

New Bedford's Fort Taber Flag Honors SSGT John F. Santos – Massachusetts Air National Guard Veteran

During the month of May, the 44th Lights for Peace flag to fly at the Fort Taber – Fort Rodman Military Museum honors the memory of SSGT. John F. Santos, of New Bedford, who served his country with honor and dignity for seven years, before passing away on December 28, 2022, at the age of twenty-five. He served in the Massachusetts Air National Guard 102nd Security Forces Squadron of the 102nd Intelligence Wing, located at Joint Base Cape Cod.

John was born in New Bedford on May 27, 1997, to his parents Robert Santos and Elizabeth Perreira. According to his mother, John was fascinated with law enforcement from a very early age. In fact, at the age of three, he would recite the Miranda Rights while watching television, when someone got arrested. For Halloween, he would dress up as a police officer, while his brother, Robert, would play the role of the inmate. "John came from a family, where many family members worked as Correction Officers, and we knew that he would go into law enforcement someday."

He attended Greater New Bedford Vocational Technical High School, where he studied Welding and Fabrication. He also worked part-time at Pa Raffa's Italian Restaurant, after school and on the weekends, during his four years of high school. It was here that he met Hannah Dupont, his true love, who would eventually become his fiancé and mother of his child, Hayden who was born on February 24, 2023. Hannah explains, "John never got to meet Hayden, but his spirit and soul lives by his side, day by day, in our home. There's no

doubt he would have been the best father ever, having proven to also be the most amazing partner.”

After graduating from high school in 2015, John enlisted in the Massachusetts Air National Guard on November 6, 2015. He was assigned to the 102nd Security Forces Squadron, a division of the 102nd Intelligence Wing. Their mission statement reads: “To provide highly trained and professional military police personnel in support of civilian law enforcement operations within the Commonwealth; ready to protect and serve at a moment’s notice.” The squadron’s primary mission is “police services and force protection at Otis Air National Guard Base,” according the 102nd Intelligence Wing website.

Throughout his seven years of service with the Massachusetts Air National Guard, John served tours in Alaska and Washington. He was also deployed to Qatar in 2019, where he received his veteran status. He was promoted to Staff Sergeant on February 20, 2021 in a memorable service held in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

SSGT Santos earned the following awards for his service: Meritorious Service Medal, Army Achievement Medal, Meritorious Unit Award, Air and Space Outstanding Unit Award w/3 bronze oak leaf clusters, Air Force Good Conduct Medal w/3 bronze oak leaf clusters, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Medal, Armed Forces Service Medal, Air and Space Expeditionary Service Ribbons with Gold Border, Armed Forces Reserve Medal with “M” Device, NCO PME Ribbons, Small Arms Expert (Rifle), Air and Space Training Ribbon, the District of Columbia Emergency Service Ribbon, MA Service Ribbons with bronze star, MA Defense Expeditionary Ribbons, MA Emergency Service Ribbon with bronze star.

His mother explained that he was incredibly passionate about the military and would do anything to support veterans. John received two Boston Marathon Medals for completing two “Tough Ruck” marathons in honor of fallen soldiers which he completed

with his fellow Airmen as part of Team 102nd SFS, while dressed in full ruck with a weighted backpack of 35 lbs.

According to toughruck.org, the "Tough Ruck Nation is group of military, first responders and civilians whose sole purpose is to Ruck in honor and in memory of our Fallen Service Members, Police, Firefighters and EMTs, while raising funds to support our warriors and families of the Fallen. We will march with our Rucks and carry the names of our Fallen comrades with us." A memorial march was held at this year's Boston Marathon to honor the memory of SSGT John Santos.

John worked as a Deputy Sheriff at the Plymouth County Sheriff's Department for 5 years and had been accepted into the Massachusetts State Police Training Academy which had been scheduled to start in February.

In his free time, John loved spending time with his family and friends, as well as riding his Harley, fishing and being the "fun" Uncle Johnny.

According to his mother, "John was a very driven and determined young man who found a way to balance his love of his career, family and friends." John was known for his infectious smile, sense of humor and for his love of family. "His tattoo said it all – For Those I Love I Will Sacrifice."

SSGT John F. Santos passed away on December 28, 2022 at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston from a brain aneurysm.

He is survived by his mother Elizabeth Perreira and her husband, Rick; his father, Robert Santos, Jr. and his wife Stephanie; his fiancé Hannah Dupont and their son Hayden Santos; his brother Robert Santos III and his wife Miranda; his sister Heather Tavares and her husband Matt; his sister Natasha Pacheco and her husband James, his grandfathers Elio Soares and Robert Santos, Sr. and several nieces and nephews.

A GoFundMe page has been set up to support the family and

John's young son, Hayden: <https://gofund.me/0dc1c6ee>

Linda Ferreira, of Empire Ford of New Bedford, researches the life histories of area residents. American flags are provided by Empire Ford of New Bedford. Flags are raised by the staff at Fort Taber – Fort Rodman Military Museum. Those who would like to honor a local veteran in the future can contact Ferreira at lferreira@buyempireautogroup.com.