The tough old bird kept getting up, though, and thrust back into action. Frank Deegan, of Eagleville, Pa., was a private first class machine gunner with the U.S. Army's **30th Infantry Division** long before he became my uncle, even long before he raised a family of his own. He was one of the lucky ones during the battle of Mortain in France. He survived, but was wounded in the leg. By the time he got patched up and shipped back to the front, his was the first infantry division to march into Belgium.

In the village of Fouron le Comte, he survived another brush with death. As he set up his machine gun to draw fire from a heavy German gun stationed at a crossroads, a G.I. fired on the German artillery. The resultant burst of German thunder blew off the G.I.'s leg and sent heavy shrapnel into Deegan's back and neck. Sixty-five years later, the dent in his neck is a testament to the chaos of that day.

By the time he returned to the battlefield, the 30th Infantry Division's losses and triumphs had mounted. The unit steamed into Belgium's picturesque Ambleve Valley and engaged in fierce battle at the town of Stoumont. Just a few days before Christmas in 1944 and not long after Stoumont, the fates tested Deegan again. He took fire while on patrol, suffering a bullet wound in the leg that shattered his femur and severed his sciatic nerve. His outfit fell back and Deegan rolled into a ditch, alone with only a .45-caliber sidearm. Fearful of dressing his wounds and risking capture, he laid in the ditch and bled. Then everything went black. When he came to, a priest hovered over his stretcher, administering last rites. He was leaving the front -- and maybe more -- for good.

Back home in Bridgeport, Pa., the Western Union man rapped on the door of the family's cramped rowhome and handed a telegram to Frank's kid brother, Bob -- my dad. **"Your brother was killed,"** said the courier. I'm not certain how the family came to learn that the telegram was in error, other than the letter they had received from Frank days earlier from a hospital in England. I can only imagine the confusion. But three **Purple Hearts** and a **Bronze Star** later, Frank Deegan was headed home.

As best I can tell, he spoke little of his service. Most of the details here were unknown to me until recently. When I asked his brother Jack if he talked much about the war, Jack couldn't recall knowing a whole bunch until the last few years. **"I do remember one day (as a child) I was watching him shave and he cut his chin,"** Jack said. **"I called it to his attention and he said, 'That's nothing. You should have seen this bleed,' pointing to his neck. That was probably the last time he ever referred to his service time."** So he came home and got on with his life, eventually marrying and starting a family. He was not unlike so many of his band of brothers, who preserved democracy in Europe then went home to the States in pursuit of a normal life. Today he's recently widowed, with three children and a pack of grandkids. His wife, Philomena, died not long ago, a few days upon his return home from the trip of a life time.

Uncle Frank returned to Belgium in September, where he was feted as the returning hero that he indeed was. He visited the spots where he was wounded. He stood over the graves of comrades. At 84, he sat in a Belgian schoolroom and answered the questions of schoolchildren whose freedom he delivered. Mayors honored him, towns awarded him honorary citizenship and all that time Frank was carrying the scars that he'd received a life time ago.

When he and his family joined in a convoy of World War II re-enactors, a soldier in the front seat wheeled around when he learned he was transporting the daughter and granddaughter of Frank Deegan. **"The Frank Deegan?"** he asked incredulously. And the girls giggled. I'm not sure what's more remarkable. That a 19-year-old kid would sacrifice everything 6,000 miles from home for his country. Or that he'd live to talk about it, and choose not to. Either way, it makes me proud to have his name. *Article written by Jim Deegan*

743rd Tank Battalion Veteran Remembers D-Day



The painful events of D-Day are apparent in the eyes of George Clendenen as he recalls the bloody D-Day invasion. "Until recently I kept it all behind me and didn't talk much about it," said Clendenen, who will celebrate his 91st birthday on May 23. George Clendenen, the father of three, now has grandchildren and great-grandchildren who want to hear about his experiences in World War II. Because he feels it is important to educate the younger generation, he now tells some of the details of the war.

Clendenen was part of the 743rd Tank Battalion that led the assault on Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944. He was a commander of the third tank to hit the shore. "There were two battalions of us," he said. "Only eight tanks made it to shore out of the 30 that made up those battalions. We lost a whole battalion but somehow, by the grace of God, I made it ashore." I'm not ashamed to say I was scared to death like everyone else.



However, there are those who realize Clendenen's fear never overshadowed his courage. On Wednesday afternoon, a group from VFW Post 5578 showed up at his Racine home to present him with a plaque and thank him for outstanding service to his country and his community. Clendenen grew up in Racine and attended Sherman High School. He was working for DuPont in Belle as a pipe insulator when Pearl Harbor was attacked December 7, 1941. A chilling thought came over him that an attack like that could occur anywhere in this country.



