



Name in English: Isaac Jesse Waipulani Ho'opi'i
Name in Chinese: n/a
Name in Pinyin: n/a
Gender: Male
Birth Year: 1963
Birth Place: Wai'anae, Hawaii
Current location: McLean, Virginia

Pentagon Police Officer, Musician

Photo Credit: Richard Avedon

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/September11/collection/record.asp?ID=27>

Profession: Police Sergeant, Pentagon Force Protection Agency

Education: Wai'anae High School

Awards: 2004, Winner, World Music Vocalist, Washington Area Music Association; August 1, 2003, "Isaac Ho'opi'i Day," proclaimed by the Governor of the State of Hawaii; 2003, J. Edgar Hoover Award, Veterans of Foreign Wars, presented annually to our nation's most outstanding law-enforcement officer; March 5, 2002, Secretary of Defense Medal of Valor, the Department of Defense's highest civilian honor, awarded to Isaac Ho'opi'i and 38 other 9/11 heroes; 2002, Certificate of Recognition, Fairfax (Virginia) County Board of Supervisors.

Contribution:

Isaac Ho'opi'i was born and raised in Hawaii. Like many native Hawaiians, he is of mixed descent; Hawaiian, Chinese, and Portuguese. After military service, he settled in Virginia and, in 1997, joined the Defense Protective Service (now the Pentagon Force Protection Agency) as a police officer.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, then-Officer Ho'opi'i was on duty and driving his K-9 partner Vito to the veterinarian when the dispatcher announced that a jetliner had just struck the Pentagon. He immediately returned to the Pentagon and was one of the first rescuers to arrive where American Airlines flight 77 had crashed.

Wearing his standard police uniform and no protective equipment, he entered the burning building, working his way around wreckage from the plane, live electrical wires, unburned jet fuel on the floors and walls, sharp glass and other hazardous debris that was scattered everywhere, and the charred corpses of victims. The fires and thick smoke inside the darkened building made visibility impossible or limited at best.

Sergeant Ho'opi'i would recall: "My job was just to react, and when you react, it is more like tunnel vision. You try to focus and your adrenaline just kicks in. You really don't realize what you're doing, except just to save lives." Each time Ho'opi'i re-entered the burning structure, he would repeatedly shout: "If you can hear me, head toward my

voice.” The victims he rescued were brought to a safe grassy area about 100 yards away. Although some of the victims would die, Ho’opi’i was credited for saving at least eight lives. Survivors who Ho’opi’i saved would never forget the rescuer with the deep voice and distinctive Hawaiian accent.

Exhausted after working at the disaster site for 36 hours, Officer Ho’opi’i and Vito went home, where Ho’opi’i’s wife Gigi, like so many Pentagon employees’ spouses and relatives, did not know the status of their family members. When Ho’opi’i and Vito returned to duty, they were deployed to locate other victims in the rubble.

In a Washington Post story in October 2001, a Pentagon contract employee, William "Wayne" Sinclair, credited an unidentified “angel” with a Hawaiian accent for leading him and others to safety. Sinclair’s story would gain national attention, including on CNN. The next day, Sinclair talked to Officer Ho’opi’i over the phone and immediately recognized the voice of his rescuer. It was the first time that Ho’opi’i would learn of any of the victims whom he had saved. The two men would meet on NBC’s “Today Show” and, to this day, call or see one another at least once every year.

In Hawaii, the Ho’opi’i name is synonymous with native Hawaiian music. Sergeant Isaac Ho’opi’i is also an accomplished musician and singer. He is a member of an award-winning Hawaiian band, Aloha Boys. The group was formed among native Hawaiians in the Washington, DC area. In addition to performing for wounded military personnel at Walter Reed Hospital, the Aloha Boys have performed throughout the East Coast and in Rheims, France; and, in 2005, played at New York City’s Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

On September 11, 2006, Sergeant Ho’opi’i sang “God Bless America” at halftime on NFL Monday Night Football at FedEx Field in Landover, Maryland, home of the Baltimore Ravens. In January 2009, the Aloha Boys performed at the Hawaii State Society Inaugural Ball; and, on January 20, 2013, were among the bands to perform at one of President Barack Obama’s inauguration balls in Washington, DC.

Sergeant Hoopii and his third K-9 partner Lava continue to protect the Pentagon, its satellite facilities, and its thousands of employees. Off duty, when he is not performing with the Aloha Boys, Sergeant Ho’opi’i, a father of three, coaches football and basketball at a high school in McLean, Virginia.

Despite all the acclaim that Sergeant Isaac Ho’opi’i has received since 9/11, he still feels haunted by the thought that he could have done more and saved more people that day. “I’m not a hero. There are people who gave their lives. They’re heroes.” “I was only trying to be a good Hawaiian and share the spirit of Aloha.”

(Revised October 4, 2014 by Gary Gee)

External Links:

<http://www.alohaboys.net/7001.html>

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/07/AR2005090701593_pf.html

http://akaka.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=speeches.home&month=3&year=2002&release_id=1012
<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2002/Sep/11/ln/ln16a.html>
<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2008/Nov/21/ln/hawaii811210382.html>