

# Volunteering keeps the museum alive and thriving

By Jack K. Johnson

“Some of the best volunteers in the state of Minnesota.” That’s how Executive Director Jeff Thielen describes our volunteers—and he’s right. A more dedicated, talented group of volunteers would be hard to find. In 2012, 53 different people volunteered nearly 2600 hours of time in support of the museum. Many of these people work intermittently—when needed for particular tasks, for example—but about a dozen “regulars” help out on a scheduled basis in a wide variety of ways.

Volunteering goes back to the museum’s very beginnings. Volunteers like Leland Smith of Blaine, who has shepherded the historical archives for over 15 years, have made vitally important contributions for a very long time. The museum’s volunteer program took a big leap forward a year ago, however, after Jeff put out a press release to area newspapers calling for volunteers. The response was immediate. As a result, a whole new team of volunteers has become engaged in the work of preserving Minnesota’s military history.



Craig Johnson of Grey Eagle talks to school groups while decked out in a Civil War uniform.

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Cold Spring resident, John Deuhs, applied to become a volunteer along with his friend, Harold Fiala, also of Cold Spring. They were both interested in military history and already knew about the museum. “The curator, Doug Bekke, called and put us to work right away,” said Deuhs, “doing everything from soup to nuts.” One of his first projects was to work with Fiala to reorganize the wood shop. He did weapons maintenance (“I’m a bit of a gun guy”), worked with fellow volunteer Paul Cantleberry to build flag staff storage brackets, and helped Bekke and

Story continues on next page

## Would you like to Volunteer?

Want to get involved or learn more about volunteering at the museum? Go to our website at [mnmilitary-museum.org](http://mnmilitary-museum.org) and click on “Support Us” or contact the museum directly.

## Points of Interest

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## ALLIES

Cantleberry prepare a special exhibit honoring the cooperative troop exchange between the Minnesota National Guard and the Norwegian Home Guard. He usually comes in one day a week and says he looks forward to it. "As I walk through the building I will look and think 'I made that bracket or cleaned up that area.' I like projects that, at the end of the day, I can see progress—and Doug is always coming up with new projects."

Many of the volunteers have some prior military experience, although it is by no means necessary. Kerry Beckenbach of Rice was in the Navy from 1973-1977, but he also thinks of himself as an armchair



Kerry Beckenbach, front, and John Duehs, work to restore a WWII German Mauser. (Morrison County Record)

history buff. When he retired from law enforcement three years ago, he looked for something new to do and the museum helped fill the bill. He typically puts in a couple of days a week and in the past year has done everything from data entry (a five month project) to restoring old leather gear. One of the great things about working at the museum, he says, is that "you are touching history . . . right in your own backyard." He also says it's "just plain fun" to be there. "There is so much to be done, and the people working there have just a solid knowledge of military history and are more than willing to pass that information on."

Craig Johnson of Grey Eagle puts his expertise as a retired 7th grade history teacher to good use by meeting with visiting school groups. He often speaks to students in the library conference room first, giving them a quick lesson on the Civil War as the first "modern" war, before taking them to the museum's special exhibit dealing with the war between North and South as well as Minnesota Dakota War of 1862. "Spring is an especially busy time because there are so many class trips, he says, "but I really enjoy meeting with the kids." He usually dresses in a Civil War uniform "for effect," he

adds. Johnson has also gone to schools in the area to talk about the Civil War.

Roxanne Backowski, a 2007 Little Falls graduate, now lives in Waite Park and is studying online for a Master's degree in library and information science at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She is also a library technician at St. Cloud Technical Community College, and because it is right down her alley professionally, Backowski volunteered to take principal responsibility for the museum's reference library. Coming in one day a week, she has pretty much been given free rein to process and catalogue the library's growing collection of books on military history. With over 10,000 volumes, it has become the largest such collection in Minnesota. It is open to researchers by pre-arrangement only, but Backowski hopes that someday it will have regular hours and expanded services for patrons. Her biggest challenge has been to get the library's catalog online as part of a national database and to make sure it matches the books actually on the shelf. "I'm still working on that," notes Backowski, "but I'm making good headway."

