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Recalling wartime Series: WEEKEND DIVERSIONS

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World War II veterans will be presented with red, white and blue ribbons during the tribute to the men and women who served in the armed forces.

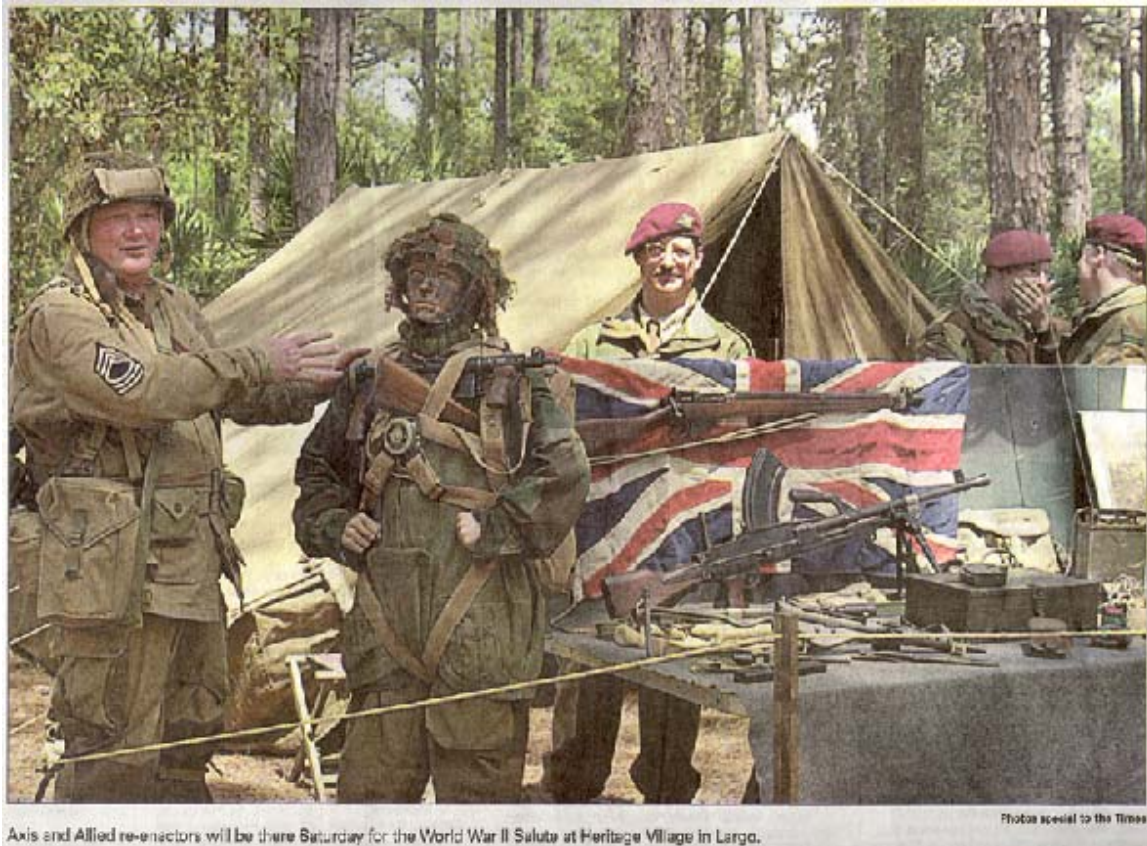
The glory, guts and heartache of World War II take center stage Saturday at the all-day World War II Salute at Heritage Village, a commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Europe and a tribute to the men and women who served in the armed forces.

Veterans of World War II will be presented with red, white and blue lapel ribbons at the Heritage Village main entrance on 119th Street.

The site will be given over to activities that evoke the era. Swing dancers from Strictly Swing Entertainment will rock the rafters of the little, historic Safety Harbor Church. Other activities will include a USO revue by Bonnie Gray Productions, Axis and Allied re-

enactors with authentic restored military vehicles, a fireside chat with President Franklin Roosevelt, a victory garden, blood drive, and big-band music by the City Rhythm Orchestra from Pittsburgh.

The World War II Salute will also focus on the serious and deadly side of war, with a focus on the Holocaust abroad and racial prejudice at home.



Axis and Allied re-enactors will be there Saturday for the World War II Salute at Heritage Village in Largo.

Photos special to the Times

Here are highlights:

Holocaust survivor and Clearwater resident Phillip Gans will share his story in a special presentation at 11 a.m. Gans hid in Amsterdam before his arrest on July 24, 1943. At age 15, Gans was taken to Auschwitz, where he was imprisoned until 1945, and then taken to Flossenbug, where he was liberated by U.S. Army troops on April 23, 1945.

Gans, a volunteer at the Florida Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg, distributes cards that bear his concentration camp tattoo number and that he signs. They read: "Do not let anyone tell you that the Holocaust did not exist. I am living proof. Haftling (Prisoner) 139755."

Gans estimates he has signed and handed out more than 3,500 cards a year since 2000. Until that time, he rarely talked about his traumatic experience in the concentration camps, but the discovery of former neighbors from Holland in Miami and Clearwater led

to his speaking out.

He particularly likes speaking to young people. "I tell children, 'Your children won't meet a Holocaust survivor because there won't be any left ...' " he said. "I tell them the story from day one until the day I was liberated."

Author Gertrude Stein is included in "women's view of war" presentations by St. Petersburg actor Betty Jean Steinshouer. Steinshouer will portray Stein as she and Alice B. Toklas fled Paris to escape the Nazis, living undercover in small villages.

The Florida Humanities Council is co-sponsoring the presentation.

Steinshouer will give Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' perspective from the east coast of Florida, where she served as an enemy plane spotter while waiting to hear from her husband, who drove an ambulance on the Burma Road. In the Willa Cather portrayal, the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist will talk about the Lost Generation and her fears for Jewish friends in Europe.

"The point of the three voices is to describe the historic period through the voices of three women who were also seeing it through three vantage points," Steinshouer said.

The exhibit "Some Gave All: African Americans in World War II," created by the Pinellas County African American History Museum in Clearwater, will be on display.

During the era, reporters from some black papers, including the Pittsburgh Courier, reported that black soldiers were fighting two wars, against racism at home and Axis powers overseas.

"I think Heritage Village and Pinellas African American History Museum are trying to commemorate the same thing, the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II and the people who fought, in our case, in both wars," said Sandra Rooks, the museum's executive director and an adjunct professor at St. Petersburg College. "We want them recognized for some of the sacrifices they made, including those who lost their lives to fight for our country."

St. Petersburg artist John Silva will display 20 portraits of Tuskegee Airmen and black women who survived in support units.

"The Tuskegee Airmen never did get a square break, and I thought it was about time somebody recognized them through all their sacrifices," Silva said. "As a result of their actions during the war, they became responsible for integration of the military forces. Prior to that they were segregated in the military into their own barracks and units. As a result of their activities during World War II, they were recognized as having the ability to do the same kinds of jobs that white people were doing."

Music and dancing will round out the day at Heritage Village. The Savoy South Dancers will host a swing dance party at the Safety Harbor Church, and the Savoy South Dance Club is sharing its weekend headline act with the event.

Pete Spina and the nine-piece City Rhythm Orchestra and vocalists said they were looking forward to leaving the cold and snow of Pittsburgh for the Savoy and the World War II Salute.

"We are thrilled about it because we, of course, admire the music of that era, and that's the mission of our band, playing the great sounds of that era," Spina said. "Not to mention the patriotic side as well. It's a pleasure to be involved in it."