

## Chapter 28 – Memorial Day

The skies were overcast as Martin walked down the driveway to wait for Representative Abney who had offered to drive for the day. He was hoping that the rain would hold off until after the annual Memorial Day ceremony at the Rhode Island Veterans Cemetery in Exeter.

They drove through historic Newport to pick up the man who had introduced them to the Thorpe case, author Ken Dooley.

Dooley was waiting on the corner when the two representatives pulled up, Abney driving and Martin riding shotgun. Abney and Dooley had met many times, however, Dooley was not familiar with Abney's Army background. During the 30 minute ride Abney told of his experiences, some of them humorous, about his time as the protocol officer for the U.S. Army in New York City.

As Martin listened to his two friends, he was hoping, for the sake of the Thorpe family that today's ceremony would go as well.

The sky had started to clear as they crossed the two bridges from Newport heading towards Exeter. Martin was thinking how grateful he was to have been able to return to live in his hometown 11 years earlier and to have become friends with Abney while they were both serving on local city boards. They had come from very diverse backgrounds; Abney from Texas and Martin from Rhode Island.

Now their paths had not just crossed but they were partners as state representatives and members of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs. They had found a new bond, that of getting some long overdue recognition for 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Robert Thorpe.

Today was the 69th anniversary of Robert Thorpe being shot down, captured, tortured and murdered on what was to be his last mission.

Martin thought of all the un-lived years of life that the Japanese had taken from Thorpe and the young men who never had the privilege of the return trip home from the battles of WWII.

As they arrived in Exeter, Martin was feeling somewhat ashamed that he had never been to the Veterans Cemetery before. He was sure that he had ridden past it on his vintage motorcycle - just never took the time to stop by to honor those who had served their country.

He was very surprised to see the large number of cars parked in the field and all of the people next to the ceremonial tent. He realized that this was going to be a much bigger event that he had predicted.

He was wondering how he would find his friend, Ed Kane, in this crowd. Just as he stepped out of the car, there Kane was - pulling into the parking spot next to him. Another problem solved. It seems like this whole project was coming together that way from the very start!

Fortunately, those who planned the event included the large tent. It must have been planned for the possibility of rain. Now that the skies were clearing, it would provide welcome shade from the bright sun.

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As they walked towards the tent, they saw Gill Thorpe standing with members of his family. He seemed also overwhelmed by the preparations for this event.

Then they heard the music. It was the 88th Army Band from nearby Camp Fogarty in East Greenwich, RI. It was very comforting to see and hear this well trained band.

Martin later learned that this band, part of the Rhode Island Army National Guard is referred to as "The Governor's Own." Its mission is "*to provide music that promotes troop morale, unit esprit de corps, and support civil and military operations and ceremonies.*"

As Martin picked up a copy of the program for the ceremony, he wondered how much recognition Robert Thorpe actually would get from this prestigious group of military officers, congressional representatives, and others.

He was happy to see two of his friends, Lisa Rama, the public information officer from Naval Station Newport, and Kim Ripoli, Rhode Island Associate Director of Veterans Affairs, a retired US Navy medic. He had confidence that these two knew what they were doing.

He was very happy to see that the entire Rhode Island Congressional Delegation including Senators Sheldon Whitehouse and Jack Reed, as well as, Congressmen David Cicilline and Jim Langevin. Martin knew that many of them and their staff members knew about Robert Thorpe. He knew that some of their staff had worked diligently, and fruitlessly with Gill Thorpe in the attempt to bring back Robert's remains.

Martin was very impressed not only with the size of the group of attendees, but also with this gathering of individuals whom he had come to know as strong supporters of veterans affairs in Rhode Island.

Following the musical prelude, the welcoming remarks were given by Daniel Evangelista, CSM (Ret), Rhode Island's Chief of Veterans Affairs. RADM John N. Christenson, USN, President of Naval War College in Newport called for the posting of the colors, the 88th Army Band played the "National Anthem, Lt. Governor Elizabeth H. Roberts led the Pledge of Allegiance, and Father Robert L. Marciano, Chaplain, Colonel, USAF, RING gave the invocation.

After Associate Director Kim Ripoli introduced the distinguished guests Governor Lincoln D. Chafee gave the welcoming remarks. RADM Christenson was the principal speaker. He introduced Dr. John Parrish, MD, a Vietnam Veteran who shared his personal experiences as a veteran with the audience.

Although Rep. Martin enjoyed the speeches and was particularly moved by Dr. Parrish's comments, he was wondering if the program was going to acknowledge Robert Thorpe or were the Thorpe brothers, Robert and Gill, going to once again be forgotten in the midst of "political activity."

Then it happened! Naval Health Clinic N.E. members came to formation in front of the dais while Kim Ripoli started to read the very impressive "Old Glory" poem. Rep. Martin and others watched as the sailors in their white uniforms folded the flag and very formally passed it from one to another.

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Martin's concerns about the ceremony giving proper respect to Robert Thorpe was soon ended when he realized that the flag was being passed to Robert's brother, Gill.

Most fortunately, Lisa Rama was able to capture this "Old Glory" ceremony on her iPad. Watching that video, which would be posted on Naval Station Newport's Facebook page provides invaluable memories of the day. Robert Thorpe and his family had finally been given recognition for his ultimate sacrifice.

The ceremony continued with the laying of a wreath and the firing of a volley by the RING Rifle Squad. 1SG Cliff Soares, played "Taps" and the 88th Army Band played "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." RADM Christenson, USN came back to retire the colors and Father Marciano gave the benediction.

Rep. Martin now realized that he had been able to witness "proper military awards and protocol." This day was a life changing experience for him and many others. It certainly had put a smile on the face of Gill Thorpe!