

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Area organizations to honor Veterans Day at observances

Thursday, November 11, 2004

Veterans Day ceremonies today at the Blue Ridge Rehab Center, the Blue Ridge Manor and the Adult Day Care Center will honor those who have served their nation.

At the Adult Day Care Center at 10 a.m., members of the Martinsville High School Junior ROTC will perform drills in honor of the 11 veterans who are clients there. Veterans also will be presented with certificates noting their ranks, tours of duty and thanks from a grateful country.

Lunch will be available for veterans and their guests.

"This is an inter-generational activity that will help both the young and old," said Melinda White, program director. The ceremony at the Blue Ridge Rehab Center begins at 2 p.m., honoring the 56 veterans who live in the rehab and Blue Ridge Manor.

Posey Young will host the event, with several veterans from the community slated to attend. Veterans also will receive certificates honoring their service to their country.

Veterans living at the Blue Ridge Rehab Center and the Blue Ridge Manor often recall their experiences during World War II.

"I wasn't on the front lines but maybe for five months," Ben Clifton said of his three years in the Army Infantry. Still, he recalls those months with amazing clarity.

"I was the bazooka man," he said, laughing. "I was the only one who could hit anything." A bazooka, he said, is a firearm which looks like a piece of pipe. Shells for the weapon were about 14-inches long, he added.

Clifton was stationed in England during most of his tour of duty. "The time passed quick. You never was worried about sitting around. You stayed busy all the time, diggin' fox holes" and other maneuvers designed to try and stay alive, he said.

"We had a lot of trouble," Ben Clifton said. "A whole lot of our boys got killed. Some of my best buddies died. I can't help but think about them."

His brother, Robert Clifton, also traveled to England before his discharge as a private first class, he said during a visit to Blue Ridge on Wednesday.

During those years, "I didn't worry about nothing. I didn't have a girlfriend back in the states and I didn't worry about anything," he said of the three years in the 7th Corps of the 1st Army.

"I was just a little ordinary boy. I did what they told me," Clifton added. The memories have lasted a lifetime.

"If I had two lives to live, I'd live one in the service. I enjoyed it, especially after they got me back in one piece," he said.

Curtis Martin is 89 years old now. He was 26 when his four-year military stint began. He was a corporal when he was discharged.

While in combat, "I never lost one drop of blood," Martin said of his service in England, France, Belgium and Germany.

He does feel eerie when he recalls some of his experiences, such as "digging trenches to sleep in so the tanks wouldn't run over you and kill you," Martin said. After digging the trench, a doubled blanket was placed in the bottom and another was placed on top of the person, similar to a coffin.

The trench, he said, felt like a grave. "You'd wake up the next morning and think you'd died a natural death," he said.

Martin also recalls crossing the Atlantic on the Queen Mary, "the largest ship afloat," he said.

The second day out, he decided to take a shower. After lathering "with that old Life Buoy soap," the water cut off. "I took a towel and tried to dry off. I was scratching from head to toe," Martin said, shaking his head and laughing.

Roy Taylor Martin, 81, is an Army Air Force veteran who spent about two years in service to his country before he was discharged in 1945 as a corporal.

Each day, he added, presented different challenges. But while he said he "learned a lot" during his tour of duty, "it didn't do me any good as far as getting around at DuPont."

Martin worked at DuPont from 1950 until 1978 and was a volunteer with the Bassett Rescue Squad for 17 years.

He said he does not talk much about the war. "We talk about DuPont," he said.