

May, 31st 2010: LOUIS CAPUTO

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 Master Sergeant Louis Caputo, who gave his life in Korea on December of 1950. What measure do we take of MSG Caputo's service to us in the protection of our freedom? The simple facts are this:

Master Sergeant Louis Caputo
7th Army, 31st Infantry Reg. Combat Team
3rd Battalion, K – Company
POW, Missing in Action - Presumed Killed
December 2nd, 1950 Chosin Reservoir

A deeper view unfolds his dedication to his country and the ultimate sacrifice he paid. MSG Caputo was born in 1918; he was 42 years old when he gave his life in Korea. His commitment to defend our freedom began when he put on the uniform of the US Army in June of 1941.

His service throughout World War II was exemplary – earning a Bronze Star for his valor. At the close of the war he remained on the front line of defending our country – assigned to hold the peace defending Japan in the face of post war Soviet aggression, and the global standoff of the Cold War.

In June of 1950 the front lines of the Cold War shifted as the Peoples Democratic Army of North Korea nearly overran the entire Korean peninsula. Pushing troops of the Republic of Korea and US Marines to the southern tip at Pusan.

In September of 1950, the 7th Army was sent to support General Douglas MacArthur's "D-Day" landing at the west coast port of Inchon. The 31st Infantry led the advance to take the Suwon Airfield and by mid-October, with the success of the invasion in place and the Army of North Korea in retreat, the 31st was headed back to Pusan on ships for a return to Japan.

However, the 31st did not make the return to Japan and were redirected to a landing on the east coast at Iwon, to join in the support of the 5th and 7th Marines – X Corps. The Marines were pushing to drive the retreating North Korean Army back to the Yalu River on the border of Manchuria and Communist China.

This chase headed into the teeth of a brutal Siberian winter, in the mountainous terrain of North Korea. By October of that year, snow had already started to cover the ground and by November, temperatures plunged to 30° - 40° below zero. A Staff General later remarked that “...it was an insane plan – you wouldn’t take a picnic lunch in peacetime over that terrain in November.”

MSG Caputo and the 31st RCT were sent to hold ground at the forward most position on the east side of the Chosin Reservoir. It is here, at the end of November that the “Destruction of the 31st” occurred. They did not face scattered, retreating forces of North Koreans, but two full divisions of the Communist Chinese Army, now engaged in the Korean conflict.

Firefights began after dark. Skirmishes with Communist Chinese forces occurred on and off throughout the night. But it was the night of December 1st when the Chinese forces pushed wave after wave of infantry at the 31st, lasting all night until daybreak. The carnage on both sides was staggering, as was the debilitating cold coupled with the futility of the fight. The regiment scrambled to retreat over the following days to aid and protect the 7th Marines.

Over 1000 men of the 31st Infantry were sent into the Chosin Reservoir. Only one Officer and 47 men returned to the Marine’s perimeter base at Hamhung. MSG Caputo’s body remains at the Chosin Reservoir, but his spirit is with us today. We honor him and in expression of our gratitude name this stretch of Piermont in his memory as Master Sergeant Louis Caputo Avenue.

Keep Louis 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.