

# Living History

By Philip Schreier

## Re-visiting 1944, Ft. Indiantown Gap Style!

In all of the years that I have participated in reenactments, only a few times have I actually felt that I was close to “experiencing” life as it was in the time period that I was portraying. One such experience was during the 125th anniversary battle of Gettysburg where well over 10,000 participants came together in 1988 to re-fight Pickett’s Charge. When you have that many people charging and fighting and the field fills up with the “fog of war” its hard to see or feel anything other than the sights, sounds and smells of combat that surrounds you. At Ft. Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania every January, you can duplicate that experience, World War II style.

Known annually as FIG, this WW II experience may be one of the best avail-

able. With as many as 2,200 participants in any given year, this event has, just by its sheer stick-too-it-tiveness and longevity, become the premiere Second World War event in the country.

I have been drawn annually, for the past decade, to this reenactment for a number of reasons, primary among them is the fact that the mid-January date is a welcome cure for cabin fever and an excuse to don my collection of military flight jackets that comprise the bulk of my closet space. (As well as to justify their expense.) Perhaps more so than that, is the entrance through the portal in time that the event offers each and every participant. The surroundings and sheer numbers of reenactors present create an atmosphere that truly sets you back a half century.



*By the end of the day's battle, it doesn't take much to conjure up an authentic 1,000 yard stare as shown here by 4th Armored Lt. Frank Jardim of Brooklyn, NY.*

It would be hard to find more suitable surrounding for a barracks and battle site. Built in the early 1930's as the training area for the Pennsylvania National Guard (28th Division), this 18,000 acre active military reservation boasts barracks and mess halls that have seen little change in the last 70 years. Each unit is encouraged to participate in a “most authentic” barracks competition for cash awards. This really brings out the “neat stuff” by the boxcar load. Walking through the barracks with a group of Battle of the Bulge survivors one year I was spell-bound to hear these hardened veterans recall their days of basic training and the flood of memories that came rushing back to them as they inspected footlockers and equipment. The little



*The roads and surrounding countryside of Ft. Indiantown Gap provide an excellent backdrop for the Battle of the Bulge. These Yanks seem happy that the usual snowfall gave that years battle a miss.*



*A water-cooled .30 BMG makes an appearance on a jeep, reminiscent of an episode of Rat Patrol, though the winter temperatures seldom give anyone cause to think they were in any type of desert environment.*



*Extra effort is taken to “dress up” the barracks and make them as “period” looking as possible. The radio on the right stopped working long ago when the last of the vacuum tubes gave way. The sounds of Benny Goodman and Tommy Dorsey can still be heard via a small transistor radio craftily hidden inside.*



*Not generally known to have played much of a role in the battle, the British Tommy is still well represented as seen by this unit of Middlesex infantry.*

nuances of how folded socks should sit in a footlocker tray (“those socks should smile, not frown”—a reference to the direction in the folds) added a touch of authenticity that you would never find in any book on the war. Adding measurably to the experience are the soft melodies of Tommy Dorsey and Bing Crosby that waft through the air, compliments of a low power FM station DJ’d and broadcast by reenactors on site. Old cathedral radios whose vacuum tubes gave way long ago to smaller transistor radios neatly hidden inside their old skeletons, provide the local area with authentic atmosphere. The spirit of fraternity



*Many units go to great lengths to dress up their barracks and make their weekend experience as close to living in 1944 as they can get. Here the 44th division gets ready to embark on the “hurry up and wait” routine before the event begins on Saturday morning.*



*The late Dick Vandall of Monroeville, PA sports a fine collection of warm weather gear as well as a captured Russian PPSH 9mm sub-machine gun.*



*The view over the top of a turret mounted .30 BMG gives a small indication of the numerous vehicles that participate in the FIG annual event.*

# Living History

abounds in these barracks after hours as each one becomes a little slice of an age gone by, filled with old friends and new acquaintances.

