

State House ceremony to honor RI WWII pilot

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STATE HOUSE -- A Cranston native, 2nd Lt. Robert E. Thorpe, who was executed by the Japanese in 1944, will be honored at ceremonies in the House of Representatives chambers in the State House at 1 p.m. Friday, May 17.

Rep. Peter Martin (Dist. 75, Newport) made the announcement at the recent annual meeting of the DAV at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Warwick. "After 69 years of silence, it's time for us to do something to honor this heroic young man," Representative Martin said.

Representative Martin said the event, and a resolution he will introduce in the House next week, stem from a request of playwright/author Ken Dooley, who grew up as a close friend of Lt. Thorpe's brother, Gill, of Edgewood. Gill Thorpe asked for Dooley's help in trying to recover the remains of his brother, who had to ditch his plane in the waters off New Guinea, after his P-47 was struck by small arms fire during a strafing run on Wewak, a Japanese naval base.

Captured by a Formosan civilian unit, he was delivered to a Japanese naval base force. Following an interrogation, during which he refused to divulge any information, Lt. Thorpe was marched to a nearby beach, shot, beheaded and buried in a shallow grave.

Today, nearly 70 years later, and despite attempts by his family to do so, Lt. Thorpe's remains still have not been recovered or returned to the U.S. for burial.

On Friday, May 17, Lt. Thorpe's story will be told and his memory honored at the State House event. Expected to attend the event are Lt. Thorpe's remaining Rhode Island relatives, his younger brother Gill and a sister, Nancy – as well as Dooley, who is recounting Lt. Thorpe's story in a book he is completing.

Also expected to attend is Capt. Lewis Lockhart, a WWII fighter pilot who was Lt. Thorpe's commander and friend.

Rep. Raymond E. Gallison Jr. (D-Dist. 69, Bristol, Portsmouth), Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, will emcee the May 17 tribute event. Joining him will be other members of the committee and representatives of various Rhode Island veterans' organizations.

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