

Hearty turnout for Branford's parade

By Lisa Reisman

BRANFORD — On a cool, gray Monday, Donald Robinson, a veteran of World War II and the Korean War, took in the hundreds thronging the Branford Green during the ceremonies preceding the town's Memorial Day parade on May 27.

Robinson was among six Branford World War II veterans — Ira Lewis, 97; Grant Briggs, 91; Bill Brody, 98; Vinnie Thomas, 92; and Stanley Petela, 95 — who were named parade marshals.

"I'd serve this country all over again in a heartbeat," said Robinson, who was awarded two Bronze Stars for his bravery in rescuing wounded soldiers in his company and for taking out a machine gun nest with a pipe bomb.

For Petela, who was awarded the Bronze Star for his valor flying fighter planes for the Air Force in England, France, and Germany, "I feel very proud. This is a special day."

That went for everyone, it seemed. Lea Witten, accompanied by the Branford High School Band, sang the National Anthem, and Michael Kinney delivered a rendition of the Gettysburg Address. As Steve Vacca played taps, the crowd grew silent. The flag gently rippled in the breeze.

"They try to make us heroes," said Robinson, who received a Purple Heart after being hit by shrapnel that tore open his stomach and required 136 stitches. "The true heroes are the guys that didn't come back, that gave their lives."



Peter Hvlzduk / For Hearst Connecticut Media

The Branford High School Marching Hornets play music as they march down Main Street during the Branford Memorial Day Parade on Monday.



Kelly Goddard / For Hearst

A soldier stands at attention in West Cemetery in Madison.



Bill O'Brien / For Hearst Connecticut Media

Honoring their service — World War II veterans from left are Vincent Thomas, 91; Bill Brody, 98; Donald Robinson, 91; and Grant Briggs, 91.



Bill O'Brien / For Hearst Connecticut Media

Town Clerk Lisa Arpin drives WW II veteran Donald Robinson in Branford's parade.



Kelly Goddard / For Hearst Connecticut Media

The wreath-laying ceremony at West Cemetery in Madison.

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