Freeport During the Korean War (1950-1953)
Presented at the 2017 Freeport Veterans Day Service
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The Freeport of the Korean War would be familiar with us today but with some noticeable exceptions. Merrick Road was only two lanes – it became 4 lanes in 1954; traveling from north Freeport to south Freeport required crossing the LIRR tracks - the railroad didn’t get elevated until 1959. The library was only 1 building (today it is a combination of 3 buildings). Freeport also had two hospitals, Doctors Hospital (later Lydia E. Hall Hospital) and Freeport Hospital. Freeport High School was located on Pine Street, next to the junior high school. The land on which today’s high school sits, was a large pond and was part of Baldwin in the 1950s. The junior high was not called Dodd, because Dr. John W. Dodd was still alive as serving as the district’s superintendent. The Atkinson school had only been opened for two years in 1950 and it would be another 2 years before Bayview Avenue School was dedicated. All students in Freeport schools during the Korean War, began their day, like students today, by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. However, with one apparent difference:

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The words “Under God” are noticeably absent. Many Americans saw the Korean War as an attempt to stop the spread of communism, a godless political system. At the urging of Presbyterian minister George Docherty and with the support of the Knights of Columbus and President Eisenhower the worlds “under God” were added to the pledge in 1954.
The Korean War is often referred to as “forgotten war.” In my own research into World War I and World War II, I was struck at how different this war was perceived by Americans. During the two world wars, there seemed to be a sense of national sacrifice. Gas and food were rationed. War bond drives were common and reported often in the press. But somehow this conflict felt different. Yes, during the Korean War, Freeport called for civil defense volunteers, the local Salvation Army collected clothing for Korean relief, and a blood drive was held at Atkinson School. But American sacrifices on Korean peninsula often didn’t appear on the front page of the newspaper.

After the war, Freeporters who died in Korea were overlooked for nearly 30 years. Finally, in 1985, a plaque with the names of 6 of the 8 Freeport servicemen who died during the Korean War was added to the Library’s Memorial Room. So for this Veterans Day, 8 Freeporters are forgotten no longer:

Wilbur Bond was the first Freeporter to die in Korea. He enlisted in the Army at the age of 17 and died at the age of 20. He lived on Raynor Street and was said to be a huge Yankee fan.

Infantryman, Clifford Craw lived on Commercial Street. He died at the age of 19.

Felix Garland lived on East Merrick Road. He was the first African American Long Islander to die in the war. He was 21 years old.

Edward Koenke lived on Johnson Place. He died at the age of 30 after an attack on his foxhole.

Ronald Canfield enlisted in the Army in 1949, two months after graduating Freeport High School. He lived 251 North Brookside Avenue. He was killed in action at the age of 20.
James Cipriano was a sergeant in the Army. He died in a truck accident in Austria at the age of 21. He lived on Bedell Street.

Norbert Holter of Jay Street was a member of the Freeport High School 1950 championship football team. He was known as Norbie to his friends. He enlisted in the Marine Corps after graduation. Due to his athletic build, Norbie was originally assigned to the Marine Honor Guard in Washington, DC. He was killed in action a little more than a year after he arrived in Korea. He was 20 years old.

And finally, the last Freeporter to die in Korea was Robert McAllister. In 1953, at the age of 21, this US Marine died on the second day of the Battle for Outpost Vegas. He lived on Southside Avenue.

This Veterans Day I would like to say thank you to the Korean War veterans here with us today, especially my Dad who was drafted into the Army during the Korean War. To all Freeport veterans, I would like to say thank you for your service and wish everyone a happy and peaceful Veterans Day.