

Lyles

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1942, and bummed around in this country for almost a year-and-a-half," Lyles said. "Anti-aircraft, they didn't need us anymore, they had their air superiority, so I volunteered and went into the (Army) Air Force."

Lyles spent two weeks in San Antonio, but this arrangement would ultimately fall through.

"Then it was back down to a camp in Texas," Lyles said. "They needed infantry over in Europe, so I put my name on that list."

Lyles received training at Fort Benning.

"When I left Fort Benning, I picked up a packet, they called it, of 19-year-olds at Fort Meade, Md."

The men were then shipped out of New York to Glasgow, Scotland, took a train to a port, and crossed the English Channel to arrive in France.

"When we got to France, I don't even think we spent the night," Lyles said. "They got us on boxcars, and it was



Contributed
Brother Lyles served in the United States Army during World War II.

cold."

They rode the small train to the Eastern side of France.

"What they needed were platoon leaders," Lyles said. "I took a rifle platoon."

Lyles, who was in his early 20s at the time, was now leading a rifle company of 19-year-olds.

"These 19-year-olds had been exempted from military service, so they could

complete their college education," Lyles said. "They were college boys."

Lyles speaks highly of the platoon to this day,

"They were a good bunch of fellas, I'll tell ya," Lyles said.

The platoon was soon learning lessons that could only be taught through the reality of war.

"There were a lot of things we didn't learn at Fort Benning that we learned over there," Lyles said. "The attrition rate for platoon leaders was very high."

He said the average life expectancy for a rifle platoon leader was 23 days, a figure the 95-year-old beat soundly.

"You didn't dress up like an officer," Lyles said. "You dressed up just as rough as you could."

Lyles said this included never walking at the front of a line, wearing his bars on the inside of his shirt

"You tried to conceal who you were," Lyles said.

A full-strength platoon would have included 168 men. When Lyles took over, the platoon had 43 members, and that number would con-

tinue to decrease.

"I think I had 12 men left in the platoon," Lyles said.

During his time in Europe, Lyles had a variety of unique experiences including being guided through a minefield by a German man and encountering a German soldier with two Iron Crosses, who wished to join the U.S. army; and three Russian women, who had been working in Germany and desperately wanted to avoid returning to their home country.

Lyles said at the time Russia's atrocities were not clear, and his platoon was forced to send the girls home.

"I think about those girls to this day," he said.

After the Allied Forces achieved victory in Europe, Lyles and company were ready to return home, but were told a 50-day boat trip to Japan was in their futures.

Before they could depart, the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, prompting Japan to surrender.

Lyles said his time spent overseas during World War II gave him values, perspective and two new rules to live by.

"I decided I'd never let worry kill me, and if I wasn't home by sunset, I was on my way," Lyles said.

Lyles views the sacrifices he and others made as civic and patriotic duty.

"I belonged to what I call a 'We Generation,' and we did it, we had the people of this country behind us," Lyles said.

He said the veteran community would also be united in appreciating efforts to bring a monument to Fairfield County.

For information about the proposed Fairfield County WWII Monument, people can contact Bill Haslett at (803) 815-1010 or whaslett@truvista.net.

"It is a source of gratification for us to know the people have not forgotten, because we did make sacrifices," Lyles said. "Whether it was the ultimate sacrifice, or the years we put in, to know that people have not forgotten."

Contact Ben Hohenstatt at 803-635-4016. Follow him on Twitter @WinnsboroHerald