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JULY 4 MARKS MANY ANNIVERSARIES FOR ILLINOIS SOLDIERS

SPRINGFIELD, III. – In addition to marking the independence of the United States, the Illinois National Guard is also marking the 150th anniversary of the Siege of Vicksburg and the Battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War and the 95th anniversary of the Battle of Hamel during World War I (WWI).

Three Illinois units participated in the Battle of Gettysburg, the 8th Illinois Cavalry, four companies of the 12th Illinois Cavalry, and the 82nd Illinois Infantry.

“At 7:30 a.m. on July 1, 1863 Lt. Marcellus Jones with the 8th Cavalry fired the first shot of the Battle of Gettysburg and the first Union Soldier to die in the battle were from the 12th Illinois Cavalry,” said Adriana Schroeder of Springfield, Ill., the Illinois National Guard command historian.

Two days later, the 82nd Illinois Infantry participated in the Union defense of the infamous Pickett’s Charge.

Hundreds of miles and several states away, Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant laid siege to Vicksburg, Miss., with nearly one-third of his entire force consisting of Illinois Soldiers.

“The turning point in the Civil War came July 4, 1863 when Confederate fighters surrendered at both Gettysburg and Vicksburg,” said Schroeder. “Gettysburg marked the last push into Union territory for the Confederates. After Vicksburg, the Union Army controlled the Mississippi River and cut the Confederacy in two.”

Fifty-five years later, in July 1918, Soldiers from the 131st and 132nd Illinois Infantry Regiments were attached to Australian brigades in France during WWI.

“These Illinois Soldiers were the first of the 33rd Division to fight in the war and possibly the first Americans to fight under the command of another country.” said Schroeder. “On July 4, 1918, they

successfully took out German trenches in the Hamel Woods, which had previously dominated Australian forces.”

On Aug. 12, 1918, George V, the King of England, arrived at 33rd Division Headquarters and awarded 19 officers and enlisted men with the Distinguished Service Cross, the Military Cross and the Military Medal for acts of bravery.

Cpl. Thomas A. Pope, a Norwood Park, Ill., native, served with company E of the 131st Infantry Regiment and received the Medal of Honor at Hamel. His citation reads, “At Hamel, July 4, 1918...Corporal Pope’s company was advancing behind the tanks when it was halted by hostile machine gun fire. Going forward alone, he rushed a machine gun nest, killed several of the crew with his bayonet, and, standing astride his gun, held off the others until re-enforcements arrived and captured them.”

The Illinois State Military Museum has artifacts and displays that tell the story of the Illinois units and Soldiers who served in these key battles. The displays include battle flags, weapons, war trophies and a WWI trench scene depicting the battle of Hamel.

The Illinois State Military Museum is open Tuesday through Saturday from 1 to 4 p.m. It is located adjacent to Camp Lincoln at 1301 N. MacArthur Blvd. in Springfield. Admission and parking are free.



Courtesy photo/ Cpl. Charles M. Palmer from Pecatonica, Ill., served with company M, 8th Illinois Volunteer Cavalry during the Battle of Gettysburg.