One of the museum's very first volunteers is Jerry Ryan. Ryan, a Guardsman who, until retirement, worked fulltime at Camp Ripley, remembers helping to wrestle large outdoor equipment displays into place each spring and back into storage in the fall. "This was back when the museum was located in the old Servicemen's Club building," says Ryan, "so I guess you could say I've been at it for a while." He lives close





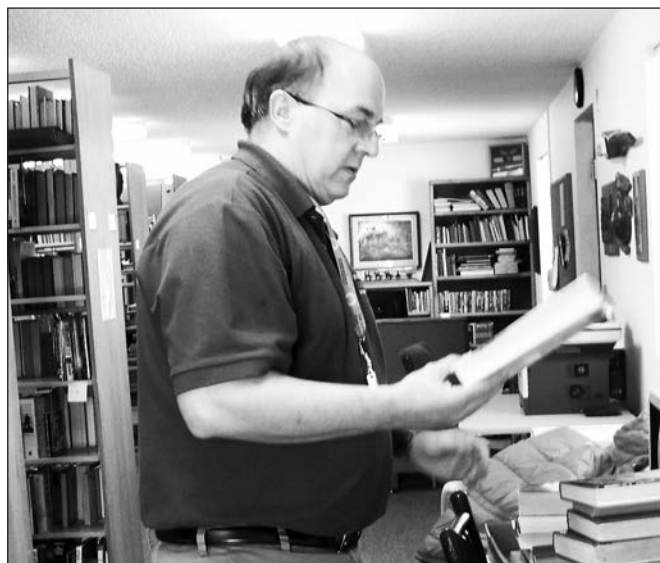
Roxanne Backowski works in the library, processing the museum's large collection of military books. (Morrison County Record photo)

to the Little Falls area. "I've always enjoyed working with people," she said, "and I'm passionate about the military, so when I saw an article in the Morrison County Record last year about the museum's need for volunteers, I decided to give it a try." On days when the museum expects to have a lot of visitors, or when tours are scheduled, Raelene serves as a greeter, assists with the tours, and works in the gift shop. She works mostly in the summer, during the busiest time for the

by on Fish Trap Lake and is the kind of volunteer handyman every museum wishes for. He's replaced—at least once—nearly every step leading up to the various outdoor exhibits, built all the metal pedestals used to identify outdoor artifacts ("I usually make half a dozen at a time," he says), and helped with the restoration and painting of numerous vehicles, artillery pieces, and aircraft over the years. A restoration project he is especially proud of is the 1929 REO Speedwagon pickup, which was used by the National Guard in Mankato until 1946. One of his other claims to fame is that he was the last person to actually drive the museum's amphibious DUKW. "People in cars going by me on Highway 10 were wide-eyed," he chuckles.

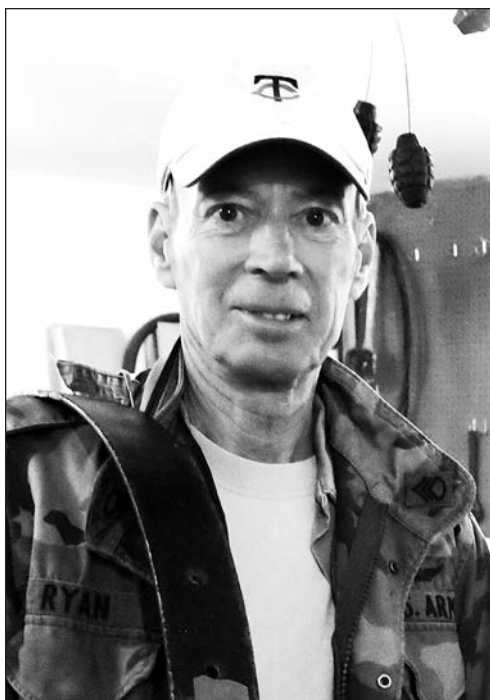
When Raelene Wilmes retired a few years ago as a special education paraprofessional, she moved from the Twin Cities

museum. "I like meeting all the different people who come to see the museum, and I especially enjoy learning about history. I learned so much last summer and I look forward to doing it again this summer. It's a wonderful way to help out and it's a great atmosphere to work in."



Jon Van der Hagen assists in the library during the quiet months and leads tour groups during the May-September "high season."

