

# Montclair Greets EX-P.O.W. With a Look at 1950

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MONTCLAIR, March 11—

With Sousa marches, high-school cheers and the harmonies of a barbershop chorus, Montclair today welcomed a native son, Comdr. Robert B. Doremus, back after seven and a half years as a prisoner of war.

This tidy, well-to-do racially integrated town of 43,000 was spruced up with civic pride for the occasion. The lampposts on its wide downtown streets were festooned with American flags.

Despite the day's constant drizzle, 700 citizens of all ages went to the high school auditorium to share in the greeting for the boyish-looking 40-year-old Navy navigator who had been thought dead after his plane was shot down over North Vietnam on Aug. 25, 1965.

## Sprinkling of Uniforms

The youngsters went on bikes and some wore Boy Scout uniforms, their faces showing genuine admiration and respect for the guest of honor. There were uniforms also of the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

There were old friends, and there were many, too, who did not know the commander or his family, but they were present as neighbors who were delighted that the time of doubt had ended for the Doremus family.

They cheered wildly when Commander Doremus said he wished to dispel "certain seven-year-old rumors."

"I am alive, I am well, and I am happy to be with you," he said.

There was no mention of the years he spent in a prison camp. Like other returning prisoners, he told reporters that he would keep to a vow he and fellow inmates had made before their release not to discuss anything that in any way might jeopardize men still being held.

## A Musical Salute

In fact, there was very little mention of the immediate past. Instead the tone of the celebration was somewhat like a high-school reunion. It was set when, soon after benedictions by a min-

ister and a rabbi, the high-school band prepared to play the "El Capitan" march.

The chairman of the welcome, Montclair's Town Commissioner Theodore MacLachlan, told the audience that Commander Doremus had played in the band 23 years ago. He brought out a trombone, offered it to the officer and invited him to join in the playing.

Comdr. Doremus winced at the words. But it was an offer he could not refuse. He turned to Lieut. Comdr. Arthur Schatz, the liaison

escort who has been assigned to him since his return to the United States three weeks ago, and said, "They'll never hear a note."

Smilingly, he joined the orchestra and to all appear-

ances played. Later he was similarly invited to join the red-blazoned Montclair Barbershop Chorus in their singing of "America, the Beautiful," and again he joined in.

Other parts of the program included a presentation of a Montclair cheer by present cheerleaders and some from the class of 1950. There was also a speech of welcome from the president of the senior class of '50.

Joseph Fortunato, who recalled Mr. Doremus's sense of humor:

"That quality endeared him to all of us, and I think he retains it today," Mr. Fortunato said. "I think I speak for all of us when I say, Bob, welcome back."

Commander Doremus's parents, his three brothers,

his sister and their families, filled an entire row at the front of the auditorium. The commander sat in another row near them with Lieutenant Commander Schatz.

Commander Doremus now makes his home in Wilmington, Del. His wife and daughters did not attend the welcome. It was explained that they were embarrassed by the fanfare and publicity.

## Praised by Congressman

There were moments when the commander himself seemed embarrassed. He smiled a bit sheepishly and said something to his escort when Representative Joseph G. Minish in his speech of welcome said:

"The noble behavior of Commander Doremus and his fellow prisoners in their long years of captivity will be an enduring example of unswerving purposes and selfless dedication to duty, honor and country."

And when it came the commander's turn to speak he did so with earnest modesty.

"In most cases," he said, "you pay tribute to someone for something he has done. In my case it's for something I didn't do; for I have done very little in the last seven and a half years. But whatever I did do was because of you."

"In a large measure we weren't away from America. We took it with us. We had it there. We had you there. And I needed that to rely on."



He joined the Montclair Barbershop Chorus as they sang "America, the Beautiful"





**Comdr. Robert B. Doremus being greeted by former classmates at Montclair High School, Mrs. Jay Corbin Handlan and her sister, Mrs. George Corbin Post, right.**



**Commander Doremus had played trombone in the school band 23 years ago. When asked to play again, he did so.**

Photographs for The New York Times by WILLIAM E. SAURO