The main attraction of this great gathering is the world-renown Flea Market that boasts hundreds of dealers who specialize in nearly every minutiae of WWII equipment, clothing and field gear. There are bargains galore as well as an opportunity to get your hands on just about anything military ever manufactured during the 1939 - 1945 period. The highlight of the weekend at one recent FIG event was

the panel truck that pulled up in front of the flea market buildings bearing thousands of surplus uniforms, boots and field gear most recently used in the film *Saving Private Ryan*. It was encouraging to see that the guys in England responsible for the movie props had taken the effort to make everything very authentic, enough so that hundreds of American reenactors continue to make use of their goods today.

Movies such as *Saving Private Ryan* and most recently, the excellent HBO adaptation of Steven Ambrose's *Band of Brothers* have drawn thousands of novice buffs into the exciting world of reenacting. It is no lie when someone says that you could show up to the FIG event dressed in nothing but boxers

and armed only with a credit card and within a few hours find yourself completely outfitted for battle save for service weapons, which are not allowed to be sold on base property!

Participants are allowed to arrive on site as early as Wednesday afternoon and most are ready to jump into the flea market by the time it opens at 1:00 pm on Thursday. A variety of activities including movies and seminar sessions fill the time until the battle event begins on Saturday morning. Due to the nature of reenacting the Battle of the Bulge, and the January event date, period camping is not encouraged and most are comfortable with the barracks lifestyle, given the extreme Pennsylvania weather that time of year.



A Lend-Lease jeep is put to good use by Commonwealth soldiers during the event.



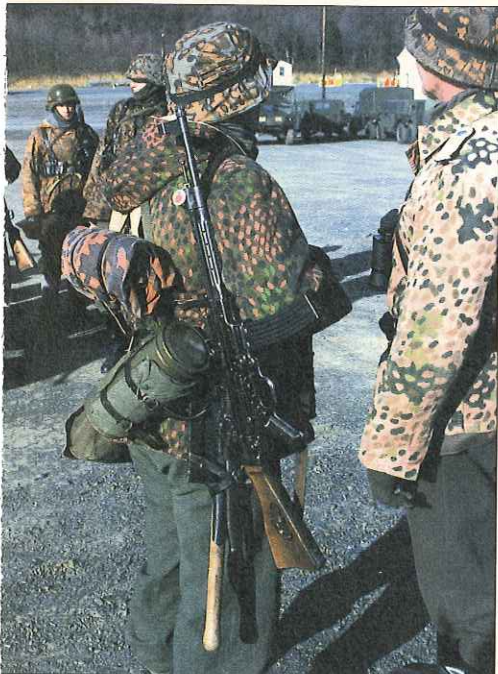
The Calder brothers (Don & Greg) of Norfolk, VA bring an excellent falschirmjager impression to the event, equipped with a functioning (some of the time) FG42 auto rifle.



German reenactors are almost equal in numbers to the Allies at the event. Here Steve Fisher sports a well made reproduction German uniform available from any number of vendors who set up at the flea market.



Period K-rations are distributed to the members of units that try to make the weekend as close to re-living the experience and conditions of fighting in the field, even if it is for only one day!



**Another rare auto rifle seen on the axis side is the MP44, the first true "assault rifle."**

Saturday offers the reenactor a true taste of military life in nearly every sense with the exception of an authentic battle experience. Troops are herded into a massive parking lot where either period vehicles or modern buses transport the thousands of reenactors to a remote sector of the military base for a staged battle scenario. Here during the embarkation stage, the old military maxim of "hurry up and wait" becomes reality for the shivering troops. Hours seem to pass as event organizers prepare each vehicle for the trip to the battle site. Once there at the event site, the battles never seem to reach any level of cohesive organization or direction. Some units have gone through the entire event without ever seeing the enemy or firing a single shot in anger. Although the presence of numerous Allied and Axis tanks, armor, half-tracks and literally dozens of jeeps creates a visual feast for the eyes, if firing a lot of blanks and exercising tactical maneuvers means a lot to you, stay in the barracks playing an Avalon Hill board game, because you are not likely to get you "fun button" punched on the battlefield.