Jon van der Hagen, MD, is a physician from Baxter. He was aware of the museum but had never visited until last spring after an article in the Brainerd paper caught his eye. "I'm not a veteran but I have an interest in military history and have gone on quite a few battlefield tours here in the US and in Europe," he said, "so I sent in an application. Jeff [Thielen] called me and we had a great conversation. I had been inspired by those battlefield tour guides, and when Jeff said that he could really use some tour guides, it got me to thinking. Long story short: I gave it a try and got hooked." He devoted one day a week last summer to giving tours and has worked on a variety of other projects four to six hours a week during the off-season. He possesses a sense of responsibility for history. "History affects us all, and people need to be aware of it. The museum does a good job of thoughtfully conveying the collective sacrifice made by our veterans, as well as the individual sacrifices," says van der



Jerry Ryan has been a jack-of-all-trades since the museum's earliest years.

## ALLIES

Hagen, “and I am honored to be part of it.”

“All our volunteers are great,” says Thielen, “but we could use more.” He would especially like more volunteers to lead tours and meet with visitors as they go through the museum. “They would not have to be experts in history,” he adds. “They just need to be friendly, learn something about what’s on display, and be willing to talk about it with visitors. We also need people right now to assist with updating our artifact records, and we could use help with data entry, but there are positions for everyone and we would try to match a volunteer’s interest with the job.”

Volunteers not only help the museum, they are helping themselves. A recent study reported in Atlantic Monthly notes a link between better mental and physical health and participation in supportive social environments.<sup>1</sup> Too busy? Don’t have enough time? A recent study in Psychological Science reported the counterintuitive result that spending time on others—e.g., volunteering—actually makes you feel like you have more time.<sup>2</sup> This research and similar studies confirm what we all know deep down: you can feel good by doing good.

### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Lindsay Abrams. “The Decline of Communities Could Explain America’s Health Problems,” *The Atlantic Cities*, March 6, 2013. <http://www.theatlanticcities.com/politics/2013/03/how-decline-communities-explains-americas-health-problems/4889/>

<sup>2</sup> Cassie Mogilner, Zoe Chance, and Michael Norton. “Giving Time Gives You Time,” *Psychological Science*, October 2012, 1233-38.

### MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MINNESOTA - Application for New or Renewed Membership

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

**MEMBERSHIP TYPE**     New member     Renewing member

**MEMBERSHIP LEVEL**     Regular - \$30/yr     Family - \$55/yr     Life - \$350  
 (Life memberships may be paid in four installments of \$90 each. Tell us if you want this option.)  
 Additional contribution \$ \_\_\_\_\_

All memberships are acknowledged in the museum newsletter and in our website’s Donor Roll Call. Contributions of \$500 or more in a single year and all Life memberships are also recognized permanently on a plaque in the museum lobby.

**How would you like to receive your newsletter?**     Postal mail     Email

**Would you like to receive information about volunteering?**     Yes     No

#### PROCEDURE

**Pay by mail:** Print this form and mail with your check (payable to the Military Historical Society of Minnesota) to: Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Highway 115, Little Falls, MN 56345. If you prefer, you can mail or fax (320-632-7797) this form without payment and follow up by calling the museum at 320-616-6050 with your credit card information.

**Pay online:** We also have a simple, secure way for you to become a member or renew your membership online. Go to our website at [mmilitarymuseum.com](http://mmilitarymuseum.com). Click on Support Us>Become a Member and follow the prompts.

**Your membership is fully tax deductible. We salute and thank you for your support!**



## Curator's Notes By Doug Bekke



One of the challenges of my work is making decisions on what artifacts to collect now, and thus preserve in the collection, that will be valuable in the future in telling the story of Minnesota's veterans. For many years I have listened to collectors bemoan the things they regretted not getting or not keeping years ago when various artifacts were available and not expensive to acquire.

Recently uniforms and equipment from the Eastern European nations of the Warsaw Pact have become available on the surplus market at very low prices. These uniforms reflect the armies that faced Minnesotans from across the Iron Curtain. It was just 22 years ago that the Iron Curtain collapsed. To me it seems like yesterday. In my mind it is still part of current events, yet to the vast majority of Americans under 30 years old, it is ancient history. I wonder how many high school students, or indeed college students, have any understanding of what the Iron Curtain was, or what the Cold War was about, or who was on which side, or the various Third World proxy wars in which millions died, or the hot wars within the Cold War like Korea and Vietnam.

