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## **75 years of football at Kemp Memorial Stadium**

Kemp first Shamokin alum killed in World War II

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Robert A. Kemp

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COAL TOWNSHIP — Kemp Memorial Stadium on the campus of Shamokin Area School District has undergone numerous modifications in its lifetime.

The changes — some more controversy than others — have included switching the home side of the field, the introduction of lighting and replacing grass with turf. The surroundings of the stadium have also transformed from a community gathering place in Edgewood Park to Stetler Drive, a residential development.

One thing at the stadium that has stayed constant in 75 years, however, is the person for which it honors.

The stadium is named after Sgt. Robert Alfred Kemp, the first Shamokin alum to be killed in World War II. Kemp, a graduate of the Class of 1935, was killed in action Aug. 11, 1942. The stadium was dedicated during a ceremony prior to the Greyhounds taking on Sunbury High on Nov. 7, 1942.

Speaking in front of a large contingent of people, Rev. Richard B. Martin, of Trinity Lutheran Church, said Kemp's spirit was a "symbol of the marching dead," adding that his supreme sacrifice was made so that others may live.

"There are other sacrifices, like Kamps', that have been made and others that will be made. But, it is better to have a wooden cross over there than an arm chair over here," he remarked.

Kemp was a radioman on a bomber when it was shot down off the British Isles. A full military funeral was held Aug. 14 at the Brookwood American Cemetery in Surrey, United Kingdom.

Kemp was born Nov. 2, 1916, a son of Alfred and Ruth (Driesbach) Kemp, of 816 N. Sixth St., Shamokin. He attended grade school, then entered Shamokin High School, where he shined as a high school athlete.

He was defeated only twice in more than 80 wrestling bouts during his high school and collegiate athletic career. He went undefeated at Shamokin and was named captain his senior year. He graduated from Washington and Lee University in 1939.

Kemp enlisted on Oct. 4, 1940, and was assigned to the Ordinance Department of the U.S. Army. He later transferred to the radio department of the Army Air Forces.

On Sept. 19, 1942, Kemp was reported missing in action and reported dead. He was survived by his parents, two brothers, William and Richard Kemp; and a sister, Betty Kemp.

Upon hearing the tragic news, the Shamokin Alumni Association began talks to honor Kemp. During a meeting on Oct. 23, the association decided to change the stadium name, simply known as Shamokin High School Stadium at Edgewood Park, to Robert A. Kemp Memorial Stadium.

A committee of six arranged a 30-minute dedication program with Martin and Superintendent Joseph H. Davison as principal speakers, and John Wary, president of the association, as master of ceremonies.

Betty Kemp unveiled a plaque located over the scoreboard that honored her brother.

The Shamokin band played the national anthem, "U.S. Air Force," and "Marines' Hymn" during the dedication, then later took the field to play "The Bells of St. Mary's" while forming a bell and moving clappers. The Sunbury band formed an airplane during their halftime performance before being joined by the Shamokin band for more patriotic music.

Although the details of who Kemp was have been lost by some over time, the purple letters of Kemp's name that are affixed to the scoreboard and the bricks of the main entrance serve as a reminder of all the Shamokin alumni who have made the supreme sacrifice.

Tommy Ryan, local sports researcher and member of the Bernie Romanoski Chapter of the Pa. Sports Hall of Fame, said the stadium is a tribute to Kemp's legacy.

He said, "Lest we forget. Often we live in the present and forget to look back at what we have because of people like Kemp who gave their lives."