

The Virgin Islands Consortium

When 'The Ultimate Sacrifice' Hits Home

VIC News / **Published On May 29, 2018 10:32 AM /**

Wyndi **May 29, 2018**



ST. CROIX -- Julian Pierre and his brother Michael Joseph enlisted in the U.S. Army as island boys with big dreams back in 1973, but only one made it out alive.

Monday, Mr. Pierre commemorated the life of his brother during the annual Memorial Day Ceremony.

According to the St. Croix native, the island wasn't very productive back in the 70's, and he and his brother would have done anything to get away. Mr. Pierre, who was 17 at the time, had one challenge to overcome before he could enlist.

"I had to beg and convince my mom to sign the papers," he told VIC during the ceremony at the bandstand near Fort Christiansvaern.

The persuasion tactics worked, and soon after, Mr. Pierre joined his 18-year-old brother, Mr. Joseph, in enlisting for the Army. They were a team, the younger working as a combat engineer and the older as a mechanic.

Eventually, the young men ended up on different missions in Vietnam. Mr. Pierre was informed his older brother had died via land mine explosion. It was the news.



Julian Pierre

“I had more people I had to worry about at the time,” he said. “It’s only when I got home that it really hit me.”

Breaking the news to his mother was hard. It was difficult for her to understand why the two had been separated.

“She was like, ‘Why weren’t you two guys together? What happened? You went in together’,” he recalled.

She wasn’t the only one who was hurting. She had lost a son, while Mr. Pierre had lost his closest companion.

“We were close – very close,” he said, crossing his fingers to gesture exactly how close. “He was my best friend.”

Considering his incredible loss, does Mr. Pierre regret enlisting? A tear ran down his cheek as he replied with a firm “never have.” There was no room for remorse because there was a higher purpose in play – “to serve the country.”

Mr. Pierre’s replies came in between listening intently to the remarks given at the Memorial Day bandstand ceremony. During the program, Keynote Speaker and Director of Law Enforcement Planning Commission Franz Christian remarked that while the military may recognize the families of lost soldiers with medals and other paraphernalia, “nothing can ever heal despair of the loss of life.”

But Mr. Pierre has found ways to heal. One way of doing so is remembering the special bond he and his brother shared. This bond is what helped him make it through more than ten years of military service.

"I'm happy that I survived, but I survived because of him because I always remember that we went in as one," he said.

Sometimes, Mr. Pierre visits Mr. Joseph's grave at the Kingshill Cemetery on the anniversary of his death. He tells him he misses him, and he wishes he were still here. It's his way of honoring Mr. Joseph's memory.

Similarly, members of the American Legion honored the memory of World War II veteran Will A. Thurland on Monday. They were accompanied by members of the Virgin Islands National Guard, Fire Service, John H. Woodson and Central High School bands, the CHS and St. Croix Educational Complex JROTC, Gov. Kenneth Mapp, Sen. Novelle Francis, Office of Veterans Affairs Director Patrick Farrell, other government representatives, and community guests.

Before the program at the bandstand, they marched in honor of fallen soldiers. During the march from Bassin Triangle to the Christiansted waterfront, participants stopped at the Christiansted Cemetery to commemorate Mr. Thurland's service via prayer, singing, and a rifle salute. The Legion gave Gov. Mapp the honor of laying a wreath on Thurland's grave.



Gov. Kenneth Mapp lays a wreath on the grave of military veteran Will Thurland at the Christiansted Cemetery.

Mr. Thurland was among the third group of World War II inductees who left St. Croix for Ft. Buchanan in Puerto Rico to register for the military draft in 1944. While working as a stevedore, on the Mississippi River and in Hawaii, Mr. Thurland entertained fellow soldiers as a part of the Virgin Islands Orchestra, which he helped organize. He earned the rank of Technical Sergeant before the war ended and returned home to St. Croix in 1946.

Mr. Thurland was instrumental in the building of the American Legion Post No. 85 hall in Hospital Ground.

March participants also honored soldiers who were lost at sea during a separate seaside ceremony at the waterfront.

Between May of 2017 and May of this year, 33 veterans from St. Croix have died. Among them are Otto Tranberg, a navy veteran, and David C. Canegata, an army veteran. Tranberg was 99 years old when he died and Canegata, 89.

St. Croix Deceased Veterans

Rank	Name	Deceased	Branch
SSGT	Walter A. Todmann	May 14, 2017	Air Force
PV2	Marcelo Ramos Jr.	May 16, 2017	Army
PFC	Mario Canton	May 18, 2017	Army
PV2	Thorvald Slater	June 22, 2017	Army
PFC	Pedro E. Figueroa	July 18, 2017	Army
PFC	Jose Luis Diaz-Gonzalez	July 29, 2017	Marines
LT	Aretha Marie Marshall	July 30, 2017	Navy
PFC	George Lawrence	July 30, 2017	Army
CPO	John A. Duval	August 16, 2017	Navy
SR	Agapito Ramos	September 9, 2017	Navy
PFC	Bernadine Bailey	September 10, 2017	Army
SP4	Claude Petersen	September 13, 2017	Army
CPL	Alphonso E. Franklin	September 23, 2017	Army
PFC	Kyjuan R. Naughton	October 28, 2017	Army
SSG	Vincent Griffin	October 31, 2017	Army
PV1	Luis E. Morales	November 4, 2017	Army
PFC	Llewellyn Reed	November 20, 2017	Army
SP4	Peter N. McDougal	November 26, 2017	Marines
SGT	Samuel I. Ryan	November 27, 2017	Marines
SD2	Ott M. Tranberg	November 30, 2017	Navy
SPC	Collin O. Williams	December 7, 2017	Army

SPC	Vivian A. Ford	December 25, 2017	Army
2LT	Dwain E. Ford	January 12, 2018	Marines
PFC	Ignatus Cassimeer	January 21, 2018	Army
PFC	Cyprian A. King	January, 22, 2018	Army
SGT	Evaristo Ventura Parilla	January 23, 2018	Army
PFC	Juan C. Carmona	February 26, 2018	Army
PFC	Sepauve Joseph Sr.	March 5, 2018	Army
SPC	David C. Canegata	March 20, 2018	Army
	Joseph O'Neal Christopher	March 26, 2018	Army
PV2	Rod F. Joseph	April 17, 2018	Army
PFC	Paulino Rivera	April 26, 2018	Army
SPC	Anderson Rampersad	May 4, 2018	Army