Those who think we now live in a dangerous time forget that just 22 years ago the Soviet Union had 30,000 nuclear bombs aimed at the United States and we had over 10,000 aimed at them. How many people remember the times we came to the edge of nuclear war over Berlin, Hungarian or Czech Revolutions, or Soviet missiles in Cuba, etc. Today, most Minnesota veterans are veterans of the Cold War, America's longest war lasting from 1946 to 1990. Indeed it could be argued that the Cold War started in the years following WWI, pausing only briefly with the WWII alliance with the Soviet Union in order to defeat Nazi Germany.

For all these reasons I've decided to pick up some uniforms of the former Eastern Block. Perhaps at some point in the future we will want to do an exhibit on the Cold War, and from the museum's deep storage areas we will have the artifacts, cheaply acquired today, that represent the forces that faced us across the Iron Curtain in America's longest and perhaps most dangerous, yet little remembered war.

In a few years we will remember the 50th anniversary of the start, and 40th anniversary of the end, of major U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. We continue to seek U.S. combat uniforms from the Vietnam War worn in Vietnam by Minnesotans. We would especially like to acquire North Vietnamese and Viet Cong uniforms. We are also interested in North Korean and Chinese items from the Korean War.

In 2014 we will remember the anniversary of World War I, the war to end all wars. It might have ended war for a few days but that was about all. We seek the uniforms of Minnesotans who served in foreign armies, Canada, Great Britain, France, the various Volunteer Ambulance Corps, etc. Is there anything you can help us with?

### Financial Report for Museum Operations in Calendar Year 2012\*

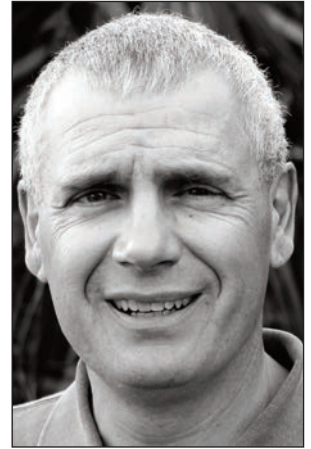
REVENUE		EXPENSE	
	\$		\$
Contributions, gifts and grants	88,005	Salaries and wages	89,567
State appropriation **	45,000	Payroll taxes	6,389
Membership dues	6,296	Curatorial services	24,498
Admission fees	25,552	Advertising and promotion	6,058
Investment income	4,337	General expenses	10,333
Net store sales	20,191	Insurance	2,839
Miscellaneous other	1,410	Collections and exhibits	19,873
	<u>\$190,791</u>	Transfer to endowment	3,500
		Miscellaneous other	1,034
		Carry forward and fund transfers	26,700
			<u>\$190,791</u>

\*The museum's fiscal year and calendar year are the same.

\*\* \$90,000 received in 2012 for the 2012-13 biennium; half is allocated for each of the two years.

## Director's Update

By Jeff Thielen



I am excited to report that at the February monthly board meeting of the Minnesota Veterans 4 Veterans Trust Fund we were awarded a \$15,000 grant.

If you are not familiar with V4V, they are a non-profit organization established as the result of the 2006 sale of the Lake Minnetonka Big Island Disabled Veterans Camp to the city of Orono. The grant request was drafted with the assistance and advice of a couple of V4V board members. The grant will fund the first part of a three-year plan to improve Veteran awareness of the museum and to improve their experience once they are here.

Planning has already begun for a professionally produced 12 minute "virtual tour" of the museum that will be posted on the website, placed on YouTube, and placed on DVD for distribution to County Veterans Service Officers, VA Medical Facilities and veterans organizations.

We have also started work on a "Veterans Corner" at the museum that will contain a Minnesota Veteran of the Month exhibit, an information kiosk with a touch screen computer providing information for veterans on VA Medical Facilities, County Vets Service Officers, and each of the veterans service organizations along with a Veterans Memorial Wall.

Other planned improvements that are part of the three-year project include: billboard advertising, a Medal of Honor exhibit, an upgrade to our Women in the Military exhibit, a P.O.W. exhibit, an upgrade to our conference room for use by veterans organizations, and additional marketing support and exhibits honoring specific Minnesota veterans.

