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Local News - **Sunday, October 10, 2004**

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Reunion honors Camp Toccoa veterans

By PEARCE ADAMS
The Times

Some people learned about World War II by just watching demonstrations and static displays at Saturday's Camp Toccoa Reunion.

But the lucky ones got to relive history by talking to a few who trained with the weapons and jumped from airplanes into combat.

About 20,000 soldiers from four regiments trained for the war in Toccoa. Several thousand people came this weekend to honor them.

The annual reunion is designed to honor the veterans and to offer visitors an opportunity to step back into history. It also is helping to raise the \$250,000 needed for a 5,000-square-foot WWII museum in Toccoa that will house thousands of pieces of memorabilia.

Admission to today's events at the Toccoa Airport is \$5. A memorial service for veterans is set for 8:30 a.m., with re-enactments of battles scheduled for 12:30 and 2 p.m.

Nicholas Thompson, 10, of



Tom Reed The Times

Paul Crawley, center, playing the part of a German soldier, is surrounded by re-enactors dressed in authentic World War II uniforms during a demonstration battle at the Camp Toccoa reunion Saturday.



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George Hicks, left, and Johnny Kempen, both members of the World War II Airborne Demonstration Team,

Toccoa said he came Saturday to see "what the weapons look like."

Tranez Cochran, 11, of Athens was among those wanting "to see what happened in WWII."

Neither, however, found Charles Craton Sr., 85, of Rome. A veteran of the war, he had answers to the youth's questions, if they had asked him.

"It's exciting to me," he said of the reunion.

Craton trained at the Currahee Mountain parachute training center in the 1940s and served with H Company of the 506th Regiment. He entered WWII by parachuting into combat at Bastogne, Belgium, during the Battle of the Bulge, he said.

Craton and some of the soldiers he served with were featured in the HBO series "Band of Brothers," which premiered in July 2001. The reunion, which had not been held for eight years, has been an annual event since.

Charles Craton III, watching as his grandfather drew a crowd of well-wishers and autograph seekers, lifted a box from his car.

Inside was memorabilia from the last days of the war, including a picture album autographed by Adolf Hitler and photos of the German leader taken from his Eagle's Nest at Berchtesgaden.

The elder Craton said he saw them on a table when he entered Hitler's home, then stuffed the items in his shirt and kept them from view for about 60 years.

prepare to board a plane for a parachute demonstration at the Camp Toccoa reunion Saturday. The living history group travels to shows throughout the country demonstrating World War II parachute jumps in authentic uniforms and equipment similar to that used during the war.



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Charles Craton Sr., 85, was among veterans of World War II attending a reunion Saturday at Camp Toccoa. He showed some photos from the era, including a picture of German leader Adolf Hitler.



Philip Schreier of Washington, D.C., wore a 1940s-era uniform to the annual reunion in Toccoa.

An actor captured the event in the last segment of the HBO series, Craton III said.

In the scene, "an officer asked the soldier, 'Did you take the album?' The soldier walked away and smiled. It was obvious he had," he said.

There were others who were looking for stories and pieces of history.

Philip Schreier of Washington, D.C. arrived early, wearing a 1940s-era uniform to honor the soldiers.

"It's an opportunity to shake hands with a few heroes," he said.

He was joined Saturday by about 30 ex-military members of the WWII Airborne Demonstration Team from Oklahoma and active duty U.S. Army Rangers from Camp Frank D. Merrill in Dahlonga.

The Rangers demonstrated hand-to-hand combat, rapid insertions and extractions, and a parachute jump from a Black Hawk helicopter, cruising by at 80 mph and 1,500 feet.

The demonstration team decided to cancel a jump from a vintage plane, which was passing at 1,000 feet.

Danny Brannock, historian of the group that recently performed for the 60th anniversary of D-Day, said Saturday's winds meant the two-engine, C-45 airplane had to alter its path and approach over the crowds to avoid having parachutists land in trees.

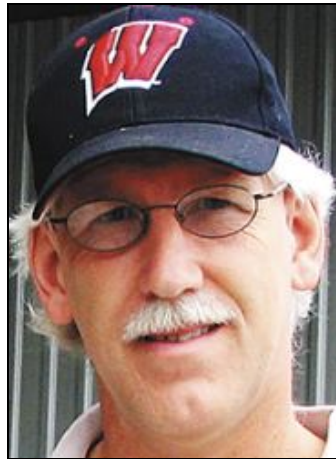
Exposing people to a risk of dropped equipment is not allowed under FAA rules, he said.

Earlier, J.T. Brown, 81, of Westminster, S.C., and a former member of the 17th Airborne in Alabama, predicted the jump with WWII-style parachutes would be risky.

"You can do very little to control where you're going," he said.

But Barry Doebert of Virginia was more focused. He came to Toccoa hoping to find veterans of B Company. His uncle, Arthur Doebert, was a member and among the first to parachute into Normandy.

He was killed June 7, 1944, said Barry Doebert, who carried a letter, written two months later by a company chaplain. Doebert was hoping to find someone who knew his uncle, who is buried in France.



Barry Doebert, a Virginia man, was looking for information about his uncle, who was among first to parachute into Normandy.

"I started the search about three years ago," said Doebert, hoping that time was not working against him. "I hope to find somebody."

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