



BRUCE FINE/News-Press

Civil War re-enactors, who are playing the part of a Union Federal Artillery company, fire a cannon at the Confederates during a re-enactment at Koreshan Unity Foundation grounds in Estero on Saturday.

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On both sides of the battle

Teed, followers were trapped in middle of War Between the States

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ESTERO — Call it living history, with really big, loud guns.

The Koreshan Unity Foundation is an open-air classroom this weekend. Civil War buffs there can teach visitors anything from the accuracy of Spencer repeating rifles to the technique of popping corn in hog fat.

They're there for the annual Solar Festival marking the birthday of Cyrus Teed, founder of the Koreshan commune. They're recreating the times when Teed and seven other Koreshan members were fighting on both sides of the War Between the States.

Teed, 23 at the time, was a medical aide with the Union forces before suffering a stroke. His commune started in upstate New York and ended up in Estero.

This weekend's Civil War re-enactment has been such a hit, the foundation plans to have it an-

nually, said director Sean Milks.

On Saturday, history buffs in authentic regalia played out their parts. Women and children sat under a shade tree, sipping tea. Nearby, men in uniform fired a cannon.

Nothing brings the Civil War to life like the sound of artillery fire. But for people like Candace Marston of Venice, nothing captures the flavor of that era like sweetened popcorn.

Marston uses a 35-gallon cast-iron kettle, much like the ones 19th century citizens used to butcher hogs. They'd leave some hog lard in the kettle, then throw in corn and sugar or maybe molasses, and they'd pop corn — a trick learned from the American Indians.

For the record, Marston skips the hog fat in favor of vegetable oil.

On the other end of the encampment stands a man in a Union sailor's uniform, displaying his collection of original Navy cutlasses and rifles.

CIVIL WAR RE-ENACTMENT

■ **WHAT:** Koreshan Solar and Civil War Festival

■ **WHEN:** 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. today. Skirmishes will begin at 2 p.m.

■ **WHERE:** Koreshan Unity, U.S. 41 and Corkscrew Road

■ **COST:** Adults \$3, children 10 and younger free with adult

The sailor, North Fort Myers native Greg Centanne, is so into his hobby that he has grown his sideburns in a Victorian style that's not seen anymore.

"You've got to have a basic interest in history to get involved in something like this," Centanne said.

He told visitors how Civil War battles were fought with outdated strategies at close range, without taking into account the speed and accuracy of 1860s weapons.

That's why the death toll was so high: 620,000 casualties, compared to 56,000 Americans killed in Vietnam, said Centanne, himself a Vietnam vet.

These enthusiasts go to as many as 16 "battles" a year in Florida alone, said Bob Scott of San Carlos Park. He's the commander of a Fort Myers-based artillery group that has three cannons, replicas of Civil War models.

One expense is the amount of black powder the cannons eat up — 40 pounds in a weekend, three or four ounces at a time.

In wartime, the cannons fired 8 pounds of powder and a cannonball, said Mike Simpson of Fort Myers.

"This gun would jump up in the air and go back about eight feet," Simpson said.

"You got out of its way."