

Chapter 29 – The 39th Fighter Squadron Association Reunion

During the process of getting recognition for Robert Thorpe, Rep. Martin had not realized that his efforts were part of a larger scene. He had focused on this one individual without realizing that Robert Thorpe is representative of many more individuals who had made the ultimate sacrifice and had not been “brought home” by our government.

Martin was very surprised when he received a call from Linne Haddock, the daughter of Frank Royal, a former commanding officer of the 39th Fighter Squadron during WWII. She was calling to ask the representative if he would be willing to speak about the posthumous honors at the 39th Fighter Squadron Association (FSA) 2013 Reunion that was to be held in San Antonio, Texas in October.

Without hesitation, he called the airline and purchased a ticket to San Antonio, Texas. He then asked Representative Abney if he would like to join him. Abney, a native of Texas and one-time resident of San Antonio, immediately agreed.

During the reunion dinner, Representative Martin provided a short overview regarding 2nd Lt. Thorpe’s life, death and the long overdue recognition of his ultimate sacrifice.

He also presented a petition requesting that the U.S. Government do everything possible to repatriate the remains of Lt. Thorpe so his exemplary service and sacrifice for his country could finally be properly recognized and honored. Twenty-three veteran members of the Association signed the petition. The petition was to be sent to the President, Vice-President and all members of the U.S. Senate.

At the banquet, Representative Abney presented the 39th Fighter Squadron Association with two citations. The first was from Rhode Island Governor Lincoln D. Chafee recognizing the Cobra Squadron’s “steadfast and loyal contribution to the defense of our country since 1939.”

The other was from Rhode Island’s senior U.S. Senator Jack Reed recognizing the 39th Fighter Squadron for its “steadfast and patriotic contributions to the defense of United States of America since 1939”. Both of these documents are now on display at the 39th Flying Training Squadron Headquarters (FTS) located at Randolph Air Force Base.

To show their appreciation to Representatives Martin and Abney, 39th FSA President, LTC Brian “Bluto” Haines, presented each of them a 39th FSA silver medallion.

The 39th Fighter Squadron Association wrote in their 2013 reunion report:

“The 39th FSA was honored to have Rhode Island state representatives Peter Martin and Marvin Abney attend the 2013 Reunion. Martin was the force behind the May 2013 Memorial Service held in the Rhode Island House of Representatives for 2nd Lt. Robert Thorpe, a member of the 39th Pursuit Squadron who lost his life in WWII.”

The previous 39th FSA newsletter had an article about Lt. Thorpe, the Memorial Service, and the involvement of Lew Lockhart.

Shortly after returning from Texas, Rep. Abney sent the following message to Ken Dooley and Gill Thorpe expressing his appreciation for having been able to attend the reunion.

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“It was amazing, but not surprising to witness first hand, the camaraderie which existed that day between sky warriors of the past and present. The age spans of some approached 50 years. There was talk of magnificent flying machines which took these aviators on combat missions and brought them back safely from enemy action over enemy air space far away from home. The enthusiasm of fighting to preserve freedom, as they knew it, was clearly evident. For anyone to take part in such historic conversations would be incredibly emotional, as it was for me.

“Though the bulk of the conversations revolved around the technical abilities man and machines; a very human side of these multi-generational aviators came through. Jokes were told about early members being able to still get into the same flying uniforms they wore decades ago. There was no doubt of the camaraderie that existed between active members of the 39th FS, former members and their families.

Most notably was how involved and informed the early members were of present day social, economic and political events and their willingness to come to the defense of their country again.”