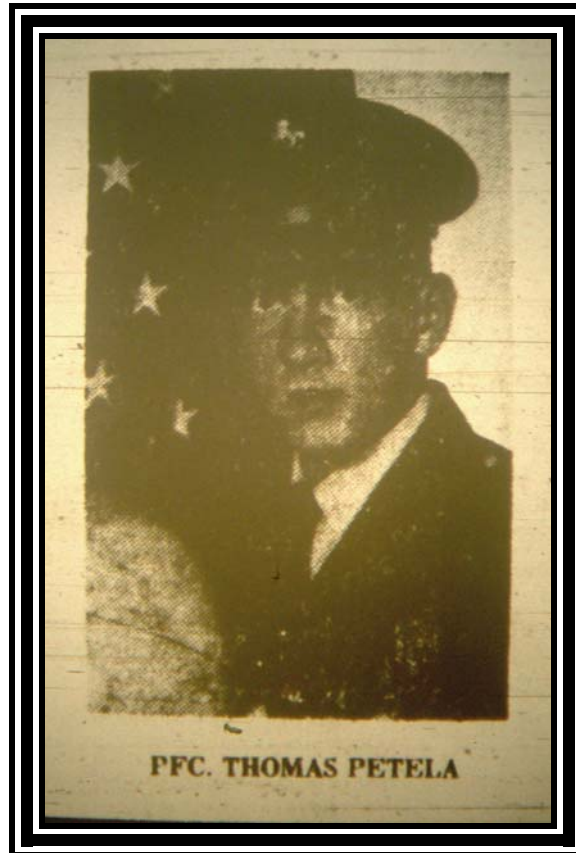


THOMAS JOSEPH PETELA

PFC - E3 - Army - Selective Service
4th Infantry Division
20 year old Single, Caucasian, Male
Born on Feb 16, 1950
From WARREN, MICHIGAN
His tour of duty began on Mar 15, 1970
Casualty was on May 14, 1970
CAMBODIA
HOSTILE, GROUND CASUALTY
MULTIPLE FRAGMENTATION WOUNDS
Body was recovered
Religion
ROMAN CATHOLIC

Panel 10W - - Line 42

Thomas is buried at Resurrection Cemetery, Clinton Twp., MI



‘Some where in Cambodia . . . ‘

Warren Youth Gives Life for His Country

By MITCH KEHETIAN
Warren Bureau Chief

WARREN – Thomas Petela was a star athlete at Warren Woods High School, and above all, he wanted to be a good American. For his country, the 2-year-old soldier gave his life somewhere in Cambodia – Macomb County’s first reported combat casualty in the Southeast Asian Country.

And in “memory and tribute” to their falled son, Mr. and Mrs. Leon Petela have the stars and stripes at half-staff.

Many other friends of the Petela soldier living in Irene Court are also displaying the American flag at half-staff.

Last Sunday the Petela’s were enjoying a quiet evening at home with their two other sons and a married daughter.

At about 6 p.m. a military car pulled up to their home at 13655 Irene Court. The army sergeant came to inform Mr. and Mrs. Petela, Tommy, their youngest son, had been killed May 14, “somewhere in Cambodia.”

Pfc. Petela arrived in Vietnam March 18. Within days the youth knew his next destination was Cambodia to “destroy Viet Cong sanctuaries. That is when Tommy wrote, “The chances are so great of me getting it, I feel something funny inside me, I know dad that you would want me to be a man and I’ll try. And if I go, it will be like a man.”

And he continued, “. . . please be proud and live like I hope you do. As Americans in our country. I love, our country and so I may die for it’s cause. . . .”

Students at Warren Woods High School are also proud of their school’s former star athlete. The school flag is at half-staff and : “the many trophies Tommy won for his school” are on display.’

While at Warren Woods, Tommy excelled as a basketball player and captained the school’s track and cross country teams for two years.

And the boy’s father clutched a green and white letter sweater dotted with award pins as he spoke of his son’s love fro sports.

“Tommy wanted to attend Northern Michigan University to become a teacher and a coach,” Mrs. Petela wept.

Several of Tommy’s former prep coaches at Warren Woods came to comfort the grieving family.” He was the kind of kid any father would be proud to have as a son.” One of them said as he attempted to fight back the tears trickling down his cheeks.

That’s when Mrs. Petela brought out Tommy’s letter. “This letter from my son has given me new courage.” She reminded her son’s former coaches.

In Part Tommy’s letter read: ‘Dad what I have to say will not be pleasant. I don’t want to write this letter, but I just have to. So here it is. Since I’ve been in Vietnam I have been in two heavy action fights. It was the most bad experience I’ve had, and I’ve killed, and have been sick from it.

“I felt ashamed of myself and through what you and mom would feel, well now, I might be killed. Our division is going into Cambodia for one of the biggest missions of the war. It is where the Viet Cong are at and we’ve got to go and get them. They make it sound so small backing the world, but it is real big here.

“The chances are so great of me getting it. I can feel something funny inside me. I know dad that you would want me to be a man and I’ll try. And if I go it will be like a man.

“. . . I want to say that you dad are the best of all. I want to be your type of man. Mom, I just cry when I think of all the things you’ve done for me. I love both of you so much. I would hate to see you and mom grow hatred within you if I die. I want you to be proud Americans, and keep your hearts.

“I pray every night to God that if he takes me. I don’t care just as long as you and mom don’t get bitter. I want that more above my life. So please be proud, and live like I hope you do, as Americans in our country. I love our country and so I may die for it’s cause.”

Young Petela continued that, “It seems all I can think of is home, and the fun through the years. I’ve seen sunsets that nobody else has seen. I’ve felt feelings in my heart for places I’ve been that no one else could imagine,” and he added.

“I’ve lived the best life I could and I’m not ready to die. But I want to live for the future and I’ll tell you I’ll try so hard to make it. They’ll have to get me with a direct bomb, because if a bullet gets me it won’t be good enough to stop me from getting home to see you and mom.

“For the time I’ve been here it’s been Hell . . . but I can’t do anything to change it. And when a boy cries his last tear he’s a man.”

For Pfc. Thomas Petela – his last day was May 14 somewhere in Cambodia when enemy fire silenced him.

Tommy can be assured his mother and father are not bitter – they’re proud as is the fallen youth’s neighbors and friends at Warren Woods High.

“I’m not bitter, because somewhere in Cambodia my son stood up for what he thought was right. The only bitterness in my heart goes out to some of the misguided youth who go around parading with the flag of the Viet Cong – like they did in Warren last week,” Mrs. Petela said. Tommy’s two brothers, John and Mark, are former army veterans. John returned from Vietnam last December.

As this reporter left the Petela home, another neighbor down the street was displaying the flag at half-staff..

There were tears in his eyes and pride in his face as he secured the stars and stripes for Tommy.

The Macomb Daily, May 20, 1970, page 3-A

