

Honor Flight honors local POW Pete Wylie

By Denyse Clark, Reporter

Thursday, November 15, 2012 at 6:24 pm (*Updated: November 16, 6:17 am*)

His name is D C Wylie Jr but he prefers to go by the name by which he's best known, "Pete."

On Sept. 26, Wylie, 88, boarded a S.C. Honor Flight to take a daylong trip to Washington D.C. to visit a memorial built in his honor as a veteran of World War II. There were about 80 veterans on this flight with Wylie and one veteran from York who Wylie knew, he said.

"We left the Columbia Airport early that morning headed to Washington," Wylie said. "Our primary visit was to the World War II Memorial."

Wylie said in addition to the WWII Memorial, he also visited the Korean Memorial, Vietnam Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, Air Force Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery. The S.C. Honor Flights are sponsored by the Electric Cooperatives of South Carolina, Wylie said. Fairfield Electric Cooperative sponsored the flight that he took. The all-day visit to Washington honors the nation's veterans like Wylie, who valiantly served his country as a rifleman of the U.S. Army's 99th Infantry Division during World War II. His tour of service placed him in Germany during some of the fiercest tumults of this war. During the Battle of the Bulge, Wylie was captured and spent four months as a prisoner of war, he said. Before his military service, Wylie had been a student at Clemson for two years but after the attack on Pearl Harbor, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves in December 1942. Wylie began his active duty service in June 1943. In September of 1944, he was stationed on the border of Belgium and Germany and before sunrise on Dec. 16, 1944, he remembers artillery barrage that turned into the Battle of the Bulge. Wylie survived German and friendly fire attacks, but his division was forced to surrender, and the next four months were a test of his human will to survive. He and fellow POWs were forced to march many days before reaching Bonn, Germany where they were packed tightly into a train boxcar. The prisoners were given no food nor water and were forced to eat snow from the top of the boxcar. On Christmas Eve of 1944, a train took these POWs to Limburg, but that camp had been bombed so they were taken to Stalag XIII-C, the notorious prisoner-of-war camp in Hammelburg. As prisoners, the men were forced to stand outside in the freezing cold for hours while German guards counted them. Many times, two small potatoes and a crust of bread was their only food. After Hammelburg, Wylie worked as a farmhand in a village near Werksburg. On one occasion while trying to find shelter, Wylie and the POWs found food the Germans had hidden in a tunnel. While in route to Bamberg, the POWs discovered a farm and while hiding under hay in a barn loft, they planned their escape to the next town where they anticipated that American troops would be waiting for them. Slaves at this farm fed the POWs for 11 days and at night, the slaves played music so these men could move without anyone hearing them, Wylie said. On April 12, 1945, he heard the unbelievable news of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's death and on the following day, a young boy led Wylie and the others to American troops in a town two miles away. After a lengthy hospital stay, Wylie was discharged from the Army in December of 1945. He returned to Clemson where he continued his studies and graduated in 1947, he said.

"I came to work in Chester in 1947," Wylie said. "I worked for the Clemson Extension Service as a county agricultural agent for 32 years."

Today, Wylie lives a quiet life in Chester and seldom speaks about his days as a POW of World War II. He said he thoroughly enjoyed the recent Honor Flight to visit the memorials dedicated to American veterans and encourages other local veterans to take full advantage of this opportunity just as his family encouraged him.