

# 'Hero for Two Nations' Exhibit Opened by Beyrle

By Shura Collinson  
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Three days before Victory Day, U.S. Ambassador John Beyrle opened an exhibition in Moscow dedicated to his father, who is believed to be one of just a handful of U.S. soldiers to fight for both the Soviets and the Americans during World War II.

"A Hero for Two Nations" celebrates the life of "Jumpin' Joe" Beyrle, who joined up with Soviet troops after escaping from a German prison camp.

Beyrle was captured by the Germans after parachuting into Normandy on D-Day in June 1944. Sergeant Beyrle, a member of the 101st Airborne's "Screamin' Eagles," was moved through seven Nazi prison camps, tortured and interrogated.

His parents were told that he had been killed in action, after American troops found his dog tags on another body — presumably a Nazi spy — on Utah Beach. A memorial service was held for him in his hometown of Muskegon, Michigan. But four months later, they received a postcard from their son, sent with the help of the Red Cross, telling them that he was a POW in Germany.

In January 1945, on his third escape attempt, Beyrle succeeded and broke out from the Stalag III-C prison camp in the village of Alt-Drewitz. He decided that his best option would be to locate Soviet troops — the only U.S. ally fighting in the area.

Once he encountered a Soviet tank brigade, Beyrle approached them with his hands in the air. "I knew two words of Russian: *amerikansky tovarishch*," or American comrade. Beyrle would later recall. In his own account of his ad-



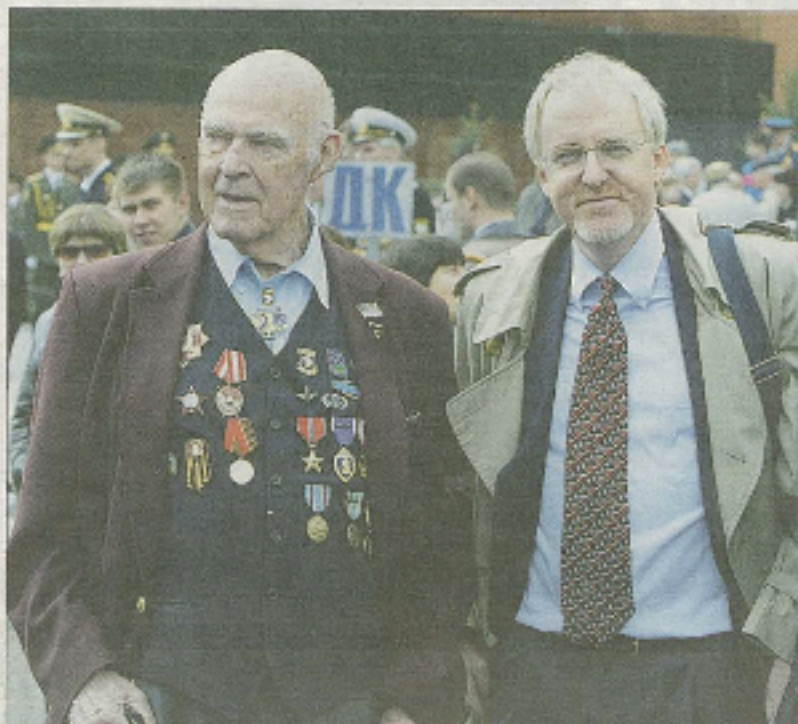
Sgt. Beyrle fought alongside Soviets.

venture, he reported winning the soldiers' trust by using his demolition skills to blow up trees that were hindering the brigade's advance.

He progressed with the unit toward Berlin, fighting alongside the Soviets and liberating the same POW camp from which he had escaped along the way. After being badly wounded in a German attack, he met Russia's celebrated commander, Marshal Georgy Zhukov, at the field hospital where he was being treated.

Zhukov gave Beyrle a letter of transit to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. There he had to convince the embassy to take his fingerprints before they would believe that he really was who he said he was — after all, Joseph Beyrle was supposed to be dead. Finally he was allowed to make his way home.

In "A Hero for Two Nations," the items on display include the telegraph sent by the U.S. War Department to Beyrle's parents telling them that he



Joseph Beyrle and his son John in a file photo. Joseph Beyrle died in 2004.

had been killed, a postcard written by Beyrle to his parents from a German prison camp, his army uniform and other personal items, as well as historic photos of the D-Day landings and some modern pieces of art inspired by Beyrle's story and created especially for the exhibition.

"Although people call my father a hero for two nations, my father did not consider himself to be a hero," John Beyrle said at the exhibition's opening at its first venue, the Stroganov Palace in St. Petersburg, earlier this year.

"He always said that heroes were those who did not return from the front. He never forgot how — when he es-

caped from the prison camp in 1945, when he was hungry and helpless — the Soviet soldiers helped him. He fought alongside them for two weeks, they saved his life in a field hospital and helped him get to the American Embassy in Moscow."

The exhibition reflects a broader theme than the extraordinary wartime achievements of one man. Sixty-five years after victory in Europe, it is a celebration of U.S.-Russian cooperation during the war and a source of inspiration for current U.S.-Russian ties.

The exhibition is accompanied by seminars devoted to the theme of U.S.-Russia relations. Historians, veterans

and their relatives and U.S.-Russian relations experts including Ambassador John Beyrle will be among those gathering to discuss past cooperation between the two countries, the current state of affairs and opportunities for cooperation in the future.

"My father's story is more than the story of one man," Beyrle said. "It's a symbol of the alliance between our two great nations and of what we can achieve when we join forces. I think that serves as a very good signal for us in the 21st century, when we're facing huge threats on a global scale, that America and Russia need to be together to face those challenges."

"As ambassador, I always say that there is far more uniting us than dividing us," he added. "I hope that with this exhibition and seminars, we will be true to this idea."

Beyrle, who was a Russia specialist at the U.S. State Department before becoming ambassador to Russia, said the wartime experiences of his father, who returned to the Soviet Union and then Russia several times from the late '70s until his death in 2004, had inevitably had an influence on his career choice.

"Even at the height of the Cold War, in my family we always had a different attitude toward the Soviet Union," he said. "My father always said that Russian medics saved his life, and that could not fail to influence me. There is never a day when I don't think about what my father went through and how grateful he was to the Russians."

"A Hero for Two Nations" runs till June 21 at the Central Museum of the Great Patriotic War, 19 Ulitsa Brat'yev Fonchenko, Metro Park Pobedy. Tel. (499) 112-8911.