Since almost every visitor to the museum is either a veteran or somehow connected to a veteran it is important for us to be truly veteran friendly. We hope that over the next few years the Minnesota Military Museum will become a favorite stopping spot for all Minnesota veterans.

If any members are aware of organizations that might be willing to sponsor a part of this project, please contact me for additional information.

## Memorials by Credit Card

Museum members have a strong history of providing "Memorials" in honor of friends, relatives or former comrades in arms.

Memorial gifts may be given in memory of a deceased person OR in honor of a living person. Memorial gifts will be acknowledged publicly in a Memorial Book located in the museum lobby, in this newsletter, and in the Donors section of our website. Moreover, unless you indicate otherwise, all Memorial gifts will be added to the principal of our permanent Endowment Fund, making your Memorial a truly lasting legacy.

If you give us the name and address of the family of the deceased, or of the person you are honoring, we'll notify them of your thoughtfulness.

There are three ways to make a memorial gift:

- You can print our Memorial Gift Form (found on our website), fill it out, and mail it to us with your check;

- You can call the museum at 320-616-6050 with your credit card information; or

- You can make a memorial gift online using a credit card or PayPal.

More information and related links are found on our website under "Support Us."

Please think of us the next time you want to honor someone with a memorial gift.

## Memorials

### January – March, 2013

#### Given by:

194th Tank Regiment Assn.  
Charley & Norma Extrand  
Richard and Betty Hayes  
Wayne Hayes  
Lyle Doerr  
Margaret Fletcher  
James D. M. Holmes  
Raymond Lunde  
Paul Meyer  
Paul Meyer  
Paul Meyer  
Margery Miller  
Doris Polson

#### In Memory of:

Tom Green  
Tom Green  
Tom Green  
Tom Green  
BG (Ret.) Duane Kunde  
Merl Fletcher  
MG (Ret.) James Sieben  
Manila "Bud" Shaver  
MAJ Robert Anderson  
BG (Ret.) Peter Sajevic  
MG (Ret.) Robert Walker  
Rita Kiefer  
Gustav Oberg

#### In Memoriam

In Memory of: \_\_\_\_\_

Given by: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please indicate here name and address of member of family to whom we can send notice of your gift:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

**Make checks payable to:**  
Minnesota Military Museum  
15000 Hwy. 115, Camp Ripley  
Little Falls MN 56345

**Gifts are deductible for income tax purposes**

## Contributions Honor Roll

### January – March 2013

**Renewing Members:** Larry Herke ▪ Marvin Hey ▪ James D. M. Holmes ▪ Richard Kaasa ▪ Bernard Koskovich ▪ Al Kreutz ▪ Duane Marholz ▪ George Martin ▪ Allan Meixner ▪ Ron Miller ▪ Richard Morey ▪ Steve Rannenberg ▪ Donald Ritchie ▪ LaVon Skoog ▪ Harry Sieben ▪ Fred Steinhauser ▪ Jon Stratte ▪ Doug Thompson ▪ Marshall Tromborg

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**American Legion:** Post 102, Anoka ▪ Post 20, Crookston ▪ Post 15, Detroit Lakes ▪ Post 381, Eden Valley ▪ Post 202, Hackensack ▪ Post 47, Hastings ▪ Post 12, Long Prairie ▪ Post 101, Melrose ▪ Post 334, Minneapolis ▪ Post 59, Montevideo ▪ Post 21, Moorhead ▪ Post 537, New London ▪ Post 49, Pequot Lakes ▪ Post 328, St. Joseph ▪ Post 168, St. Paul

**VFW:** Post 936, Alexandria ▪ Post 9713 Auxiliary, Mankato ▪ Post 494, Minneapolis ▪ Post 8731, Monticello ▪ Post 7092, Osakis ▪ Post 8663, Roseau ▪ Post 6992 Auxiliary, Sauk Rapids ▪ Post 4847 Auxiliary, St. Cloud ▪ Post 4086, Wabasha ▪ Post 5462, Waconia ▪ Post 3922, Wadena ▪

