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Civil War re-enactors enliven history for visitors in Niles

By **SHERRY VAN ARSDALL**
Tribune Staff Writer

Story was first posted at 6:20 p.m. Saturday, May 15, 2010.

NILES — Six-month-old Liam Kane wore a long white dress/frock and a knit wool cover over a folded cloth for his diaper. He was attending the fourth annual Brandywine Civil War Re-enactment with his [parents](#), Bill and Karlee Kane, of Lockport, Ill.



Tribune Photo/MARCUS MARTER

Confederate Capt. Randy Brinson (left) and Union Major Keith Harrison (right) have a little fun with one another during the 4th annual Brandywine Civil War Re-Enactment in Niles on Saturday.

"Boys and girls were dressed equal because the mortality rate was so high at that time," Karlee Kane said. "They were dressed simple until they were older."



The only way to tell the difference between a baby boy or a girl was their hair.

"Boys always had their hair parted on the side or their hair was gathered in a tuft on top of their heads," she said. "The women and girls always wore their hair parted down the center."

Liam played with simple toys near his mom under a shelter half.

Two soldiers would each carry one half of a tent and then button it together to form a tent, said Kane, who portrays Henry Johnson, an actual soldier from Chatham County in North Carolina, during re-enactments.

"It's fun. I've always been interested in history and went on a weekend camp 10 years ago and was hooked for life," Kane said. "It's a fun hobby."

Kane wears the uniform of a common Confederate soldier and showed visitors his government-issued military equipment, including a [cartridge](#) box, a canteen, a five-pound wool blanket and rifle musket.

"We carried between 20 to 30 pounds," he said. "I would write home for a new shirt and carry an extra pair of socks in my knapsack."

He has a housewife, known today as a sewing kit, with buttons, thread and needles to mend clothing. "Back then, everyone knew how to mend their own clothing," Kane said. "A soldier's life is boring, so I have dominoes. Some carry playing cards but cards are considered bad (for religious reasons)."

As members from the Union's 9th Battery Michigan Light Artillery Unit fired a cannon Saturday, baby Liam didn't even flinch at the loud noise.

Rich Healy, of Plano, Ill., takes on the character of Larkin Moon, a small farmer from Chatham County who enlisted in the 26th North Carolina Infantry Regiment and survived the war after being wounded twice.

Healy looked forward to sleeping on his rope bed after the day's activities, which included the battle.

More Information

Sunday's Civil War re-enactment schedule

Where: Low family property next to Brandywine Middle/High [School](#), 1700 Bell Road, Niles

What: Re-enactors will stage battles, conduct tours of campgrounds and explain what life was like during the Civil War.

When: Camps open to the public at 9 a.m. Sunday.

- 9 a.m. - 1860s church service and camp demonstrations
- 10 a.m. - Infantry drill and panning for gold
- 2 p.m. - Battle

Admission: \$5 for adults, \$2 for students and seniors, and free for children under 8.

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"Most of what you see is as close to period as we can get," Healy said.

The rope on the bed has a crisscross pattern and, "you have to tighten up the ropes at night so the bed won't sag," he said. "That's where the saying 'sleep tight' comes from."

For six years, Joe Fortner, of Elkhart, has been a private with the 1st Michigan Infantry, and hosts for the weekend event.

"I've always been fascinated with history and the Civil War was one of the biggest moments in our history, deciding whether we'd be one country or two," Fortner said. "A lot of families fought against each other."

There were more casualties in the Civil War than all the other wars combined, he said.

"It's nice to teach the public and they can actually see it and live it through us," Fortner said.

Fifth-grader Cameron Madison has an interest in history and liked the campsites. "It's cool," Cameron said.

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"deciding whether we'd be one country or two"

Or more. I believe that's going to be brought to the table again in the future.

"There were more casualties in the Civil War than all the other wars combined, he said."

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False.

It's good that people are getting together to recognize the war between the states but the war certainly wasn't fun or cool.
 Did anyone portray the Rothschild international bankers who fomented and funded the whole thing?

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