

Perryville class learns from World War II veteran

By Herb Brock
Staff Writer

HARRODSBURG — A group of Perryville Elementary School children boarded a bus and travelled a few miles up U.S. 68 to Harrodsburg Friday morning. But the bus trip became a flight that transported the youngsters half way around the world — and more than half a century back in time.

It wasn't an ordinary field trip to a local landmark. It was an extraordinary journey to a foreign country in the 1940s.

The Philippines during World War II.

And their tour guide and teacher was a man who was there — a man who experienced one of the most horrendous and horrifying events of the war.

Edwin W. "Skip" Rue, a Harrodsburg native who now lives in Lexington, was an officer of Co. D of the 192nd Tank Battalion, a Harrodsburg-

based Kentucky National Guard unit that was activated at the beginning of the war. The unit gained fame for its gallantry while taking part in the infamous "Bataan Death March."

In a lecture that was more like a conversation at the National Guard Armory, Rue talked about the march and his years as a prisoner of war. He didn't have tapes, slides or pictures. His only visual aid was a

book. You learn more from the people who were there," said 11-year-old Justin Weldon. "It's really interesting."

Rue is one of several veterans who have spoken to or soon will speak to the 43 pupils in Lana Yeary's and Sherry Jones' fourth-grade classes at Perryville Elementary. Along with Rue from the World War II era, the classes' special guest lecturers include men who fought in the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Gulf War.

Funded by a grant from the Kentucky Historical Society called the Hambleton Tapp Award, the

special unit has focused on "bridging generations" through the study of wars. In addition to lectures from veterans, the pupils' itinerary includes visits to Camp Nelson National Cemetery, the Vietnam War Memorial in Frankfort as well as to the Harrodsburg armory.

The unit will conclude on May 16 with a ceremony at

Students learn about war from teacher who was there

map of the world. He spoke softly without a hint of bravado or a mention of bravery.

But in less than an hour, the 86-year-old veteran was able to snip bits here and pieces there from his "volumes of memories" and weave them together into a low-key but still gripping account of his war-time experiences.

"This is a lot better than learning about the war from a



Staff Photo by Troy Anderson

Veteran Edwin W. "Skip" Rue talks about his experiences during World War II to fourth-graders from Perryville Elementary Friday at Harrodsburg's National Guard Armory.

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Baril Park in Perryville where a monument donated by Danville Monument Co. will be dedicated to the memory of veterans from this area.

And Rue, although well into his 80s, still has vivid memories of several of the World War II veterans — especially the 64 men from Harrodsburg and the two men from Perryville that made up the majority of the members of Co. D.

Of the 66 local men who went over to the Pacific corridor, only 37 came back and others, like Rue's brother, Arch, died shortly after their return from war-related injuries and illnesses.

"The two boys from Perryville were Lucian Yankey and Hugh Leonard. We had to leave Hugh over there, and Lucian spent the rest of his life in a hospital," said Rue.

"I was very proud of those boys from Perryville — all of the boys in the company."

Co. D. was activated around the time of the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 but they were kept in the dark at first about why they were being shipped over to the Philippines. They later found out that their job was to protect Clark Airfield, an American base near Manila, against Japanese attack.

Rue, a major, was commander of the unit while it was aboard the Philippines-bound ship but he was replaced in that post when he was promoted to serve on Gen. Douglas MacArthur's headquarters staff. But Rue didn't have much of a chance to enjoy the promotion. He, the rest of the Co. D and thousands of other Americans soon took on a position with no rank — that of prisoners of war.

Rue spent 3½ years as a POW and the low point in the miserable experience was the grueling five-day, 65-mile "death march" through the jungles of the Bataan peninsula.

The Japanese wanted to move thousands of American captives from a makeshift holdover to an official POW camp.

"They had the trucks to do it (move the POWs) but they decided that would be too easy on us," said Rue.

The Americans were kept marching day and night and given only small amounts of water and food.

"They fed us rice balls about the size of a baseball and they had seaweed in them. Seaweed is salty and it was put in with the rice to replace the salt we were losing through our perspiration," he said. "I'd totally lost my appetite and gave the rice balls to an officer marching next to me."

Frail and fatigued, POWs were dropping dead along the trail and it was the job of Rue and the other survivors to carry their bodies to a graveyard. They put the bodies in blankets and tied the ends to rods. A mural-size blown-up photo on a wall of the armory classroom showed a parade of American POWs in pairs carrying what looked like sacks of supplies but actually were the corpses of their comrades.

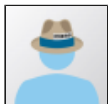
The end of the march was really just the beginning of Rue's ordeal as a POW. Not long after the march, he and other survivors were shipped to a POW camp in Japan where he spent three years.

Rue's last POW camp was on a mountaintop. It was more of a cemetery than a camp, or at least that's what he believes his captors hoped it would become.

"They showed us the bitterly cold and snowy conditions and said we'd die there."

Rue 2

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