However, all complaints about the lame battles aside, the event organizers have tried to do the impossible within the rules handed down by the base commander who requires each participating reenactor to be accounted for as they leave the parking lot and immediately after the battle and before return to the barracks. This procedure, while

**"The Model 1903 Springfield Rifle And Its Variations" - by Joe Poyer**

A part-by-part examination of the famed M1903 with all markings, codes, finishes and changes to each part by serial number range. Includes all M1903, M1903A1, M1903A3 rifles, all .22 and .30 caliber sporting and target rifles and all sniper rifles. **\$22.95** plus postage. *Many other titles available.*

"The M1 Garand, 1936 to 1957" (\$19.95)

"The M16/AR15 Rifle, A Shooter's and Collector's Guide" (\$19.95)

**JUST PUBLISHED!**

**THE M1903 SPRINGFIELD AND ITS VARIATIONS**

BY JOE POYER  
EDITED BY E.P. FURLER

North Cape Publications, Inc.

"The M1 Carbine: Wartime Production" (\$16.95)

"The M14-Type Rifle" (\$14.95)

Order from North Cape Publications, Inc., PO Box 1027(M), Tustin CA 92781. Or phone 1-800 745-9714 toll free. Email orders to [ncape@ix.netcom.com](mailto:ncape@ix.netcom.com). Postage is \$2.95 for one or two books. CA residents add 7.5% sales tax. Priority mail is \$4.95, add \$1.00 for each additional book. Visit our web site at <http://www.northcapepubs.com> for our complete list of collectors books.

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW...**

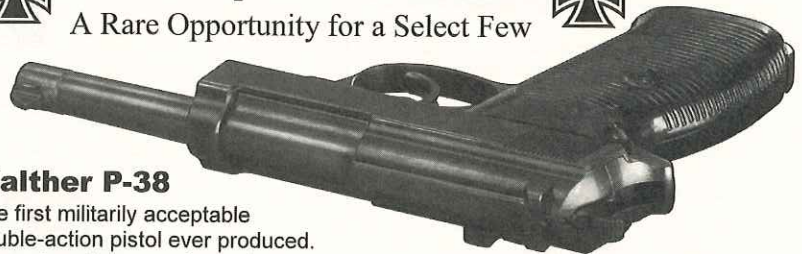
The next issue of **MILITARY CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED** will be available on newsstands MARCH 12, 2002.



**The Spoils of War**



A Rare Opportunity for a Select Few



**Walther P-38**

The first militarily acceptable double-action pistol ever produced.

An engineering marvel so advanced for its day that it even has a loaded chamber indicator that can be seen or felt. Every modern double-action pistol is patterned after this one, even the one currently in use by the U.S. Army.

**Made in WWII Germany by Mauser and Walther**

- Brand New, but 60 years old. Original in every respect.
- Nazi proof-marks on all parts and matching numbers certify originality.
- The Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross numbered to the gun is included.
- Presented in a solid walnut display case numbered to the gun.
- This small number of brand-new P38's were overlooked near the end of WWII.

**A Collector's Dream! Your Chance to Own One.**



The Knight's Cross and the velvet-lined Case are both numbered to match the P38 serial number.