Clendenen was drafted into the Army when he was 22. He had been married for only a short time to Lillian, now his wife of 68 years. Following basic training at Fort Knox, KY, his 743rd Tank Battalion was stationed near Yuma, Ariz. They were given a top-secret mission on U.S. soil to furnish military equipment for a Hollywood picture. It required 15 days in the Mojave Desert in California where Clendenen drove a M3 tank that was a prop for the 1943 Humphrey Bogart film, "Sahara." Clendenen can be seen in the black and white photo...he's the third man from the left, just near Humphrey Bogart. The tank he drove was not similar to the Sherman he would drive a year later to storm the beaches in France.



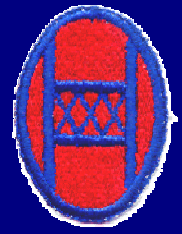
"They designed these floating tanks and the unit I was in was assigned to operate them," he said. Initially, the invasion was set for June 5 but Allied Commanding General Dwight Eisenhower deemed the weather too rough and it was delayed one day. On June 5, Clendenen received a Western Union telegram informing him of the birth of his son, James, on May 11, 1944. With thoughts of a wife and new baby at home, he continued on his mission. Only a few of the 743rd tanks made it to the shore as many of the 743rd tank crews were swamped by the rough seas and drowned in the frigid waters of the English Channel. "They declared the sunken tanks a tomb and just left them there," he said. "I was one of the lucky ones not to swamp and my tank was the third tank to make it onto the beachhead." We led the way for the infantry as German machine-gun fire rained down relentlessly from up above. American forces suffered 2,400 casualties on Omaha Beach. Remembering that day brings a far away look in his eyes and a trailing voice that reveals it still remains too much to bear. Clendenen held the rank of Staff Sergeant but when he learned that his first son had been born he requested a demotion to Buck Sergeant so that his family would qualify for an allotment, he said. Driving the tank and standing for such long periods took a toll on Clendenen's knees and drained his stamina. Many months later, he would be shipped to a hospital in France and then discharged from the Army shortly before the war ended in May, 1945.



He saw his son for the first time when the boy was 16 months old. "It thrilled me to death in more ways than one," he said. "I can't put it into words." He and his wife later had two more children, Bill and Sharon. Pictures of children and grandchildren surround their home along with a glass-covered case holding Clendenen's decorations. He continued to work at DuPont until retirement in 1971. In 1973, he helped start the Racine Volunteer Fire Department where he has served as a fireman as well as assistant chief. Life went on as he put war days behind him and tried to block out painful memories. However, love for his grandchildren and great grandchildren proved a powerful incentive for him to unveil the past.



Old Hickory Loses Three Dear Friends



Sam F. Gaziano: A World War II veteran of the famed 30th Infantry Division, known as "Old Hickory," was a resident of Arlington Heights, formerly of Waukegan, passed away in mid January of 2010. Sam retired with the rank of Major from the U.S. Army after 25 years of service and then served as a history teacher at Warren High School in Gurnee. He was also an active member of, as well as a Past President of, the 30th Infantry Division Association. Sam was a longtime parishioner of St. Anastasia Parish in Waukegan and was an active resident of the Moorings for seven years. Sam was the beloved husband



of the late Rose Gaziano; loving father of Joseph (Mary) Gaziano, Francis (Lynn) Gaziano, Mary Crais and Margaret (David) Weeks; a proud grandfather of fourteen and great-grandfather of seven. Sam's Funeral Mass was held on January 20th, at St. Cecilia Church in Mount Prospect, IL. Sam's interment was at Fort Sheridan Cemetery. Old Hickory.



Theophilus Ira "Flip" Pitts: A World War II veteran died February 16, 2010. Flip attended West End High School and entered military service in 1940. He spent most of his military career with the 30th Infantry Division, known as "Old Hickory," After his discharge in 1945, Flip joined the Tennessee National Guard where he served until his retirement in 1968. When he returned to Nashville in 1945, Flip worked for Red Ace Petroleum Company until he started his own business, The Salvage Center, and later, Flip Pitts Carpet Warehouse. He was a former member of St. Paul Southern Methodist Church, member of West End United Methodist Church, American Legion, West Nashville Kiwanis Club, West Nashville Moose, and West End High Lunch Group. Survived by his wife, Nancy Lee Perkins Pitts; daughters, Susan Pitts Dale, Neill Pitts, Ellen Pitts Mayo (John), Karen (K.K.) Pitts Rainey (Jack), all of Nashville and Polly Pitts Cullen of Port Orange, FL. seven grandchildren, two nieces and one nephew. A Memorial service was conducted by Dr. Ronald R. Carrier and Rev. John Feldhacker. A graveside military service was held on February 18th at Mt. Olivet Cemetery. Old Hickory.



