

# Suburban Journals

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Rick graefe journal Bill Meppiel of Lemay stands below the coat of arms at the Jefferson Barrack County Park.

Alligators, lions and ladders

By [Jim Merkel](#)

As a youngster growing up in Lemay, Bill Meppiel often wondered about a coat of arms he had seen on a stone wall at Jefferson Barracks County Park.

What did that alligator mean? And what was the point of the ladder?

"It just seemed so odd. I could not see a correlation to anything," Meppiel said.

Now 55 and living in Fenton, the information technology analyst for AT&T found the answer to the mystery.

One image on the coat of arms referred to a battle on Christmas Day 1837 between volunteer soldiers from the area and Seminole Indians. The battle was fought at Lake Okeechobee in Florida.

While the alligator refers to the second Seminole War and the lakeside battle, the coat of arms has a larger reference point.

It was devised for a military unit that was stationed at Jefferson Barracks for almost the entire 120-year history of the military installation.

For years, the coat of arms was nothing more than a faded image on a wall, largely invisible to motorists using the entrance to the Jefferson Barracks County Park from South Broadway.

But it recently received new life. A volunteer organization paid to have it repainted and refurbished.

Now a bright red lion, a white cross with a red background, an alligator and the words "unity is strength" can clearly be seen.

The coat of arms is of the 6th Infantry Regiment, which arrived at Jefferson Barracks in 1827, about six months after the military installation was formed. The unit fought in the Mexican-American War, Civil War and World War I. It remained at Jefferson Barracks until 1940, six years before the installation was decommissioned.

"The 6th was a very important unit that was here for years. They were known as the 'Spit and Shine' group. This was their home," Glenda Stockton said.

Stockton is the president of the Friends of Jefferson Barracks, which paid for the crest's restoration.

The 6th Infantry Regiment included Zachary Taylor, who served as president from 1849 to 1850, and Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, Stockton said.

"The 6th Infantry always considered Jefferson Barracks their home," Marc Kollbaum said. He is curator of museums at the site.

The coat of arms was originally approved on Jan. 21, 1921, according to a Pentagon web site.

Each element of the coat is a reminder of a specific event in the unit's history, Kollbaum said.

The alligator on the coat of arms comes from the unit's involvement in the Second Seminole War against Indians in Florida in the 1830s, Kollbaum said. In 1837, Col. Richard Gentry and Col. Zachary Taylor led a group that included the Regiment of Mounted Missouri Volunteers into the Battle of Lake Okeechobee in Florida. A total of 26 soldiers were killed and 112 wounded. An estimated 11 Seminoles were killed and 14 injured. The ladder on the coat of arms came from the unit's involvement in the Battle of Chapultepec in the Mexican-American War. In the battle, soldiers used ladders while they stormed a castle on a hill.

A white cross on a red background symbolizes the crossing of the Meuse River near Verdun during World War I. A silver cross on a red field was the symbol of the ancient lords of Verdun.

In 1940, the 6th Infantry Regiment was redesignated the 6th Armored Infantry Infantry Regiment.

After that, the unit was based at Fort Knox, Ky. and saw service in North Africa and Italy during World War II.

For more information, go to <http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/Inf/06th%20Infantry%20Regiment.htm>