

Memorializing the Past: Honoring the Old Guards

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ALTON - Men representing the 32nd Illinois Volunteer Infantry, Company F, laid carnations on the graves of men who were veterans of the Civil War at the Alton National Cemetery. The men placing the flowers are part of the Alton Jaeger Guard, a group of reenactors who keep parts of Alton's illustrious Civil War history alive. The Jaeger Guards represent a militia mostly made of newly-arrived European immigrants who settled in Alton during the 1800s.

The carnations were donated by Kinzels Flower Shop in Alton. Men from across the Midwest also joined the Jaeger Guard in full dress for the Memorial Day Parade in Alton, which is the oldest one in the nation.

"We are driven by a lack of focus on history in a town as rich in history as Alton," Jaeger Guard Zack Hardin said following the parade. "We had 40 men and two musicians from four states travel to Alton to bring that history to life. Our hope is that we can bring attention to Alton's important past and participation in the war that made this nation into what it would become. We wanted to honor these men and their sacrifice and do it in a way that would be respectful, and something that, if they could see it themselves, they would have appreciated."

This year's parade was the 151st in Alton's history with the first taking place in 1868 when Union veterans paraded in uniform from the Alton City Cemetery to the Upper

Alton Cemetery in uniform to honor the graves of their fallen comrades. Hardin said his group not only worked to honor these souls with the reenactment and carnations, but they also placed flags and carnations on the graves of veterans not interred in the military section of the national cemetery, including former Jaeger Guard commander John Kuhn.

Hardin said the group also worked "tear for tear and shred for shred" to recreate the iconic battle flag of the Illinois 32nd. In the future, the Alton Jaeger Guards will also be traveling to Galesburg, Illinois for a reenactment as well as Missionary Ridge to recreate a battle there. Hardin said the group would also be marching in the Bethalto Veterans' March in August where they will be portraying the 80th Volunteer Illinois Infantry, Company K, which was raised in Bethalto.

