

# The GATEWAY Wing

Vol. 14, No. 5

May 2011



Showing  
civic  
leaders  
the  
ropes

## Living history

# 932nd member serves U.S. in the past and present

**By Tech. Sgt. Gerald Sonnenberg  
932nd AW Public Affairs**

It's nothing new for historical re-enactors from around the world to assemble at various times each year to momentarily bring events and people of the past back to life. However, 2011 is different in that April 12 marked the 150th anniversary, or sesquicentennial, of the Confederacy firing upon the United States' Fort Sumter, S.C., beginning the bloodiest period in American history... America's Civil War.

Over the next four years, as the 150th anniversary dates of significant battles and events occur, thousands of re-enactors will portray soldiers and civilians from both the North and South. They will come together to battle each other wearing period clothing and singing period songs, not to celebrate the bloody events from 1861-1865 that claimed more than 600,000 lives; but to share their love of history and remember the people and places that helped create the United States of today.

Since 1996, Tech. Sgt. Charles Prather has been part of the boys in blue portraying a soldier in the Union's 17th Missouri Infantry.

A medical technician with the 932nd Medical Squadron, the former Navy Corpsman and Air National Guardsman joined the 932nd Airlift Wing in 2006. In 2010, he deployed to Balad, Iraq, for a six-month tour with the 332nd Medical Group of the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing. Sergeant



Prather loves history, so being assigned to a unit historically linked to the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II was a plus for him.

Back home, the St. Louis native and civilian phlebotomist works in a local hospital and spends several days per year deploying to the past. On those days, he dons his blue wool uniform, straps on his leather gear and eats the same type of food Civil War soldiers ate like hardtack, and fires the same type of single shot, muzzle-loading Enfield rifle of the time.

"I got into re-enacting because of my love for military history," he said.

The unit he belongs to is called the Turner Brigade, which refers to the members of the German Turner Society or "turnverein" in St. Louis at the time of the Civil War. Turners taught



(Above) Tech. Sgt. Charles Prather after his most recent re-enlistment. (Left) "Private" Prather on Saturday, April 30 during a re-enactment at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis. (Courtesy photos)

gymnastics and physical culture to German-American youth. When the Civil War broke out there were over five hundred enrolled members. The militia men formed a unit later commissioned the 17th Missouri infantry.

Sergeant Prather said, "I do have records of two relatives on my father's side of the family who served in the Civil War. There was an Adolph Luebke, who served in the Union army and was captured at the battle of Chickamauga, and I have the discharge papers for a John Loverne, who served with the Confederate 50th Missouri Infantry."

The largest Civil War event he has participated in so far was the 135th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania where more than 20,000 re-enactors came together to portray the battle that took place there July 1-3, 1863.

Sergeant Prather's love of history and interest in re-enacting went beyond the American Civil War after seeing

**See HISTORY, on page 6...**



(Above) Members of the 17th Missouri Infantry pose for a photo during re-enactment at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis. Sergeant Prather is seventh from the right in a wide-brimmed hat. (Right) Sergeant Prather stands next to a war memorial in Missouri. (Courtesy photos)

### HISTORY, continued...

*Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers*. He then became more interested in World War II history. In 2009, Sergeant Prather joined another German re-enactment unit. This time the era was World War II. He explained that they do not give the ‘Nazi’ salute. “Doing that is an automatic dismissal from the unit,” said Sergeant Prather.

“For the most part reenacting is not exactly like being there, but I will say, especially at Gettysburg, there were times I felt that I saw ‘the elephant’ when I saw the huge numbers of men in uniform, and the pyrotechnics were going off over our heads,” Sergeant Prather said. “That did add much more realism to it. For Civil War events we just fire off 60 grains of black powder using

blanks. For World War II events, the blanks we use are surprisingly loud.”

He said there is a dollar investment in equipment and uniforms, but anyone can join any re-enacting unit as long as they have a love for history, and are somewhat physically fit because it can get demanding.

“The most satisfying thing about re-enacting is the wealth of knowledge you pick up that you could never get out of a classroom, or by reading a book, or watching a movie,” explained Sergeant Prather. “And, I also enjoy the simple pleasure of talking about the battles with other people that share the same interest.”

