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# At Gettysburg, a Battle of History vs. Modernity

By JON HURDLE

GETTYSBURG, Pa. — Like thousands of other re-enactors, Eric Mueller honors the sacrifices of soldiers in the Civil War by going to great lengths to live as they did — sleeping beneath a canvas sheet suspended on wooden posts, eatinghardtack and salt pork, carrying 60 rounds of ammunition in a cartridge box and a backpack, and marching long distances in heavy woolen tunics.

But in the interests of safety and perhaps a little comfort, Mr. Mueller, 40, allows modest divergences from the 19th-century soldier's life.

Last week, for example, Mr. Mueller packed in his knapsack two sweet potatoes and two small onions, foods that he conceded may not have been in season in southern Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863, and so would not have been available to Civil War troops even if they had tried to forage them from nearby farms.

Still, he subjected himself to discomforts like not washing for a week and squeezing his six-foot frame into a 5-foot-8-inch-long tent that he shared with another re-enactor. Mr. Mueller, a civil servant from Hawaii, said he stayed “reasonably dry” during four nights of camping out on Cemetery Ridge in the heart of the Gettysburg battlefield.

Minute attention to detail is a source of pride, and sometimes controversy, among Civil War re-enactors, at least 10,000 of whom gathered in Gettysburg from the Fourth of July through Sunday to mark 150 years since Union troops won the decisive battle that turned the war in the North's favor.

Some re-enactors — known as “hardcores” or “campaigners” — eschew any trace of modernity in their quest for authenticity. Others — often known as “mainstreamers” — participate in re-enactments as a hobby and sometimes feel shunned for a lack of commitment to historical precision.

“There are some hardcores that really look down on mainstream re-enactors,” said Jennifer Haines, 65, a retired nurse who played the role of major in the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. “They don't feel that we are presenting history as it should be.”

Some hardcores believe it is not appropriate for women and children to participate in recreations of 19th-century Army life because they were not part of the real thing. “Having women and children in the Army would not be accurate,” said Doug Dobbs, a high school history teacher from Hagerstown, Md.

Ms. Haines had come to Gettysburg with her daughter and son-in-law and three granddaughters, all of whom have their historical functions, she said from outside her tent.

For Mr. Dobbs, 59, being faithful to the cause meant spending a week marching 120 miles from Chantilly, Va., to Gettysburg, arriving at the battlefield at 4 p.m. on July 2, as the 15th New Jersey Company E did exactly 150 years earlier.

He and three companions, all dressed in the heavy wool coats and breeches of the Union army, marched 37 miles on the final day of their trip, emulating their forebears, including Mr. Dobbs’s great-great-grandfather James Dow, a private in the company.

Despite his loyalty to the past, even Mr. Dobbs made concessions to modernity during the grueling march by accepting offers of pizza and by walking on roads that did not exist in 1863. And he said that period clothing did not help in the summer heat. “It would have been easier in shorts and a T-shirt,” he said.

Mr. Dobbs said that his zeal has led other re-enactors to brand him a “hardcore” but that he dislikes the term because it suggests he looks down on those who take a less rigorous approach.

Adam Lipke, 37, a re-enactor who shared a tent with Mr. Mueller, wore a blue shirt that he had made himself in the style of the 1860s, but he said that he had chosen to save time by using a sewing machine to stitch, a technique that he said would be rejected by more zealous re-enactors.

Still, Mr. Lipke, a city worker in Honolulu, said he had spent about \$120 on a replica soldier’s hat, complete with hand stitching and a re-creation of the original label. “This is the most authentic piece I have,” he said.

Walter Hilderman III, 64, a retired police officer from Eutawville, S.C., acknowledged some tension between re-enactment groups, but said there was room in the movement for all persuasions.

Mr. Hilderman, who has been attending re-enactment events for 50 years, including the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, said he has no plans to stop.

“We are all historians,” he said. “We love this and we are going to keep doing it as long as we can walk in a straight line.”



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