

Gamble joins pantheon of Great Alaskans

by Vern Metcalfe
for the Tundra Times

(Editor's Note: The following is the first of a series of columns by Juneau writer Vern Metcalfe. The title for the column is his adopted Tlingit-Raven-Cohoe Indian name.)

JUNEAU — There were memorial and funeral services for Ivan Gamble Sr. during the last weekend in June at his hometown of Angoon. And so passed, at age 37, a leader who will be sorely missed — not only by his fellow townsmen — but "by his people, his state and his country," to quote Gov. Steve Cowper who spoke briefly at the funeral.

At least 100 Alaskans flew into the tiny fishing community on Admiralty Island for the services.

As one who knew Ivan for a few short years, I had no idea of the scope of his activities, other than his stewardship of Kootznoowoo Inc. and the fact that he played basketball in the Juneau Gold Medal tourney on a yearly basis.

Yes, he had been on the governor's transition panel; he had presided over the "1991" seminar held in Juneau recently; he was a board member of the Alaska Federation of Natives; and he had a very bright future when he died tragically.

The listing of his achievements was summarized by a poem written by Frank Wilton on June 21 and read at

*The old Home Team won't be the same
with Ivan out of the Game
Ivan was always ready to take the ball
and lead the Team
Just when others were running out of steam
He'd carry the Ball
Like at Christmas, he'd plan the program
and decorate the Hall
And when bent, became President of Kootznoowoo,
A.N.B. and others
All Alaska people were his sisters and brothers
And on the Fourth of July, what a Bang!
Ivan would buy the fireworks for the whole shebang
If there was ever a need
Ivan always took heed
and would lend a hand
Save the land!
For his Native people, his creed
and his final deed
It will never be the same with Ivan out of the Game
For he was our forward, our center, and our guard
The M.V.P., our star, the Captain of our Team
and we are Champs because of him.*

Frank Wilton

the memorial service by Frank Sharp.

All during the memorial service I thought of seven of my classmates who had graduated from Wenatchee High School in 1940 and who were to die in World War II.

None of these "best and brightest" lived to be 22 years of age.

As I looked at Ivan Gamble Jr. ("J.R." in Angoon), who is 10, I also thought of losing my mother when I

was 14 and the fact that he will probably not really understand all of this for some years to come.

Then I also thought of my friend Eben Hopson who died before he reached 60 and was the founder of the North Slope Borough. I was to work for Eben for a little over a year out of Juneau prior to his death. He, too, was a man of many achievements, one who contributed not just to Barrow and

the North Slope villages, but to all of Alaska.

In future columns in this space, I will also write about other Native Alaskans I've known and served with or worked for during my 46 years (I came to Juneau in 1941) in Alaska.

I was asked to make an announcement at the memorial service by Albert Kookesh.

I mentioned what you've read about Ivan Jr. and the "best and the brightest," and I noted that I'd been honored by being asked to eulogize the late Frank G. Johnson of Kake and Frank Peratrovich at their memorial services in Ketchikan. I also mentioned another of the Tlingit legislators I'd served with in 1951 in the person of Andrew Hope.

I said, "And now Ivan Gamble joins that pantheon of Great Alaskans."

The pity is that he didn't live long enough to become a larger force in Alaska. We could definitely have used a man of his vitality and personality in the State Legislature. Ivan had the knack of bringing together warring forces on such matters as the "1991" issue, which is termed pragmatism by some.

I prefer Lyndon B. Johnson's terminology here: "The Art of the Possible." It would be a fitting memorial to Ivan if those of differing opinions on amending the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act could come together and present a united front.