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Re-enactment Ceremony Honors Tampa Bay History And The Sacrifice Of Its Pioneer Families

Veterans of Tampa Bay's own Sunny South Guard will be honored for their duty and sacrifice Saturday, September 17, 2011 at the Poe Plaza in downtown Tampa during a free historical re-enactment.

Tampa, FL –On Saturday, September 17, 1861, 100 of Tampa Bay's most prominent citizens formed a civilian militia to protect hearth and home after President Lincoln called up 70,000 troops to force Florida to re-join the Union. They marched off to defend Florida when she was attacked, along with her sister States of the Confederate States of America. When the company returned, it was missing a third of its men. Those that remained went on to become mayors, sheriffs, State Representatives, and Senators and even a Governor of Florida.

It was sacrifice like this that led the Veterans Administration (VA) to provide veterans benefits to Confederate and Union soldiers, alike. This is the spirit with which the Tampa Bay Sesquicentennial Commission will be staging an historical re-enactment of the Flag Presentation Ceremony to the Sunny South Guard that originally took place on that date in 1861 when Florida seceded from the Union and joined the Confederate States of America. This free re-enactment will happen just steps from it's original Old Fort Brooke location, at 201 N. Franklin Street in downtown Tampa. During the event, dignitaries will recognize descendants from the original pioneer families who settled here, and fought for Florida and her sister states.

"Veterans understand what it means to fight for your country, and to make the ultimate sacrifice—no matter how popular or unpopular the war," said David McCallister, co-chair of the Sesquicentennial Commission. "On this day, we'll be honoring descendants of some of Tampa's most prominent family members who stepped up to the task when duty called, a honor-worthy act, regardless of political position"

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Re-enactment Ceremony Honors History And Sacrifice, 2-2-2.

The re-enactment is being hosted by the Tampa Bay Sesquicentennial Commission, a group of historical re-enactors, genealogists, descendants of Tampa's pioneer families, as well as other civic-minded individuals and organizations interested in preserving Tampa Bay's rich history.

Back in 1861, Hillsborough County also included present-day, Manatee and Pinellas Counties. In June of that year, 100 of the "darling" sons of Hillsborough County organized themselves into an infantry company known as the Sunny South Guards and offered themselves to Florida for her defense. Upon receiving orders to report for War duty and prior to their departure to Jacksonville in September, the ladies of Tampa Town presented a company flag in a spectacular, moving presentation ceremony. It was held at the officer's barracks at Fort Brooke, Tampa's militia headquarters which was captured from Federal hands when Florida seceded.

The unit would be designated the 4th Florida Infantry, Co. K, and assigned to Hardee's Corps in the Army of Tennessee, CSA. The "Guards" were engaged at Murfreesboro and Jackson, and participated in the Campaigns of the Army from Chickamauga to Nashville and saw action in North Carolina. Some of these men will be killed in the line of duty, some were held as prisoners of war, while others returned home to help re-build the economy.

The re-enactment will depict the historic events of that day and will include the 11 young ladies that represented each of the States of the Southern Confederacy. Each will recite a poem and participate in the singing of the "Bonnie Blue Flag." Up to 100 men in early war attire will portray the Sunny South Guardsmen listed on the Roll of Honor (see link below to view the Roll and read bios). Onlookers in civilian attire will represent the families of the men and townspeople who participated in the ceremony. A special appearance by a re-enactment brass band, the 3rd Florida Regimental Band, Co. B "St. Augustine Blues" (aka Ancient City Brass Band) in period civilian attire will play "Dixie" at the end of the flag presentation. One of Florida's most famous re-enactors, Thomas Jesse, Cmdr. of the Department of the Gulf, CSA, will be portraying then US Army Colonel Robert E. Lee.

The Company's Captain, John T. Lesley, was reported by Tampa Tribune Historical writer DB McKay in the 1960s to have accepted the flag and said, "Ladies and my fellow countrymen. It is with humble words, yet in a prideful spirit, that I accept on behalf of my fellow soldiers of the Guard this beautiful banner of the youthful Confederate Republic, being delivered to witness before God and the world defense of the freeman's inalienable rights as defined by constitutional law." Lesley, who was wounded in action, later served as the Mayor of the City of Tampa, Hillsborough County Sheriff and Florida State Senator.

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Re-enactment Ceremony Honors History And Sacrifice, 3-3-3.

The re-enactment begins at 3pm a 1860's brass band concert, followed by the ceremony and flag presentation re-enactment at 4pm. From 5 to 6pm, guests will enjoy watching history come alive as re-enactors mix, mingle and discuss the lives and times of 1861. (Peace River Artillery cannon display)

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To learn more, visit <http://www.tampabay150.org>. To read the names of the soldiers being honored, visit <http://www.tampabay150.org/roll%20of%20honor.html>