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Submitted photo World War II re-enactors will stage several mock battles during World War II Weekend, which will be held April 24-26 at Jefferson Barracks Park.

World War II re-enactors remind public of veterans' sacrifices

By [Julie Randle](#)

Kevin Owens laces up his combat boots, buttons up his uniform, straps on his helmet and looks out at the battlefield.

Members of his Second Ranger Battalion of St. Louis wait in Jefferson Barracks Park, where they will re-enact a battle scene straight from World War II Europe.

Owens, the president of the battalion, has been fighting mock battles for four years now. A firefighter for a South County fire department - he declined to say which one - Owens was drawn to re-enacting after learning about the exploits of Ranger battalions during the war.

"I've always had a fascination with military history and the army," Owens said.

Hearing stories from older people in the war just fascinated me," he said. "One of the best ways I could pay them back was to show I remember."

Owens shares many of the same sentiments with his fellow re-enactors.

The re-enactments they put on bring to life the history and role veterans played during World War II

"We do it so the general public can see a glimpse into what those soldiers did and the horror of war," said Owens, who lives in South County.

The group travels across the nation where it stages battles at historical events, veterans reunions and World War II weekends.

For the past 30 years, the organization has taken part in the World War II Weekend at Jefferson Barracks Park. The Rangers, accompanied by more than 300 re-enactors from organizations around the country, will converge April 24-26 on the South County park for this year's event.

Besides reenactments, it will feature weapons demonstrations and a military vehicle display.

"The purpose of World War II Weekend in St. Louis is to let people know what went on during the war," said Kent Stephens.

Stephens is president of the St. Louis Gateway Chapter of Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge, a non-profit group that honors the men involved in the Battle of the Bulge, which they call the greatest battle ever fought by the U.S. Army.

Not only can visitors to the event see equipment, weapons and uniforms from World War II, they can read about the experience of veterans in "Victory Through Valor: A Collection of World War II Memoirs." Members from the Battle of the Bulge group will be on hand to sell their book and autograph it.

Proceeds from the sale will be used to erect a GI statue that the organization wants to display near the monument to the veterans of the Battle of the Bulge. They still need \$15,000 to install it. The organization will display photographs of the statue during the event.

"This will be only statue dedicated to veterans of World War II in the St. Louis area," Stephens said.

The statue will be erected to honor the GIs that "saved freedom throughout the world," said Stewart Piper, chairman of the statue committee.

Owens said events like the World War II Weekend mean a lot to veterans.

"They want us to remember their buddies that died over there and they want everybody to remember that," he said. "People often forget that freedom costs the lives of men. It's there because somebody had to die for it."

Want to go?

What: World War II Weekend

When: 1 to 5 p.m. April 24, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. April 25 and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. April 26

Where: Jefferson Barracks Park

Cost: Free