

Brighton native honored as Veteran of the Month

By Sherri Onorati, Special to The Leader

The National World War II Museum reports that there were 16,112,566 members of the United States Armed Forces who served during World War II, which ended with 291,557 battle deaths, 113,842 non-combat related deaths and 670,846 wounded servicemen and women. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that there are just 620,000 American WWII veterans still alive at the end of 2016 and the majority of them are now nonagenarians.

March's Veteran of the Month, Rudolph Boykin, is one of those early American heroes whose sacrifices away from home, made it possible for his descendants and for all Americans to enjoy the freedoms we have today. Nominated by fellow veteran, John McBride, Boykin was born in Brighton, Tenn., at the end of the first Great War on Oct. 4, 1919.

"It was an honor and pleasure to nominate Bro Rudy," said McBride. "I didn't know he was a veteran and we don't have many WWII veterans left, so I wanted to make sure we got him recognized. But I say to you Bro Rudy, thank you for your service, thank God for the longevity of your life and may he continue to allow you to live for as long as he please."

Boykin was a sharecropper providing for his young family – wife, Annie Sue and daughter, Louise - when a friend returned home on furlough and told him about Army life.

"I wanted to go," revealed Boykin. "I was a sharecropper and didn't get much out of it because it was a tough life. One of my friends who worked with me came home on furlough and told me to tell my wife I was joining up 'cause you got paid. It was a way to take care of my family."

Boykin says that although he joined for necessity, nonetheless, he enjoyed his time in the service.

"See, I was on the farm and I drove a tractor and truck," he said, "and in the Army I drove a truck and hauled everything. I was a truck driver and had an ole Dodge truck. Yeah, I enjoyed doing it."

He enlisted on Apr. 28, 1944 and quickly became well travelled, spending time training in Tullahoma, Miss., and Ft. Benning, Ga., before being assigned to Camp Plauche in Slidell, Louisiana for additional training. Upon completion of his training in Louisiana, he was assigned to Ft. Lewis, located in Seattle, Wash., as a longshoreman soldier whose responsibility was to safe guard America's seaports as vital war materials and supplies were on-loaded and off-loaded on ships destined for use on the war front. He was next stationed overseas with the 847th Port Company at the Port of Nagasaki in Nagasaki, Japan, where he spent the next couple of years travelling extensively to various ports throughout the islands in the Japanese theater.

At the end of his tour, Boykin returned to Ft. Smith, Arkansas where he was honorably discharged before returning home to Covington. Once home, he found employment with the City of Covington, retiring after 38 years and made a life with his beloved wife, Annie Sue Flowers, whom he married on Sept. 6, 1942 and raised 14 children, eight boys and six girls, through 47 years of marriage. When his beloved wife passed on May 29, 1990, Boykin didn't think he'd find such love again but he did when he met Dolly Ruth Burton. He married again at the age of 74 on July 2, 1994 and will soon celebrate their 23rd anniversary. Their blended family now includes a total of 19 children and a lot of grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great grandchildren... five generations.

"Ooh wee, do I have a lot of grandchildren," Boykin laughed when asked how many he had. "I can't help it because the lord is good to me, but I've got too many to count, that's how much!"

His son, Rudolph, Jr., thanked those in attendance for honoring his father and gave heartfelt praise to his father for teaching him and his siblings right from wrong and for ensuring they went to church. Boykin is the chairman of deacons at Greater St. John Baptist Church in Covington.

"I just want to say it is a honor that you all have honored my dad," he said. "For a man to raise eight boys and six girls, and to keep the eight boys he raised out of jail, I am thankful. He was firm, but also gentle. He directed us to go to church when we were younger and daddy, I want to thank you for keeping us in church."

"Thank you for honoring me, I surely did enjoy it," added Boykin. "I am proud of my service, yes, ma'am, I enjoyed serving my country."

The Tipton County Veteran's Council presented Boykin with several awards for his years of service, including a certificate of honor, a years membership in the Tipton County Veterans Council, a certificate for a canvas portrait given by Munford Funeral Home, a two hour house cleaning by Merry Maids and a resolution signed by the governor and a flag flown over the state capitol, given by District 81 State Representative Deborah Moody.

"It is with heartfelt appreciation of your tireless efforts in support of our United States, the Tipton County Museum, Veterans Memorial and Nature Center in partnership with the Tipton County Veteran Council gratefully acknowledges your service as our veteran of the month," read Kathy Desjarlais, president of the Tipton County Veterans Council. "Your dedication to our country is commendable and an honorable addition to the fight for freedom in the world."

The Veteran of the Month program is sponsored by the Tipton County Museum, Veteran Memorial and Nature Center and the Tipton County Veterans Council. Sponsors of the monthly event include Tipton County Veterans Council, Patriot Bank, The Bank of Tipton and Munford Funeral Home. Underwriters include the VFW Post 4840 and the Disable American Veterans Auxiliary in Millington. Honorees are recognized on the second Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. and the public is invited to both make nominations and to attend the ceremony.