

## Robert Coningsby Gordon



Old Lyme - Robert Coningsby Gordon, 91, died on Wednesday, July 17, 2013.

He was born on Oct. 29, 1921 in Melbourne, Australia. Shortly after, his family immigrated to Norfolk, Va., where his father served as minister for the United Church of Christ.

Robert Gordon grew up as an accomplished classical pianist and majored in music at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Thoughts of a concert career were cut short by Pearl Harbor. Gordon volunteered for the Navy, attended officer's training school, and served as Lieutenant JG on the USS Helena and later the USS Quincy. The SS Helena was sunk, with much loss of life, during the battle of the Solomon Islands, Bob swam to an enemy-held island. After being rescued, he returned briefly to the states and married Jean Swan on Dec. 2, 1943. This December would have marked the couple's seventieth anniversary.

During his tour of duty on the Quincy, he participated as gunnery officer in the D-Day Naval bombardment of German defenses at Omaha Beach. The Quincy then sailed to join in the Mediterranean campaign and later, to the Pacific, where it was in the flotilla present at the Japanese surrender.

Thanks to the G.I. Bill of Rights, Gordon was able to move to Cambridge, Mass. with his family (his wife, their son John, and soon a daughter, Jean Craigie) to earn a Ph.D in English literature from Harvard University. The family then drove across country to Eugene, Ore., where he took his first teaching job in the English department of the University of Oregon. While in Eugene, he became a naturalized citizen of the United States. A second son, Alan, was born in 1952.

In 1957, he accepted a position in the humanities department at San Jose State University, in California. The family moved to a hillside home in Los Gatos, Calif., overlooking the Santa Clara Valley - at the time an area of orchards and tract homes, but soon to become known as Silicon Valley. As an internationally recognized scholar on Sir Walter Scott, he spent two years with his family in Edinburgh, Scotland on a Fulbright grant.

In 1987, he retired and moved with his wife to Old Lyme. The two were enthusiastic participants in the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme. Most years they summered at their house in East Boothbay, Maine, to which Mrs. Gordon had family ties reaching back to the nineteenth century.

Robert Gordon continued his lifelong involvement in music, singing in the church choir and attending every concert and opera he could. Despite the increasing infirmities of age, he also maintained his activities in literature. His last book, *Arms and the Imagination*, was scrupulously researched and expertly written with the help of a magnifying glass and reading machine; it was published when the author was eighty-eight. He also continued to be engaged in political causes. In particular, having experienced the extreme violence of the war years, he campaigned until his last days for American gun control laws.

Robert Gordon was predeceased by his daughter, Jean Craigie Gordon; and by his wife, Jean Swan Gordon, whose death occurred less than three months before his.

He is survived by his sons, John Gordon and Alan Gordon; by grandchildren, Jonathan, Ashley, and Sasha (Alexandra) Gordon; and by a great-granddaughter, Laurel Gordon.

A Memorial Service will be held at 3 p.m. Aug. 3, at the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme.

Donations may be made to the James Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence: [www.bradycampaign.org](http://www.bradycampaign.org).

**Published in The Day on July 28, 2013**