Sidney Odelson: A 20-year resident of Rancho Bernardo passed away peacefully with his family by his side on January 18, 2010. Sid was born in Chicago, Illinois, was one of 14 children -11 brothers and 3 sisters, and lived in Chicago until he retired. Sid served in the U.S. Army's 30th Division Infantry Division as a Staff Sergeant during World War II, landing on Omaha Beach and walking across France to Germany. He was very proud of his service and he attended the 30th Infantry Division Association "Old Hickory" reunions in California and North Carolina. He was a proud member of the Greatest Generation, including a career as a tradesman and a small business owner. He also enjoyed talking about his military experiences to high school classes throughout San Diego. Sid had a gregarious personality and enjoyed meeting and talking to everyone and anyone. In recent years, he was a regular at the 24 Hour Fitness facilities. He and his wife, Sylvia, were also very active at the Joslyn Senior Center in Rancho Bernardo, helping to start and run the center for many years. Sidney is survived by his loving wife, Sylvia, sons Robert and David, daughters-in-law, Susan and Shelley, three grandchildren, a brother and sister. A funeral service was held for Sidney at Temple Beth Israel on January 20th and a private memorial service is planned to be held at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery. Old Hickory.



Old Hickory Pin Up

May

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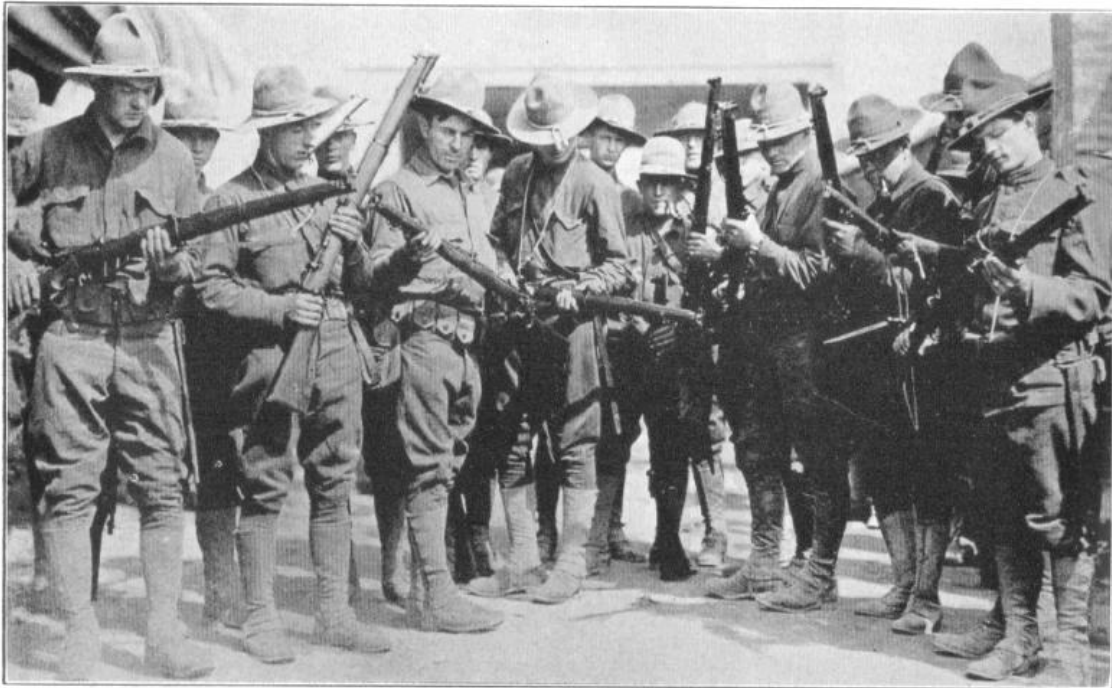
June

