

Biography of Alfred H. Gilbert Sr.



Alfred H. Gilbert Sr. was born October 13, 1920 in West Glens Falls, New York and graduated from Glens Falls High School in 1939. After graduation, Alfred worked at Scott Paper in South Glens Falls, NY for 18 years, except for the time he was in the United States Army. He married the love of his life, Beatrice (Bea) V. Latham (Gilbert) on August 1, 1943 and enjoyed 66 years together until her death in 2009. Alfred and Bea had five children: sons Alfred (Butch) H. Gilbert Jr., Bruce W. Gilbert (deceased), and David G. Gilbert, and twin daughters Penelope Gilbert–Moore and Pamela Gilbert.

After Scott Paper, Alfred worked at Hudson Pulp and Paper in Palatka, Florida for 5 years as a shift supervisor, then as a salesman for the upper Midwest Region for Porritts & Spencer (P&S), moving the family to Kalamazoo, and then Portage, Michigan. Alfred was then offered a transfer to Oregon in 1970 as a salesman for P&S for the Western Region. Alfred spent a total of 48 years in the paper mill industry until his retirement at age 65 in 1986.

One of the most notable periods in Alfred’s life was his time as a soldier in the United States Army. Alfred was drafted into the Army on October 7, 1943 and was on the front lines during the landing on the beaches of Normandy, France approximately three days after the initial invasion in June of 1944. He was assigned to Company F of the 357th Infantry Regiment of the 90th Division of the Texas/Oklahoma (T&O). During the invasion, Alfred and several others in his company were captured by a German tank division shortly after moving inland from the beaches of Normandy. Beatrice received notice from the Army on July 27, 1944 that Alfred was missing in action (MIA) since June 19, 1944. Then on August 23, 1944 Bea received confirmation that Alfred was a POW, held by the Germans in an unknown location. During this time, Alfred’s son Butch was born on June 29, 1944. Alfred would not learn of his first son’s birth until his release in 1945.

By February 2, 1945 confirmation was received that Alfred was imprisoned at Stalag 4A POW camp. Records indicate Alfred was transferred by the Germans to POW camp Stalag 3C. He recalls being transferred several times from one camp to another by way of cattle trucks during his 11 months as a POW.

Although Alfred won't talk much about this period in his life, he has shared some of his thoughts about the 11 months as a POW. He recalls that the conditions were deplorable and food was very scarce. When asked what one memory stuck in his mind the most from his time as a POW, he said there were many but he didn't want to share them, except that he will always remember "being hungry." Alfred also told of the time when he and other POWs were placed in a school house near the outskirts of Dresden, Germany, with very heavy and near deafening bombing from Allied forces occurring 24/7 for approximately three days. When the heavy bombing had subsided, the German soldiers guarding Alfred and the other POWs (which he recalls to be approximately 50 or so), left the POWs to be on their own. It was later learned that the reason the German soldiers left was because the Germans received information that Russian and American Allied forces were moving into Dresden.

During this time, he and the other POWs had to fend for themselves and walked toward Czechoslovakia in hopes of being reunited with Allied and American forces. One memory Alfred has shared is the time they were confronted by several Russian tanks and infantry men. One of the Russian tank turret hatches had opened and out came a large Russian female. It surprised all of them to see a female driving the tank. Shortly after being found by the Russians, the POWs were turned over to American Allied Forces and eventually sent to Scotland and England to be debriefed and finally returned to the United States. Alfred was released from active duty and Honorably Discharged from the United States Army on November 29, 1945 at Fort George G Meade, Maryland.

Alfred presently lives in Gresham, Oregon with his daughter Penelope and son-in-law, Keith Moore and enjoys the comforts of reading, bird watching and watching movies, as well as having family and friends stop by to visit from time to time.

Along with his 5 children, Alfred has 11 grandchildren and 6 great grandchildren. Alfred has no regrets in life except never going to Alaska. Not bad for a 96 year old!