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Four Civil War soldiers are unknown no longer

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Bob Krasche lays a wreath on the new tombstone at Yorktown National Cemetery for Robert Rumney, a soldier who died in 1862. Rumney was one of four soldiers who until recently was considered unknown. (David B. Hollingsworth | The Virginian-Pilot)



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By [Diane Tennant](#)
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YORKTOWN

After the bugler had played taps for the Civil War dead, after the speeches had been given and the three volleys fired at Yorktown National Cemetery, after the re-enactors had driven away in a red pickup and the crowd started to wander off, Thomas Grund Jr. mustered his troops.

Five men gathered with him around a headstone so new the white marble glistened. Grund explained that he would stand at the head of the grave and the chaplain at the foot. The honor guard, a Union re-enactor, would come forward when called and stand to the left of the marker.

Reading from a sheaf of papers in his hands, Grund said, "Let the guard of honor set up the symbols of the army and let a soldier be detailed to guard it."

The re-enactor solemnly stepped into place. A belt, canteen, hat and other Civil War soldier's gear was laid on the grave. Grund read, although he probably didn't have to, that Pvt. Robert Rumney of Company F, 65th New York Infantry, died on April 18, 1862, near Warwick Courthouse, most likely of disease.

He didn't have to read the information because Grund, a Suffolk resident and senior vice commander of the local Sons of Union Veterans camp, spent months and months identifying Rumney and three other soldiers who, for decades, had lain under tombstones marked Unknown Soldier.

On Sunday that changed, as new headstones bearing the names of the four were rededicated during ceremonies conducted first by the National Park Service (which oversees the national cemetery at Yorktown) and then, after everyone else had left, by Grund.

"Two-thirds of the burials here are unknown," park Superintendent Dan Smith had said before the observance began. "To rededicate these this many years later is amazing and a real tribute to what Memorial Day is all about."

The park ceremony involved laying wreaths and a reading of the Gettysburg Address and, finally, moving to the Confederate cemetery down the road for a second observance. After the crowd had gone, Grund stood by Rumney's headstone and

suggested that everyone be careful because the spider mums had been colored red and blue, which

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could come off on hands and clothing and marble. He read a poem called "He Died at His Post," and then moved to the second grave.

One of the re-enactors, overcome by the heat, dropped out under a tree. The others retrieved his musket, much as Civil War soldiers would have done, and carried on. Grund led the way to the grave of Cpl. Emile Lambert of the New York Light Artillery. By comparing three different rosters of burials, then discovering that all the graves had been renumbered sometime in the past, Grund had learned that Lambert had been killed in battle near Lee's Mill on April 16, 1862.

"Let the guard of honor..." he began to read, and the musket and soldier's gear were laid down. After Grund read a poem called "Hurrah for the Light Artillery," the group moved on.

The idea of the gear, he pointed out, is that it is laid down like the soldier is wearing it - belt across the grave, hat near the top. At the grave of Pvt. Harrison Demouth, 7th New Jersey Infantry, Grund gave an impromptu speech.

"This one holds a special place in my heart because he was the first one, and he opened the door for the other ones," he said, meaning that Demouth, misidentified for years because "New York" had been recorded in place of "New Jersey," was the first of the four unknowns he had discovered. After exhaustive research had the names pretty well nailed down, Grund ordered their service records just to make certain.

The park service reviewed each claim and agreed that Grund was right. The new headstones arrived just in time for Memorial Day.

Grund read "Only a Private" over Demouth's grave, choking up near the end. Then the group moved across the cemetery to the last plot, that of Sgt. Joshua Richardson of the 74th New York Infantry, who was killed in action May 5, 1862, near Williamsburg. Grund went through the short ceremony one more time, read the poem "Company K," and finished up.

"Collect the symbols of the army," he directed. "The guard of honor will return to the ranks."

The Sons of Union Veterans left the cemetery. Behind them, set into the grass and clover with rows and rows of worn and stained Civil War markers, four shiny white headstones gleamed. On them were laid a bouquet of spring flowers for Memorial Day, and a single red rose apiece as a symbol of pure devotion to the republic for which they died.

On either side, forward and behind, Lambert, Rumney, Richardson and Demouth lay surrounded by headstones with worn lettering that read, "Unknown Soldier."


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