

Jeff Jay 1923 - 2019

Jeff was born in Ipswich in 1923, the 6th of 7 children born to Jethro and Nell, home was in Pleasant Row - no longer in existence - but then in the dock area down by the river. The 20s, were post war and leading up to the Depression and one can only imagine that life was hard, indeed 2 of Jeff's brothers and sisters died tragically young.

He left school at 15, most left at 14, but Jeff was considered too small - so he did an extra year. he went to work for Footmans – a builders' merchant - where the present day Debenhams now is. He joined the Church Lads Brigade in 1937 and achieved the rank of sergeant.

When war broke out in 39, Jeff was too young to officially join up, but it didn't stop him from volunteering. His mother was sceptical of him ever making the Army – because of his size! But as we all know he did and he joined the Parachute Regt - a regiment he was proud to be a member of, until his dying day. He did his parachute training on Course 77 at the Parachute Training School at Ringway (now Manchester Airport) between 9th-18th Aug 43, completing 8 descents – his individual report states he was “Alert and keen. A good dispatcher.”. From there he was posted to the 7th Battalion (Light Infantry) Parachute Regiment.

When he was 90 he looked back on his war service..... in his own words.....

“How is it that I have managed to get to 90 years old? Maybe it is because I got a lease on life at the age of 20 – this is how it happened.

“In 1944 (June 5th) I was No 14 in a group of 20 men ready to jump into Normandy (France). The man in front of me (No 13) said he wasn't going to jump. I explained to him the consequences and he maintained he would not jump. So I said if I change places with you, will you jump and he said “yes” and that settled the problem.

“When we were crossing the coast of France we were being buffeted and blown about with Anti Aircraft fire and with a terrible bang a piece of shrapnel hit the plane behind me and sadly ended the life of who would have been No 13. “ (What Jeff didn't say here was that they swapped not only places but watches and it was his watch that was found and it was Jeff's mum that was visited and told the news of her son's (Jeff's) death. It was some time later that Jeff walked in the door.....)

“Our Padre had told us not to be afraid at our service before leaving Brize Norton. This apparently stirred me on.

“Now for a happier occasion. As a POW I was in a workers' prison (Kriegesgefangenen Lager) a party of 20 of us with 2 civilians in charge. One of these men (old enough to be my father) named Walter could speak broken English and spoke to me almost every day. He really wanted me to tell him

where I was from - but all he got was my RANK, NAME AND NUMBER. This went on for weeks and then came the time when it was evident that the war would end, and I told him Ipswich in Suffolk. I cannot describe the look on his face when he told me he was a POW in the 14-18 war and was in a camp in Harwich. He had been in the German Army and spoke of how well he had been treated. However, before all this he made a fuss of me in the November for my 21st birthday - when we finished work for the day and were walking back to our barracks - he pushed a newspaper wrapped parcel in to my jacket and when we got to our hut, I found a sandwich made with black bread and very black sausage which was the diet of the day in Germany. He also said to me that today my mother would be thinking of me and probably shedding a tear or two. Walter was certainly no Nazi and I do not hesitate to thank him every waking day.”

What he doesn't tell you, that he was on the run for 10 days, hiding in French farmhouses before being captured. When he was demobbed he was given a suit and a £100 and sent on his way. He returned home. Before that 2 newspapers reported on Jeff's story - the first had a report of Jeff's death – it had a picture of him in uniform and states “Mrs J R Jay, 107 Boyton Road, has been notified that her son Pte George Jeffrey Jay, of the Parachute Regiment, was killed in June in North-West Europe.” The other (which is too long to repeat in full) reported that a postcard had been received (it does not say by whom) from Jeff stating he was a prisoner of war at Stalag 4D and asking to be remembered to all old colleagues and hoping the Battalion (i.e. Church Lads Brigade) is as smart now as when he was in it.

So the war ended and Jeff returned to work at Footmans. In those early post war days, like many, he married, but the marriage wasn't to last, but when he moved to work at Hewitt's in Brook St, collecting grocery orders on his bicycle, there he met Daphne and you could say, in a favourite phrase of his, the rest is history.

He and Daphne married at Kirton – a very compassionate vicar, bent the rules; admittedly Daphne had to spend a week in a lady's house in the village, but she did that willingly and they married and not just married - but remained happily married for over 60 years, anyone visiting Jeff and Daphne will know the pride of place that the Diamond Wedding Card from Her Majesty the Queen has on their sitting room wall.

Together they moved to Badwell Ash where Jeff found similar work - they lived in the house next door - but when that business was sold and the new owners moved in to the house, Jeff and Daphne were moved upstairs to the flat above the shop - Ian was a baby and it just didn't work out - so Jeff went out and found another job and that was what brought them to Grundisburgh.

Jeff was the van driver for Mr Linley who was the then owner of Williams Stores. A house came with the job and Daphne and Jeff with the boys lived in what is now the Old Bakery.

In 1962 they moved to No 9 Meeting Lane - Jeff was now the village milkman, working for the Foulgers. He would enjoy that job and helping with the harvest too. His final work was with Roadworks - working on the roads. Roadworks employed quite a number of men from this village - it was hard physical labour but Jeff loved it and stayed with the firm until retirement beckoned in 1988.

Jeff however, I believe was not defined by his work, but by his faith. I found it highly significant when I visited Jeff in hospital the day after his stroke - he could barely talk - I prayed with him and gave him a blessing and he responded with a very firm "Amen". It was the last word he ever spoke to me. Amen – so be it! His faith was a practical faith and he found enormous joy and fulfilment in his ministry as an Elder - he was so proud to be the first Elder appointed in Grundisburgh. He was faithful in visiting the housebound and elderly. He kept a diary with all the details of every service he ever led – Morning Prayer according to the Book of Common Prayer – he loved it - and he especially loved singing in the choir. He notched up 49 years, just missing the half century. In later years when I would visit him and Daphne to take them communion, he would sometimes ask to sing, especially when we were close to a festival - The Easter Anthems being a particular favourite - which is why we began this service with those words.

His love of God was mirrored in his love of and for his family – Daphne - Ian and Philip - a proud grandfather of Stacey, James, Ryan, Corinne, Dominic and Abigail and of the great grandchildren Oscar, Evelyn, Finlay, Albert, Harrison and Archer. There was a moment of especial pride when Dominic graduated as an officer from Sandhurst and Jeff attended the Sovereigns Passing Out Parade.

At home – he enjoyed simple pleasures - Countdown, Songs of Praise, Pointless and without fail the 6.00 o'clock News.

He was a follower of Ipswich Town – a member of the Lyttleton Club and the Lunch Club. He was Chairman of the Scout group for some time, and a driver for the Leg Club.

Each of us will have our memories of Jeff that we treasure - may be a little man in physical stature, a David rather than a Goliath, but a big man in heart and faith – a man who was rooted and grounded in the love that is God - but is now released - set free to fly – as the reading Philip shared with us - "those who trust in the Lord – they shall renew their strength, they shall rise up on wings like eagles – they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint "

Jeff travel on in the love of God that created you; in the company of Jesus who redeemed you, and in the strength of his Spirit - may you dwell this day in peace.

Funeral address by Canon Revd Clare Sanders