

Awesome! That single word describes the 150th Anniversary Antietam living history hosted by the National Park Service. Huge crowds, perfect weather, and an abundance of special moments made the weekend very memorable.

Friday night, nine members of the 155th NYVI setup our tents along the wood line about 100 feet behind the Dunker Church. The 24th Michigan under Colonel Craig Decrane was our hosts and we formed a company with the 17th Michigan.

Saturday morning dawned with clear blue skies as we watched the sun rise over the New York monument, a trend that would last all weekend. The morning started with a weapons inspection from the Park Service where they also handed out commemorative volunteer medallions that served as identification.

We were portraying the 6th Wisconsin of the Iron Brigade for the majority of the weekend so the soldiers were instructed on the intricacies of Chandler's musket drill. Learning to do things left handed was interesting although certain tasks (like fix/unfix bayonet) were actually more natural.

After lunch, the battalion marched to the NY monument for a firing demonstration for the spectators, held in conjunction with four artillery NPS artillery pieces brought in from various parks. Antietam owns a brass 12 pound Napoleon cannon that had a very distinctive bark.

An interesting part of the demonstration was an artillery battery near the North Woods answering the fire from the NY Monument. It provided a perspective on the distances involved and how counter-battery fire occurred.

Immediately after the demonstration was one of the most memorable moments of the weekend. The battalion briefly returned to camp, switched caps from the Iron Brigade's Hardee to the more common forage, and grabbed our 155th NYVI Irish and National colors.

With corporal Mike Mahiques carrying the green flag and private Rob Terreri holding the Nationals, we marched to the Roulette Farm to recreate the attack of the Irish Brigade in the battle. We followed a path from the Roulette Farm to the Sunken Road just to the right of that marched by the 69th NYVI.

Scott Biggar read passages from Brigadier General Meagher's after action report in the Official Records at four stops during the march. The final stop of the march was at the Richardson and Meagher tablets at the Sunken Road where arms were presented and taps was played.

Later in the evening, we had a nice visit from our friends in the 124th NYVI who were camped near the Poffenberger farm at the North Woods doing demonstrations for the Park Service as well.

On Sunday, reveille awoke the battalion at 5:30am and we marched a mile to the North Woods. There, at dawn, we recreated the attack of the right three companies of the 6th Wisconsin at the beginning of the battle, including scaling a fence along the edge of the West Woods.

After returning to camp for breakfast, the 155th NYVI soldiers piled into one of the Park Service buses and took a scenic ride to the Pry House. Mary Mahiques was camped there for the weekend with other civilians, providing demonstrations and a soldier's fair. There were also medical demonstrations and historical information at the house and its outbuildings, including a nicely put together display of artifacts from the Irish Brigade.

The Park Service had a wealth of activities for the public all weekend long. The Virginia and Pennsylvania Civil War history trailers were there, as well as C-Span doing live broadcasts. Book signings by authors, first day covers by the Post Office, kids' activities, and historical talks occurred all weekend long. The published schedule showed three to four activities starting every fifteen minutes from dawn until dusk.

We performed another public demonstration late in the afternoon and then attended a talk by Pulitzer Prize winning author Jim McPherson and NPS Chief Historian Emeritus Ed Bearrs in the evening that was attended by nearly 300 spectators.

The Park Service was very receptive to living historians adding activities that were not originally scheduled so our battalion command staff setup an unscheduled march for dawn on Monday, September 17th. Once again reveille sounded at 5:30am but as the soldier's awoke we saw a steady stream of cars filled with spectators heading to the Cornfield through a thick fog.

The official commemoration of the combat at dawn was scheduled to be run by the Confederates at the south end of the Cornfield. But in addition to that, our battalion marched back to the North Woods and recreated the left wing of the 6th Wisconsin's attack.

We moved as skirmishers through the fog of a fallow field, listening to the rebel artillery and muskets report to our front over a small rise in the ground. As the sun rose, the artillery reverberated across the East Woods, mixing the smoke in with the fog while we moved into the Cornfield. We paused there while the Confederates finished up the official program, including readings by NPS Rangers of soldier's reminiscences of the battle.

Following the official program, we moved up to a worm fence bordering the Cornfield and performed a short ceremony for the Union side.

That marked the end of the official programs for the weekend. After returning to camp for breakfast, we packed up, did some touring of the battlefield, and then headed towards home.

Being on the actual battlefield during the 150th commemoration led to many special moments and experiences that everyone will not soon forget.