

Former prisoner of war learns German with u3a to understand his wartime experiences

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s told how

Glenfield

u3a member Richard, who was shot down over Belgium in World War II, has told how the u3a movement has been a “lifeline” for him.

Richard Whateley-Knight, who joined Glenfield u3a in Leicestershire when he was 92 with his late wife Joan, became a member of several interest groups, including German speaking.

Richard, who recently turned 100, says, “My desire with joining the German interest group was to understand the language and the people, after my experience.”

He added “The u3a is a lifeline for me. I can’t emphasise enough how important it has been for my wellbeing.”

Newlywed Richard was part of No 613 Squadron, which was tasked with low-level night flying to destroy trains, tanks and buildings around St Vith in the Battle of the Bulge.

On Christmas Eve, 1944, the de Havilland DH.98 Mosquito which he was navigating was intercepted by a Luftwaffe Junker Ju 88 – which Richard described with characteristic understatement as “very bad timing.”

A burst of fire penetrated the cockpit, injuring Richard’s legs and shredding the controls. Richard and pilot Ken Baird bailed out and landed safely, but Richard was picked up by a German patrol and taken to various prison camps.

Finally, he was released by Allied forces at Moosburg. Richard revealed that living in the camps was mostly boring but sometimes he worked in the kitchen or hospital. The camp inmates were aware the war was coming to an end and he didn’t encounter any violence.

Richard is part of the Caterpillar Club, an informal association of people whose lives have been saved through the use of a parachute to bail out of a disabled aircraft. He was also awarded the National Order of the Legion of Honour, the highest French order of merit for military and civilians, in 2018.

An avid cricket fan and player, he was a member of the Local Umpires Association for 34 years and was awarded life membership of the England and Wales Cricket Board's Association of Cricket Officials.

Richard also belongs to the u3a gardening and history groups but describes the Glenfield u3a luncheon group as the most fun.

His recent 100th birthday was celebrated by his u3a friends with a cake and a speech by Richard. He said: "The reason I enjoy u3a so much is the extreme level of friendliness and cooperation within the movement.

"Since I reached my current age, help from other members has been instantaneous. No matter which groups I've been in there's been support available. If there's some tricky steps on a garden visit, there's always a helping hand.

"There's a desire within u3a to make new people feel at home."

If you're not yet a u3a member, [-join u3a.](#)