

KIMMSWICK: Military hardware draws crowd at Rendezvous

Annual event serves as salute to vets

By Kevin Carbery

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Huge military vehicles rattled windows as they tooted around town, but the most impressive figures at the Rendezvous @ Kimmswick to Honor Our Veterans may have been the veterans of World War II who were on hand to tell their stories.

The event, which took place May 24-25, is intended to give recognition to all American military veterans, according to organizer Ray Dawdy.

"We're here to honor our veterans," Dawdy said. "We got a lot of contributions from the business community." "We've got some new stuff this year. The National Guard is here. The Patriot Guard is here. We're happy with our public turnout and the reenactment turnout."

The event featured appearances by the 2nd Ranger Battalion reenactment group, the Military Vehicle Preservation Association and the Railsplitters of Columbia, Mo., reenactment organization. In addition to those in American garb, reenactors were on hand wearing German, English, Italian and Canadian uniforms as well.

Visitors were able to see a tank, a World War II motorcycle and huge military trucks, as well as all kinds of weaponry. In addition, they had the chance to talk to Battle of the Bulge veterans such as Bernie Schwender, 85, and Richard Eggleston, 84, both of St. Louis.

"It's my third year here," Eggleston said. "I wouldn't trade the experience for all the tea in China."

"The people who live here are very nice and treat us well," Schwender said. "It's nice to be remembered and to have kids come talk to us. You get more from when a kid comes over and his parents come over. The kids give you so much satisfaction."

Ryan Owens, 27, of Maplewood, is a reenactor with the 2nd Ranger Battalion. He appreciated participating as a reenactor and getting to talk to people such as Schwender and Eggleston.

"I enjoy seeing the veterans, paying tribute to them," he said. "I love hearing their stories. They'll give you helpful hints.

"One (World War II) veteran told me one trick he would do with his rifle. The Germans would listen for empty clips hitting the ground, then would stand up and fire. The vet told me he'd fire four shots, then toss



ANDREW JANSEN PHOTO Adam Brewer, 9, Afton, looks at .50 caliber ammunition on Steve Smith's World War II era jeep last Sunday during the Rendezvous @ Kimmswick salute to veterans event.



an empty clip on the ground. When the German would pop up to shoot, he'd shoot them."

Bob Flowers of Hillsboro came to Rendezvous @ Kimmswick as a representative of the Patriot Guard Riders, a group that attends military funerals.

"When there is a funeral of a fallen soldier and there's a large motorcycle brigade, that's us,." Flowers said. "If it's a veteran, we're there for them."

He thought the Rendezvous is a great idea.

"It's nice to see the veterans saluted," Flowers said.

Jon Shoop, 54, of Defiance, brought his tank to the festivities.

"I've got three tanks," Shoop said. "I'm part of the 14th Armored recreation group of Louisville, Ky. We have eight of these tanks in the club. We keep them in Louisville, then send them out for events. This one, I just bought last spring in Texas at an estate sale. It's running, but it needs more work. It's a Stuart MSAI. In our Army, it was considered a light tank that was used for scout work. What's unique about it is they were used in all theaters of the war."

Shoop gets a kick out of displaying his tank at events like the Rendezvous.

"It's a total blast," he said. "I love it."

Kimmswick business owners were glad to take part in the event honoring veterans.

"We're losing so many of the World War II veterans," said Ed Schaffer, owner of the Purple Junction. "This is a way to thank all veterans."

"We're definitely going to keep doing it. We've got plans for next year."

Debbie LaBrot, owner of the Bunny Patch, had similar thoughts.

"It's great," she said. "This is our third year. I think it's a nice salute to veterans. It's the least we could do."

"We're selling items to raise money for gasoline for veterans. All the merchants here give in one way or another. It's fun."

Barb Ferguson, 44, of Barnhart, attended with her 5-year-old son, Scotty.

"I told my son about it and said there would be a tank and he wanted to come," she said.

"I liked riding the motorcycle," said Scotty, who sat in a sidecar during a motorcycle ride. "It's fun to see the big trucks."