

Harold Beaupre

Harold Beaupre was a prisoner of war marching across Germany at gunpoint when he finally could take no more. It was the winter of 1945 and having suffered two years of abuse and near starvation Beaupre slumped to the ground.



When a German soldier told him to stand up or be shot, the broken young man from Waterloo said, “Shoot.”

Two friends, seeing Beaupre in the desperate situation, picked him up by the arms and carried him forward. Beaupre never knew who the soldiers were who saved his life that day but he remained forever grateful.

This was the kind of story Beaupre would tell when he was asked about the Second World War. Despite the horrors he experienced, Beaupre always focused on the men who died and those who helped him.

Beaupre, who later prospered as a businessman in Uptown Waterloo, was quick to remind people that of the forty young men who went to war from his Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate graduating class, only four survived.

A great loss for Beaupre happened on the morning of April 17, 1943 when the Lancaster Bomber he was in was damaged by German gunfire. Pilot Glenn McNichol tried valiantly to make it back to base with only two of four engines, but the aircraft finally fell from the sky at 240 mph, and crashed into a house in France.

Miraculously, Beaupre and the crew survived but McNichol was killed instantly. Beaupre, who helped a trapped gunner flee the wreckage, often told the story of the heroic pilot. When his son was born after the war, Beaupre named the boy Glenn.

After the crash in occupied France, Beaupre was taken to a prisoner of war camp near the Polish border called Stalag Luft 3. The camp was made famous when seventy-four prisoners escaped in 1944. Beaupre watched as soldiers shot fifty of the men who were recaptured.

On May 2, 1945 Beaupre and his fellow prisoners were liberated. “I was sure I would be cool, calm and collected,” he said. “But I screamed my head off when we were liberated by the British 8th Army.”

Beaupre returned to Waterloo, married his high school sweetheart and began working in his father’s store on King Street called Beaupre Paint and Wallpaper. He took over the business in 1946 and eventually changed the name to Beaupre Interiors.

Beaupre ran the business for thirty years in several downtown locations before retiring in 1979 and opening up another shop called Beaupre Stamps. The new business allowed Beaupre to pursue his passion for collecting stamps on a more full-time basis. “I look at the stamps and if it’s a country, my mind takes me there,” he said once. “Each stamp tells a story.”

Beaupre continued to tell the stories of war until he died in 2002 at the age of eighty-three. His stories paid tribute to the men who lost their lives to protect our freedom but they also reminded society about the cost of war. “. . . it was a bad time and I saw a lot of things,” said Beaupre on the fiftieth anniversary of his release. “We certainly don’t need another war.”

Photo courtesy of Margaret Beaupre.