

## 'Incredible individuals'

Members of 'Greatest Generation' treated to Famie film

BY SUE MASON • OBSERVER STAFF WRITER • NOVEMBER 11, 2010

People carry the strangest things in their wallets. Take Rose Kaupp, for instance. Mixed in with the coins and currency is a rivet, one of the many used to build the B-24 bombers at the Willow Run Bomber Plant during World War II.



The war effort heralded the work with a “We Can Do It” poster featuring Rosie the Riveter, and while Kaupp wasn't that Rosie, she was a riveter. In fact, as an 18-year-old, the Manchester resident placed the first rivets in the first bomber to roll off the assembly line at Willow Run.

“It wasn't hard, but it was tedious,” Kaupp said. “I'd put the rivets in and someone would set them.”

While Kaupp was working in the heart of the Arsenal of Democracy, Fred Millard was storming Omaha Beach on D-Day. The Northville resident, who was born in Plymouth and grew up in Livonia, was in the first wave of American soldiers to jump off a landing craft into battle.

“We were the first ones in. They dropped us in nine feet of water,” Millard said. “The first thing I did was throw my gun away. Who was I going to shoot underwater?”

Millard and Kaupp were among the special guests at a recent screening of Keith Famie's Detroit, Our Greatest Generation at the Westland Senior Friendship Center. Sponsored by American House, seniors were treated to lunch and the movie, documenting World War II as experienced by those who lived and worked through it.

### 'INCREDIBLE INDIVIDUALS'

"After working on this production, I can say that had it not been for these incredible individuals, the war may have had a very different result," said Famie, who spent more than a year creating the film.

Some 300 seniors, many of them veterans, were praised for their efforts as members of the "Greatest Generation."

"Stand tall and hold your heads high," Westland Mayor William Wild said in a videotaped statement. "We recognize you, we value your bravery and strength. We recognize the burden you carried. Know how proud we are of you."

"Your experience is unique in the history of mankind," Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano said. "Sometimes we lose perspective and take our rights and freedoms for granted. We should thank you, veterans, for what you did."

The experience may have been more than unique for Millard, an 18-year-old private who joined his unit in Sicily, where "they told me don't unpack, we're leaving." They marched all night and early the next day, before he stepped on an anti-personnel mine. He was severely injured and spent more than five months in the hospital after his buddies were able to get him out.

"They couldn't get me out right away; they had to hide me and come back for me," he said. "They put me in a little ditch and gave me all of their water. It was getting dark and I heard soldiers marching by. I looked and it was the Germans."

Millard lost a lot of friends on the beach at Normandy. He used a trick that he learned swimming at his aunt's lakefront cottage to propel himself through the water to save his life that day. He made it to the beach, where he worked his way to safety, passing the bodies of soldiers, many of whom he knew.

"I lost a lot of good friends that day," Millard said.

He made that trip two more times, first to go back and retrieve a gun that he took apart and cleaned, then to find a bandolier filled with bullets.

A decorated veteran, Millard is still being recognized for his bravery 66 years later. On Sept. 10, he received a letter from Graham Paul, consul general of France in Chicago, informing him that he has been named a Knight of the Legion of Honor.

"My fellow countrymen will never forget your sacrifice," Paul wrote.

## HANDFUL OF RIVETS

Kaupp didn't get such tributes, just a handful of the plane rivets, one of which she carries with her. She took the job at Willow Run because it paid well. She had left home at age 16 because her father didn't want her to go to school anymore.

Kaupp lived in Detroit when she took the job at the bomber plant after it opened. She met her late husband, Gene, there and when he asked her to move to Ypsilanti to be closer to him, she didn't think twice. He never served in the military because "he worked in a factory where he was needed," she said.

"We worked nine hours a day, it was mostly women," she said.

Famie was inspired to do the film following the loss of his father, a bombardier on a B-17 during the war. He got help from Bob Gillette, founder of American House, in bringing it to fruition.

"Without the support of Bob Gillette, the story never would have been told about what Detroit did for the Arsenal of Democracy," Famie said.

He added that the 80-something veterans like to talk, "but we don't listen."

"The sad thing about society is we see them walking in Kmart and all we see is an 89-year-old shopping, but you can bet that in some way they were involved in the war effort," he said.

Famie is working on another documentary about Vietnam veterans, which will premier

Jan. 28 at the Fox Theatre. According to Famie, his latest film is “an opportunity to tell a story that's never been told.”

“Our Vietnam vets are becoming the caretakers of our World War II veterans and the guardians of our current military,” Famie said.

While Detroit, Our Greatest Generation has turned Famie into a spokesman for veterans, it also has a message for young people.

“The significance of the film is to help young people understand what it means to get old,” he said.

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