

# Riley

From Page A1

what is now the Juda Zion Methodist Church, and went on to work in multiple jobs in Monroe. He developed a friendship with Helen Lehr, who he worked with at Karlen Bakery. On May 7, 1940, he took his Oath of Allegiance to the United States Navy.

Not long before the Pearl Harbor attacks, Riley sent a letter home and a scarf home to Lehr. That scarf is now displayed at the Monroe American Legion post that bears his name: Zilmer-Riley Post 84. Laird, now 101-years-old and living in assisted living in Monroe, is the last person living to have known Riley.

“She’s the last person still living who knew David,” said Krauss Smith, who visited with Laird just days before the memorial. “She was five years younger than David when they both worked at Karlen Bakery. During our visit, she repeatedly described David as a ‘good egg’ and ‘a really good guy’. She said they would visit with each other as coworkers, but he never talked about his past or his home. She said she wasn’t one to pry, either. Helen’s friendship probably meant more to David than she knew at the time.”

Krauss Smith said that in his final days, David was rejuvenated with life, and finding a purpose.

“In a final letter home before Pearl Harbor happened, David seemed to realize the seriousness of life — acknowledging that he had missed opportunities in his life prior to the navy, and that he intended to make up for when he came back. Of course, he never got the opportunity to make up for those,” Krauss Smith said. “He was a young man just beginning to find his way.”

The Oklahoma was hit multiple times by Japanese bombs, capsizing the vessel in just eight minutes. Much of the crew that died were trapped inside the flooded hull. Two years later, the ship was able to be repaired and floated again. The bodies were exhumed, and reburied at National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. On February 24, 2021, his remains were identified in a last-ditch effort by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), which used forensic technology and DNA. Riley was Wisconsin’s last unidentified Pearl Harbor casualty.

“We want to make sure everyone comes home,” said John Curran, State Captain of the Wisconsin Patriot Guard Riders. To join the Wisconsin Patriot Guard riders, Curran cites just one simple requirement: Respect. “Respect for the families, respect for the fallen.”

The group has helped bring home several others of the 429 USS Oklahama dead. He had never heard of David Riley before, and the group began working to find his home. Months later, they were in contact with Krauss Smith, and together they began to track down where Riley should call home. They got the office of Wisconsin U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin involved, and through virtue of patience and persistence, the ducks all lined up in a row.

Also assisting Krauss Smith with Riley’s return included VetsRoll.org and the Navy Casualty Office.

Riley was posthumously awarded a Purple Heart, the American Campaign Medal, and the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal. There is a memorial located inside of



Times photos: Adam Krebs



**TOP:** Terry W. Eddinger, Rear Admiral, CHC, U.S. Navy Deputy Chief of Chaplains for Reserve Matters hands the flag designated for David Joseph Riley to Riley’s cousin Deborah Krauss Smith at the conclusion of Riley’s reburial at Mt. Vernon Cemetery May 27 outside of Juda.



**MIDDLE:** Riley was given a 21-gun salute as a part of his fully military honors service.

**LEFT:** The memorial service before the burial included music by the Juda Zion Church Adult Choir.

Juda High School for Riley, and, in 1947, Riley’s name was added alongside Glen Zilmer’s at the American Legion Post 84. Zilmer was Green County’s first casualty of World War I.

At the time of Riley’s death, he was survived by his foster parents, a maternal foster grandmother (Oricka Zeittlow Matzke), and other foster aunts, uncles and cousins. His foster mother, Della, died in 1960, and foster father Elmer died in 1976.

The memorial event featured the Juda Zion Church Adult Choir, the Monroe Brass Quintet, Zilmer-Riley American Legion Post 84 members, Green County Historical Society, Juda Historians and foster relatives, Shriner-Hager-Gohlke Funeral Home, the Juda Fire Dept., Juda School District staff, Green County Sheriff’s Dept. and the Monroe Police Dept.

“For Elmer and Della, I hope they found solace in the shared grief of this close-knit community that has welcomed all of us here today in Juda. It is that same community that kept David’s memory alive here all of these years later,” Baldwin said during the memorial service. “David Riley will be buried here with dignity alongside his loved ones — finally laid to rest in a community that fought to honor his legacy and bring him home. May David’s soul rest in peace, and may the memory of his service and sacrifice live forever.”

Presenting at the burial were Naval Station Great Lakes Honor Guard, with speakers including Chaplain Tommy Jung and Terry W. Eddinger, Rear Admiral, CHC, U.S. Navy Deputy Chief of Chaplains for Reserve Matters. The Honor Guard displayed full military honors, including a 21-gun salute.

Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers also ordered flags across the state to be flown at half-mast on May 27.



**ABOVE LEFT:** U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin spoke at Riley’s memorial service. Baldwin’s office helped bring his remains home more than 81 years after his death at Pearl Harbor. **ABOVE RIGHT:** John Curran, State Captain of the Wisconsin Patriot Guard Riders, presents Riley’s cousin Deborah Krauss Smith with replica dog tags. **BELOW LEFT:** Riley’s remains will be placed within the grave site as his foster parents, Elmer and Della Ausmus.



# 2023 Green County Dairy Breakfast



Times photos: Adam Krebs

The 2023 Green County Dairy Breakfast was held on Saturday, May 27 at the DeVoe farm southeast of Monroe.

