

DIXIE

FACING PAGE: Civil War re-enactor Bud Thayer stands with his horse, Dixie, while dressed in his full Confederate Army uniform. Thayer and Dixie have been doing reenactments together for the past eight or nine years.



DOWN IN LAND

Lake City's Bud Thayer participates in Civil War re-enactments all over the southern states.

Story and photos by KAYLA LOKEINSKY

The Olustee Festival held every year in Columbia County is one of the area's most beloved traditions. The three-day event transports visitors back to the time of the Civil War, right up until the Battle of Olustee Re-enactment, by far the most exciting part of the festival.

One of the men among the troops is Lake City's own Bud Thayer. The 79-year-old Navy veteran has been participating in Civil War re-enactments for over 30 years and is a member of the 2nd Florida Cavalry.

"I've always had an interest in the war between the states in addition to World War II," Thayer said. "Those are two periods of history that I've always had very sincere interest in and when I ran into several of the guys who were with Company D back in the early 80s in McIntosh I signed up with them and began re-enacting. The more I get into it the more I learn about history so it's been an education for me as much as it is for the people I try to present the information to."

Sitting on horseback in his Confederate uniform, Thayer looks straight out of a Civil War movie. As a matter of fact, Thayer and his company have been a part of several highly-acclaimed wartime movies. Thayer participated in re-enactment scenes for the Civil War-era movies, including "Gettysburg" and "Glory," as well for the Texas Revolution mov-



ies such as "Houston: The Legend of Texas" and "Alamo: The Price of Freedom."

"I've had various different roles in

all of them," Thayer said.

While he was working as a catastrophe insurance adjuster before his retirement, Thayer fought in movie



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battles in his off time.

"I worked from Maine to Hawaii and from Seattle to St. Thomas," Thayer said. "In doing so, I only worked when there was an emergency or catastrophe somewhere that needed me. So, at the time I did movies in-between."

While at one point he and his company were traveling to several states to participate in re-enactments and movies, Thayer and the 2nd Florida Cavalry now tend to participate in re-enactments in Florida and Georgia. This fall, Thayer and company have participated in re-enactments just about every other weekend.

TRAINING FOR HISTORY

In order to make sure that they continue to accurately portray what happened during the Civil War, the cavalry continuously practices and trains to make sure that their performances are not only historically accurate, but entertaining.

"You train and you keep training," Thayer said. "We're still training, even after all these years we're still practicing. We try to make things look right for the crowd. We take a lot of pride in our uniforms and our accouterments and the way we act in battle, parades or whatever it might be. We want to convey that to the crowds."

For Thayer, re-enacting is about more than just putting on a show.

"It's not just the riding and the maneuvers and putting on a show for the public," Thayer said. "You try to assimilate what our ancestors would have gone through. It's also the comradery among troops, especially in our unit. You're sitting around the campfire and having fun with your friends. It's fantastic."

Thayer has traced his ancestry back to the Civil War, where members of his family fought on both sides of the battlefield. Although he

and the other re-enactors do their best to ensure that the battles remain historically accurate, they do make a couple adjustments to make sure that they can keep the crowd engaged.

"We do our best to try to put on something that the spectators will enjoy and assimilate somewhat what the battles were then," Thayer said. "Now we naturally carry more firepower than they did back then because we've got to make this battle last for 45 minutes to an hour, and you can't be running out of ammunition on horseback."

Thayer has ridden into battle with his current horse, Dixie, for the last eight or nine years, and he taught her how to behave under gunfire and cannon fire.

"I've worked with several different horses over the years," Thayer said. "The one I had before Dixie was a big, black, 16-2 hands Tennessee Walker. Beautiful animal, but he didn't like my hobby. It took a lot of convincing that he was going to like my hobby. The first time a cannon went off it was rodeo time."

Dixie, on the other hand, was battle ready since the first time she came out onto the field.

"Dixie's been super," Thayer said. "The first time I put her into a battle she looked around and said, 'OK what's next.' She's been great. She makes me look good in the saddle."

During the Olustee Festival, which Thayer has been participating in since the early 1980s, keep an eye out for him and Dixie riding in the Olustee Parade next to the Confederate Army General, leading his cavalry through the streets.

Annual Olustee Festival

The 39th Annual Olustee Festival will take place on Feb. 17 and 18 in downtown Lake City. The 41st Annual Re-enactment of the Battle of Olustee will take place Feb. 17-19 at Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park. There will be a 3:30 p.m. battle demonstration on Saturday, Feb. 18 and the Olustee Battle Re-enactment will begin at 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 19. This year's event marks the 153rd Anniversary of the Battle of Olustee.

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— BUD THAYER