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## Battle of Averagesboro 2 days of Civil War come to region

By Sarah A. Reid

*Staff writer*

**AVERASBORO** — The green tractor parked along the edge of the Civil War battlefield was far from historic.

But it was functional.

While re-enactors reloaded muskets and mortars in the cotton field in front of him, Walt Smith narrated the high points of the Battle of Averagesboro from the tractor cab Saturday.

“Ooh, it looks like the Confederates are going to try for it again,” Smith’s voice boomed over two speakers when Confederates pushed back a line of Union troops.

This weekend, 300 re-enactors are gathering near Godwin to re-enact one of the last major offenses of the Civil War. At 1p.m. today, re-enactors will re-create a famous ravine scene in which numerous Union troops died.

The battlefield straddles the county line between Cumberland and Harnett off N.C. 82, just north of Godwin.

When the 35,000 Union troops marched into Averagesboro in March 1865, they were ragged, cold and tired, according to historical accounts.

The men had marched an entire winter as part of Gen. William T. Sherman’s infamous March to the Sea.

After Savannah, Ga., fell to Sherman in December 1864, he divided his forces in half, partially to confuse Confederate troops.

Some of his troops headed to Goldsboro. Some headed toward Raleigh.

They were to meet in Richmond, Va.

Confederate officials wanted to delay one mass of soldiers, hoping that they would be able to rout the others on their way to Richmond.

The 8,000 Confederates waiting at Averagesboro knew they were no match for the mob they were about to meet.

“It was simply a delaying tactic,” said Mac Williams, president of the Averagesboro Battlefield Commission.

About 1,450 people died during the two-day battle that started March 15, 1865.

But during the re-enactment Saturday, few people fell.

“Has anybody been shot yet?” one woman asked about 10 minutes into the hour-long battle.

The Confederate infantry was the only group on the ground, and they were firing.

A few minutes later, Drew Smith, 8, almost jumped off his father’s shoulders when a cannon fired.

“Whoa! Did you see that smoke?” he asked.

Drew and his brother Aaron, 4, were propped up on the shoulders of their father, Scott, and their uncle, Wendell Smith.

“The army that walked up from Georgia is doing fine, but us softies from the 21st century are having trouble holding children on our shoulders,” Scott joked.

Back in the Confederate camp, soldiers seemed to suffer from more than aching shoulders. Most heads were sweat-covered from the heavy felt hats they wore. Some men settled near the commissary, which was making chicken and dumplings for dinner.

Chris Roberts, a Confederate lieutenant general, rested in front of his canvas tent, awaiting a potential new re-enactor.

“All we need is a bunch of people to become re-enactors, and we will be falling right and left,” he said.

Re-enacting is all about numbers, Roberts said.

So is preservation, said Wade Sokolosky and Mark Smith, two local authors and modern-day military men who chronicled the battle.

The two men were delighted to see a couple hundred people at the battlefield and visiting the camps, concession stands and their book-selling

tent Saturday.

“They all know we are out here to raise money for the battlefield,” Sokolosky said.

### Directions

Take Interstate 95 North to Exit 65. At the stop sign, turn left onto Godwin- Falcon Road, which will turn into Main Street. Turn right onto Burnett Road and follow the signs to the battlefield.

### Today's Schedule

10 a.m. to 5 p.m.: Museum, vendors, camps and food stands are open.

1 p.m.: Battle of Averasboro

3:30 p.m.: Raffle drawing

Staff writer Sarah A. Reid can be reached at [reids@fayobserver.com](mailto:reids@fayobserver.com), or 323-4848 ext. 280.

Staff photos by Cindy Burnham

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