

May, 30th 2011: DENNIS HOGAN, JR.

On behalf of the Village of Piermont -
Welcome residents, honored guests and Gold Star families to our
Memorial Day commemoration.

This Memorial Day, we turn our attention to Private First Class Dennis Hogan Jr. who gave his life in the Philippines in April of 1945 and whose body remains missing, unidentified to this day. We acknowledge the long history of the Hogan family in Piermont and Orangetown, their service and sacrifice to our country. Members of the Hogan family are here today; we welcome them, honor their presence and, through our annual ceremony, assure them that Dennis will not be forgotten.

Like many young Piermonters, Dennis Hogan Jr. (Junie) enlisted in the army right after Pearl Harbor, in early 1942. He was attached to the 11th Airborne, as a member of the newly formed 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment. This unit was formed specifically for the task of island-hopping and securing positions for the eventual invasion of Japan. The 511th trained so extensively in preparation for the fight in the Pacific that it is said that no member of the unit ever backed away from a jump.

In 1944, the 511th was sent to New Guinea in preparation for the invasion of the Philippines. The Philippine island chain was the keystone of the Japanese empire, providing a base of communication from the island of Japan to its conquests and vital natural resources in Southeast Asia. The plan to retake the Philippines represented the beginning of the end of the war in the Pacific theater.

In November, Dennis was involved in the campaign to capture Leyte Island. The 511th parachuted into eastern Leyte in the effort to seize and secure the central mountains, protecting the coastal corridor for the

U.S. 7th Infantry Division. They were to march from east to west, through the mountains to Ormoc Bay. This type of mission was possible only for a streamlined, well-trained and completely self-reliant unit as the 511th. The terrain is extremely rugged and mountainous, consisting of narrow ridges covered with dense, tropical forest. Only steep hazardous foot-trails, always slippery with mud, cross the mountains. On Christmas day 1944, after over a month of engaging the enemy, the 511th came out of the mountains – the best Christmas present they could have asked for.

After the successful Leyte campaign, the consummate step in securing the Philippines was to land on the larger island of Luzon and the liberation of Manila. Dennis' unit parachuted onto the Tagaytay ridge to the southwest of Manila and fought their way towards the city. In early February of 1945, Dennis was injured in battle and received a purple heart and bronze medal as part of that conflict- perhaps in the point-blank, hand-to-hand combat inside of the Nasubu Bay Police Station. After the successful liberation of Manila, the 511th was instrumental in parachuting into and the liberation of the Los Baños POW camp, freeing over 2000 men and women civilians from captivity. In March, Dennis' unit was dispatched to clear the critical supply routes to the southern port city of Batangas. In a mission similar to the Leyte campaign, the 511th entered the mountains east of Lipa where the Japanese were dug in. The enemy showed no sign of surrendering and it was already becoming apparent that most Japanese soldiers neither expected, nor would be afforded the ability to return home. They had become committed to die for the Emperor. This suicidal defense, coupled with the inaccessible terrain required much close fighting and progress in these mountains was often measured in yards.

By mid April, Dennis and his regiment were in the Mt. Malepunyo area- a group of densely vegetated peaks rising almost vertically over 3000 ft.

The Japanese soldiers were entrenched in caves, ditches and fortified pillboxes, putting up intense resistance. On or about April 22nd, Dennis' company was overrun on Hill 2380 by an aggressive suicidal attack. Dennis was lost along with many of his comrades from company E. The battle continued for days, the hill constantly bombarded by US forces, and eventually recaptured over a week later. Although the bodies of Dennis' 16 compatriots were recovered, Dennis Hogan Jr. was never identified and his body was declared 'non-recoverable'. The Hogan family has struggled for two generations to locate and bring Junie's body home, to no avail. What adds to this frustration is that a fire in the National Personnel Records Center destroyed the records of service of many WWII personnel including the details of Dennis' actions that merited his multiple bronze medals and the Silver Star.

PFC Dennis Hogan Jr. marched into the mountains of Batangas province to help clear the way to end the long and brutal conflict in the Pacific. His efforts, as well as his brothers-in-arms, broke enemy resistance and led the eventual end of the war.

Although his body rests, unmarked and forsaken somewhere in those mountains so far away, his spirit is with us today. We honor him and venerate his sacrifice. In remembrance of him, we express our gratitude by naming this stretch of Piermont Avenue after Private First Class Dennis Hogan Jr.

Keep Dennis and all of our fallen soldiers in your thoughts and prayers. It is in their honor that we gather this day. I ask you to keep in mind all of our men and women who are serving our country today. As we enjoy this day in Piermont, away from our labors, let it not be far from our thoughts that these soldiers stand guard for us on foreign soil in harm's way. God Bless them, keep them safe, and make sure they return home soon.