



A.B. Thompson is dead at 70

A prominent Simcoe County resident and former mayor of Penetanguishene died Friday night at Penetanguishene General Hospital following a brief illness.

Alfred Burke Thompson died Friday, Aug. 9 one day after his 70th birthday. He was born in Penetanguishene Aug. 8, 1915.

Mr. Thompson was Mayor of Penetanguishene in 1957 and 1958. A post-World War II graduate of Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto, he practiced law in Penetanguishene and was named assistant Crown Attorney for Simcoe County in 1966. He retired in 1980 when he turned 65.

Mr. Thompson was one of 78 Allied prisoners of war of Nazi Germany who participated in the Great Escape of 1944 during World War II. He joined Britain's Royal Air Force in 1936 and was a Pilot Officer in September, 1939 when he and several English and French flyers were taken prisoner after the twin-engine plane they were flying developed engine trouble and landed in northern Germany. Mr. Thompson spent the entire war as a German prisoner, except for a brief period of freedom during the Great Escape.

The flyers were captured just after Britain declared war on Nazi Germany, and before Canada declared war, while on an RAF propaganda mission. The crew was dropping propaganda leaflets on the German countryside when engine trouble forced the landing.

Last fall, Mr. Thompson described the five years and eight months he spent as a prisoner of war as "an endurance contest," "a terrible ordeal." Newly-captured Allied prisoners were often brought to Mr. Thompson (whose camp nickname was "Tommy") to help them prepare for survival in wretched camp conditions. His attitude and courage saved many young lives. Mr. Thompson's own survival was at greatest risk when a successful prison break was made from the Stalag Luft 3 camp in Germany in the spring of 1944.

In a caper which inspired the 1963 movie 'The Great Escape' the prisoners dug three tunnels under the camp perimeter and, after months of preparation and stealth, 78 men, including Mr. Thompson, crawled to freedom.

In the wake of this disaster for the Germans, Hitler ordered thousands of German troops to search for the escapees. Three men ultimately made their way to freedom, but the rest were either shot or returned to camp after being captured. Of the original 78, 50 were shot. Nine were eventually recaptured and one went missing. Mr. Thompson was in a group of 15 returned to camp for the duration of the war. Upon his return to Canada, Thompson married the former Nora Jackson, entered law school, and raised eight children.

A.B. Thompson is survived by his wife Nora and children: A. Burke, Susan Flood, Nancy Gendron, Jennifer Beauchamp, Wendy, Nora Crete, Andrew and Matthew. He is also survived by eight grandchildren; survived by brothers, Judge Donald G.E. Thompson of Owen Sound and Jack Thompson of Sudbury; sister Ruth Dawson of London.

A.B. Thompson rested at Martin's Funeral Home until yesterday when funeral service was held at All Saints Church in Penetanguishene at 2 p.m. Interment at St. James On-the-Lines Church in Penetanguishene.

Military heritage highlights Descendants' Day on Aug. 24

This year you'll get a real bang out of Descendants' Day at Penetanguishene's Establishments!

On Aug. 24 between 1 and 5 p.m., members of the Canadian Military Re-enactment Society will assemble on the parade square at the Historic Naval and Military Establishments. They represent the Volunteer Battalion of Incorporated Militia of Upper Canada. They'll present battle

drills and tactics, all in the style of the War of 1812. Their uniforms and gear will be faithful to the period.

The 25 man re-enactment group will bring along their camp followers—costumed wives and children who will cook for their men just as the 19th century counterparts did. Their presence at the Establishments on Aug. 24 will add to the colour and excitement of the annual activities.

The original Volunteer Battalion of Incorporated Militia was raised in 1813 to fight alongside regular British troops. Battalion headquarters was in York (Now Toronto). When the 24th Regiment of Foot was called away to help put down the 1837 Rebellion, the Volunteer Battalion of Incorporated Militia looked after military duties at Penetanguishene in their absence.

The soldiers of the Volunteer militia were well known for their expertise in camping and woodcraft. A typical military bivouac—a temporary soldiers' shelter—will be set up for Descendants' Day and visitors will be invited to inspect it.

Many of the men who served at Penetanguishene in the 19th century remained in the area and their descendants are to be

found throughout Ontario. Many still live in Simcoe County and some live as far away as Michigan.

The Descendants of the Establishments Association has traced hundreds of families that are descended from Establishments personnel and Descendants' Day is a celebration of that connection.

Descendants' Day also offers the opportunity to learn how to trace a family tree.



Old fashion charm at Establishments

Mrs. Keating spins as she awaits visitors to Descendants' Day at the Establishments. Much of the planned Descendants'

Day activity takes place at the reconstructed Keating House. James Keating, the Fort Adjutant at Penetanguishene

built the original house for his family after his transfer from Drummond Island.