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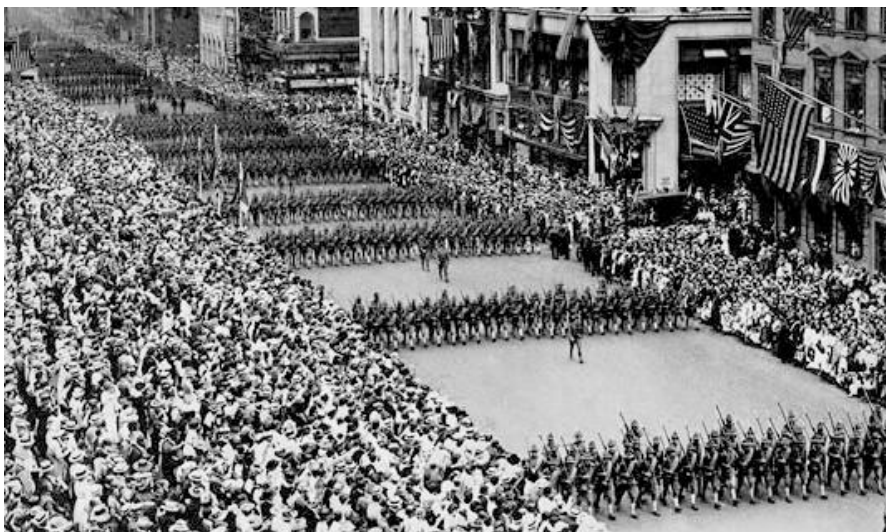
FAMOUS WWI PHOTO DEBUNKED



A group of 30th Division men at Calais, France, inspecting British rifles given them in exchange for their Springfield model.

I daresay that most of us have seen this photo, which is reproduced in the official history of the Thirtieth Division in the World War (I) and other publications. The above illustration is taken from the photo pages between page 161 and 162 of the official history. It specifically identifies the photo as being of 30th Division soldiers. Regrettably, that isn't true. The actual documentation on this photo as it is preserved in the Signal Corps Archives is that they are soldiers of Company K, 111th Infantry, 28th Division. It's easy to see how someone could misidentify this photo, which I've also seen listed as men of the 27th Division, since the II Corps was comprised of those two divisions and the SMLE is the weapon that they were issued and what they used in combat during the Great War.

Many troops trained with the British and were armed with British weapons for temporary periods, or simply for familiarization with Allied forces equipment. Several other units were originally tasked to serve with the British before General Pershing settled on loaning them the 27th and 30th Divisions for the duration.



The caption of the above photo is also incorrect in that not all 30th Division troops were armed with the M1903 Springfield when they deployed to Europe.

Some had the M1917 when they got off the boats and received them back to use in the parades when they got back home after the Armistice. In historical research, you can't always believe what you see . even in a photo!

Article submitted by Jay Callaham.



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Displays, 30th ID History –TBD

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30th Brigade Welcome Home Event A Fantastic Success!

On April 11, our returning 30th Brigade pals were honored and received a tremendous reception from all of the attendees! The RBC Center Brigade Welcome Home Event really “rocked.” The welcome home ceremony was at times very touching, especially when their Brigade buddies who were killed while deployed were specifically named and individually honored. All in all, the majority of the program was taken on in a very positive and joyous celebration mode. The OHA can be very proud of the fabulous WWI & WWII militaria display that was erected by Jay Callaham, Neil Trivette, Pat Grogan, and Dan Jutson along with the able assistance of FJ Hale, Ken Hyatt, and Walt Sowinski. Special mention goes to the superb escort duty of Mike Owens and Matt Koonts who did a great job in the Welcome Home Honor Guard, the WWII jeep display provided by Chuck and Char Eatmon and the WWII correspondent and photographic services provided by Shell Hyatt. The OHA team received numerous thank you's from the NCNG HQ planning staff, from the Brigade Commanders, and from our WWII pals George Kennedy, Mr. King, Ed Middleton and Frank Deegan. The OHA team expended a lot of time and energy to make this a truly glorious Welcome Home event for our Brigade buddies (and our 30th IDA pals) and it can be truthfully reported that all of our efforts resulted in a “mission accomplished!” Old Hickory!



Upcoming Events

May 23 - 24th 2010

Kings Mountain

Timeline of the U.S. Soldier

Contact: Ron Crawley

May 29, 2010

Memorial Day????

State Capitol Grounds

Raleigh, NC

Contact: TBD

June 5, 2010

OHA Annual Meeting

Price of Freedom Event

Salisbury, NC

Contact: Walt Sowinski

June 4 - 5, 2010

Price of Freedom Event

Salisbury, NC

Contact: Don Shupe

July 4th 2010

Fourth of July????

State Capitol Grounds

Raleigh, NC

Contact: TBD

July 4th 2010

Fourth of July Parade

Faith, NC

Contact: Don Shupe

August 19 - 23 2010

30th IDA National Reunion

Ramada Inn

Raleigh, NC

Contact: Walt Sowinski