Order Directly from us.  
Complete Package Only \$1995.<sup>00</sup>

**Mitchell's Mausers**

P.O. Box 9295  
Fountain Valley, CA 92728-9295  
714-899-3660 FAX 714-899-8611  
[www.MitchellSales.com](http://www.MitchellSales.com)

New Exclusive IHF Video Release

# THIRD REICH IN COLOR



This remarkable trove of color footage, assembled from far-flung private and state collections, presents Hitler's Europe as never seen before. Amateur film enthusiasts — soldiers, tourists, Hitler's own pilot, even Hitler's mistress, Eva Braun — began



experimenting with color film in the late 1930s, their camera eye recording the Third Reich from every angle. Some of this film was only recently uncovered in former Soviet-bloc archives, hidden for almost 60 years; all of it, thanks to digital technology, has been newly trans-

ferred to video with surprising clarity. "Home movie" segments — Hitler with his inner circle, Goebbels' children at play, and a vacationing Marlene Dietrich on the French Riviera with a young John F. Kennedy — capture the era's leading actors with an

often unsettling intimacy. Nazi festivals, rallies, pageants and military parades (including a bizarrely risqué "Night of Amazons" in Munich),



War-time coverage includes new found combat film from almost every major campaign of the war - Blitzkriegs of Poland, Norway, Yugoslavia, the invasion of Russia, Afrika Korps troops in Tunisia, day to day life of German soldiers. D-day and the final desperate defense of Germany and the fall of Berlin.. Authentic footage of the execution of partisans. The brutalities of the Eastern Front and the horrors of the Warsaw Ghetto, new weapons in



action, including V-2 rocket launchings — these and more are here presented, uncensored and unrehearsed, with color's startling realism. Our images of this period, long frozen in iconic black & white, will never be the same.



Color, 100 minutes, English commentary.

VHS # 800 Price: \$29.95 plus \$5.50 S&H

DVD # 22800 Price: \$34.95 plus \$5.50 S&H

Warning: This program contains graphic scenes of violence and nudity and is not recommended for young or impressionable viewers. Visit our website for detailed scene by scene descriptions of this entire program.

To order, write or call:  
773-927-2900 Dept. 134

INTERNATIONAL HISTORIC FILMS, INC.  
Box 29035 • Chicago, IL 60629  
www. Historicvideo.com


# Living History

an attempt at making sure no one is lost and or missing or as it happened one year, dead of a heart attack in the middle of the field, takes more time than any other aspect of the event and given the normal weather conditions, creates an understandable amount of grumbling among the troops.

One aspect of the event that has had myself and numerous other reenactors scratching their heads is the fact that a 158 acre site, located smack dab in the center of the event area is roped off and reenactors are forbidden to enter for fear of.... nope, not unexploded ordnance... nope, not mine field training, ... nope, not anything that you would possibly ever dream of... its roped off so

that the only known Regal Fritillary butterfly colony east of the Mississippi River may continue to develop in unrestricted bliss. It does present a humorous sight to see Sherman tanks and companies of Allied infantry, tip-toeing around a butterfly sanctuary while machine guns and rifle fire fill the air. As mentioned before, the event organizers go out of their way to host veterans of the Second

World War as their guests. Many of the men who originally laid their life on the line to preserve our way of life are present to spin yarns and tell "how it really was" to the throngs of interested buffs from generations far removed from that of "the greatest generation", the men and women who made the world a safer place to be in 1945. This aspect of the event is perhaps the most significant and is truly worth the visit to be with the guys who made it happen.

Event participation is restricted to members of organized units and information can be received from the World War II Federation at: #62 West High Street, Waynesburg, PA 15370 or by logging on at <http://www.alltel.net/~shawkids/wwii>. Participation fees range from \$37 to \$64 depending on if you wish to participate in the mess hall meal plans or not. 



Bob Lawrence of Erie, PA (right) and friends make the Gross Deutschland unit one of the most authentic and hardest fighting outfits to attend the event on the side of the Axis. Their barracks impression is world class.



The barracks provide an opportunity to wear and display a variety of uniform impressions. Here (a few years ago) Capt. Garry James (USA-Ret) editor of Military Classics Illustrated sports a leather A-2 flight jacket that normally doesn't see a lot of use in his native Southern California. Major Guy Gormley (USNG) on the right leans up against any number of military vehicles that participate in the uniform of a U.S. War Correspondent.