

May, 28th 2012:

JOSEPH HARTZ

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 Piermont's son, Sergeant Joseph Hartz, who gave his life near in Vietnam in March of 1968. The story of Joseph Hartz is especially unique in how he became one of "Piermont's Own". Joseph was a foster child - unable to be raised by his birth mother in Brooklyn, brought to the St Dominic's convent, and was embraced in a home here in Piermont.

Many Piermont families welcomed foster children into their homes - from St. Dominic's Convent in Blauvelt and St. Agatha's Home in Nanuet. Young Joey was welcomed at the age of 5 into the home of Dorothy and Ray Holmes, and spent his childhood and adolescence on Hudson Terrace in Piermont.

We welcome members of the Holmes family here today and my personal thanks to Sharon for the information she shared about her big brother Joey. We honor the family's selfless gift of a home for Joey and, through this annual ceremony, assure them that Joey will not be forgotten.

Joseph Hartz graduated from Tappan Zee High School in Piermont, a decorated athlete in Cross Country and Basketball. He entered the conflict in Vietnam ~~the following year~~ at the age of 19, in June of 1967. Joseph went to Southeast Asia as a member of the Charlie Company / 3rd Battalion / 22nd Infantry, Tropic Lightening, serving in (ya din) GiaDinh province outside of Saigon. Throughout the fall of 1967, Tropic Lightening was involved in Operation Saratoga, in which US soldiers engaged the Viet Cong in the jungles from the Cambodian border to the outskirts of Saigon. One of the widest ranging operations yet undertaken in the war, the C/3/22nd found plenty of Viet Cong to deal with.

1968 dawned a turbulent year. At the start of the Lunar New Year in late

January, the Viet Cong began a push that would become named for that Vietnamese holiday. Known as the TET Offensive, this coordinated push throughout all of Vietnam took the US and South Vietnamese forces by surprise. Over 70,000 North Vietnamese troops engaged in this broad action, taking the battle from the jungles to the cities, including the capitol Saigon itself. The fact that the people of South Vietnam raised no alarms as the Viet Cong organized battalions, regiments, and divisions in their midst spoke volumes about the regime in which the United States was supporting and devoting the lives of its soldiers.

During the Offensive, Sergeant Hartz' battalion was focused outside of Saigon, along Highway 1, blocking Viet Cong passage along that supply route and keeping the way open for civilians and US Forces. Joseph's battalion engaged the enemy often, increasing pressure on the Viet Cong and ultimately foiling their plan to isolate Saigon. The offensive carried on for through February and although the US embassy in Saigon was invaded and occupied for a brief time, the military success of the Viet Cong was limited.

The TET Offensive was a major turning point for the public's opinion of the war, and began to raise doubts that a 'win' was possible in Vietnam. But on the ground, the soldiers did not have the luxury to question why.

Joseph sent home a poem from early 1968 that expressed his dedication to the cause of helping the Vietnamese people:

A Lonely Man

*I sit alone every night and watch the stars that shine above and wonder why.
Why was I chosen to serve in this foreign land?*

Because back home everyone seems to think we're wrong. But, in the short time I've been here, the people have shone (sic) me that they are glad we're here to help them fight for their freedoms and rights. Like our fore fathers did for us.

I'm no longer a lonely man but a man with a job that just has to be done!

As the TET Offensive wound down in late February 1968, the 3rd Battalion was engaged by the VC 9th division in fighting east and south of (kootshee) Cu Chi. Joseph's battalion soon moved south to the (hok moan) Hoc Mon village area, four miles northwest of Saigon along Highway 1. The beginning of March found Companies C & D engaged in a fierce battle on the outskirts of Hoc Mon. On March 6th 1968, Sergeant Joseph Hartz was killed in action, just a few weeks before his 20th birthday.

As a child, Joseph Hartz found a family and a home in Piermont. On the verge of adulthood, he left to join in the conflict in Vietnam and gave his life in the service of his country. He is remembered with a street named for him in the Village- Hartz Terrace, off of Piermont Place. This special day we remember Joseph, pay homage and venerate his sacrifice.

Keep Joseph 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 continue to stand guard for us on foreign soil, in harm's way. God Bless them, keep them safe, and make sure they return home soon.