

A WWII Living History Day at IRM

THE ANZIO EXPRESS & NORTH PLATTE CANTEEN

By Rebecca Tulloch



Photo by Tom Davison

The men and women of the “Greatest Generation” and their trains were remembered on October 3, 2009 at IRM when the museum hosted its first WWII Reenactment. WWII Historical Interpreters populated our museum portraying American, Allied, Axis soldiers, and war time civilians; both on the home front, and in war torn Italy. Through out the day, our WWII period trains demonstrated the critical role that they played during the war years, culminating with the reenactment of an American Troop train making a whistle stop at the famous North Platte Canteen in Nebraska.

The event began early in the morning when museum guests began their visit to the museum by first being issued Italian identification cards at the main gate. They were instructed to carry their Italian ID cards with them through out the day because at any time German soldiers could ask to see their “Papers Please!”, and they did.

A ride on the “Streetcars to Italy Tours”, was first on the agenda for our guests. Departing from the Depot Street station, which doubled for a trolley stop in Anzio, Italy, patrons were greeted by the American Women’s Army Corps (WACs) who had set up their headquarters adjacent to the trolley stop just as this unit had done in Italy over 60 years ago.



Photo by Tom Davison

WAC Field Equipment and radio operator Abbie Manelly at the Anzio Trolley Stop.

Our guests were then invited to board the trolley for a ride into occupied Italy in 1944. The first stop on their tour was Cassino, Italy, the site of the famous battle for Monte Cassino; there a British soldier spoke to the passengers about the battle while part of the war was taking place just outside the trolley windows. He then warned them that the trolley would be entering into German controlled Italy and that they should be careful as they continue their journey. Soon after the trolley rolled into the enemy zone, passengers were met by German soldiers and scientists who were supervising an archeological excavation where priceless treasures were being unearthed and stolen back to Berlin. German soldiers then boarded the train to check ID papers only to discover an Italian female partisan was riding on the train. As the train rolled on down the tracks, the German officer began to interrogate the partisan on the train for all the passengers to observe.



Photo by Rebecca Tulloch



Photo by Tom Davison

Above: Red Streetcar 3142 passes by German Antiquities display. Right Corner: Italian Soldier Bob Starr. Right: Italian Partisan Lisa Dousharm is discovered by Germans.



Photo by Rebecca Tulloch

Suddenly, the trolley was ordered to stop as it was observed by the Germans on the trolley that Italian partisans were on the track a head setting up an explosive device. The Germans quickly exited the trolley to engage the partisans in a fire fight only to be extinguished by an American patrol squad who accidently stumbled into the scrap. After being rescued by the Americans, the trolley proceeded even further into the occupied zone eventually ending up in Viterbo, Italy. There all the passengers were asked to unload on to the platform for a papers check and questioning regarding the partisan attack on the trolley. All were required to comply, and the passengers smiled indicating their over all enjoyment of the unique view into history. They weren’t just watching a performance; they were in one!



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German Historical Interpreter Dave Fornell reviews guests’ identity papers at Springfield trolley stop which doubled for Viterbo, Italy.