**Donations:** Chris Allen ▪ Bremer Bank, Brainerd ▪ Nolan Brinkman ▪ Browerville Lions ▪ Susan DeSimone ▪ Mary DeZurik ▪ Joseph Edwards ▪ Elk River Lions Club ▪ Elks National Veterans Service ▪ Robert Ferguson ▪ First Regiment MN Volunteer Infantry ▪ Margaret Fletcher ▪ GNP Company ▪ Goldsmith Jewelers ▪ Drew Haggard ▪ Gary Hoffman ▪ Kyle Kohnen ▪ Ed Komac ▪ Larson Boats ▪ Lin Furniture ▪ Nick Linsmeyer ▪ Little Falls Eye Care Center ▪ Little Falls Lions Club ▪ Nikki Majesta ▪ Masonic Lodge #30, Anoka ▪ Mid-MN Federal Credit Union ▪ Mills Fleet Farm ▪ Minnesota Civil War Sesquicentennial Task Force ▪ Minnesota Weapons Collectors Association ▪ Donald Nelson ▪ Barbara Nevin ▪ The Office Shop ▪ Otertail Lions Club ▪ Pine Country Bank ▪ Randall Cushing Lions ▪ Pleasureland RV Center ▪ Shooting Star Casino ▪ S. Shottenkirk ▪ St. Cloud Lions Club ▪ Marvin Tenhoff ▪ Twin Cities Civil War Roundtable ▪ Veterans 4 Veterans ▪ Veterans Club, Inc., Onamia ▪ Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 684

## ALLIES

**Allies** is published for the members and friends of the Minnesota Military Museum.

Nicholas Ostapenko, **President**  
Jeff Thielen, **Executive Director**  
Doug Bekke, **Curator**  
Leland P. Smith, **Archivist**  
Sandy Erickson, **Administrator**  
Al Zdon, **Editor**

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**Military Historical Society of Minnesota**  
**C/O Minnesota Military Museum**  
**Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy. 115**  
**Little Falls MN 56345-4173**

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**DSN: 871-7374**  
**Fax: 320-632-7797**  
**Email: connect@mnmilitarymuseum.org**  
**Website: www.mnmilitarymuseum.org**

## **Artifact Donation Honor Roll**

### **January – March, 2013**

*The museum gratefully acknowledges donations of artifacts from the following:*

Shari Collins ▪ Susan DeSimone ▪ Paul Given ▪ Tom Gonyea ▪ Jim Gwost ▪ Iron Hills Pawn Shop ▪ Frederick Kea ▪ Gordon Krantz ▪ Mrs. Earl Nystrom ▪ Jim Perra ▪ Melissa Poepping ▪ Jan Rothanburg ▪

## **Artifact Donations**

### **January – March, 2013**

**Uniforms:** Cap, Garrison ▪ Coveralls, USCG (2) ▪ Fatigue shirt, USCG ▪ Hat, USN ▪ Jacket, Eisenhower ▪ Jacket, USCG foul weather ▪ Jumper, USN ▪ Leggings ▪ Service shirt, USCG ▪ Shoulder board, WWI German police ▪ Trousers, USCG foul weather ▪ Trousers, USN ▪ Uniform, WWII German Army Artillery captain's parade dress

**Equipment:** Caisson Box ▪ Flotation jacket, USCG ▪

**Miscellaneous:** Badges, WWII German (4) ▪ Bags (5) ▪ Belt, USA WWII ▪ Belt, WWII German (2) ▪ Belt buckle, WWII German (4) ▪ Books ▪ Canteen ▪ Documents ▪ Flag, Nazi (3) ▪ Magazines ▪ Maps ▪ Medal, 1918 ▪ Medals, WWII German (7) ▪ Newspapers ▪ Pamphlets ▪ Photographs ▪ Pin, WWII German ▪ Pocket Diary/Bible, WWI ▪ Postcards ▪ Tinnies, WWII German (7) ▪ Wound dressing, WWII German

**Weapons and related items:** Casing, brass 105 mm artillery shell ▪ Magazines, Luger pistol (2) ▪ Magazine, M-14 rifle ▪ Magazine, Mauser rifle (3) ▪ Pistol, Luger w/holster ▪ Pouch, ammunition (2) ▪ Rifle, Mauser w/bayonet ▪