

# THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of a Cryptologic Service and Sacrifice

## MSgt John W. Ryon USAF



Nakhom Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base was universally known as a somewhat primitive airstrip hacked out of the jungle ... It may have been as the saying went, "The worst base in Thailand, but the best base in Vietnam."

"The EC-47 Experience" by James C. Wheeler

MSgt John W. Ryon was born on August 9, 1929 in New London, Connecticut. He attended Stonington High School in nearby Pawcatuck, and after graduation enlisted in the US Air Force. After basic training, he was initially trained as a firefighter, but in 1959 he switched careers and retrained as a radio communications analyst. John honed his craft in Japan with the 6918th Radio Squadron and the 6927th Security Squadron, and by 1967, had become so adept at his work that he was sent back to Goodfellow Air Force Base to serve as an instructor. 1972 found him working for the 6994th Security Squadron stationed at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base in Thailand.

Operating in the rear spaces of a reconfigured EC-47 aircraft, John's job was to collect critical enemy communications to discern enemy intentions and save lives. Since 1966, the Air Force had utilized EC-47s throughout Vietnam to great effect. The Thailand operation was one of the later efforts, but due to its location, the Nakhon Phanom base could provide Airborne Radio Direction Finding (ARDF) coverage of Southeast Asia better than any time in the past. John had spent hours learning his craft and had also helped others to train to standard, but in Thailand, he would finally get the chance to put his training to use.

On November 21, 1972, John took part in his first operational mission. At 0900, he and nine other crew members headed for the flight line. Four of them would handle the flight operations; John and four others would handle the radio communication duties. Flight conditions were perfect: it was sunny and a comfortable 75 degrees. Aircraft and crew took off at 1035 for what was expected to be a routine classified tactical mission. All went well during the operation, and 6½ hours later, the plane headed for home.

Shortly after 1700, the plane approached Nakhon Phanom, and the pilot was given permission to land. Initially, it appeared the final approach would be routine, but as the plane approached the runway, a series of mechanical challenges arose that eventually led to disaster. The aircraft briefly touched down, but then suddenly jerked and swerved hard to the left, prompting the pilot to power up and become airborne again in hopes of making another approach. Despite this effort, the plane struck a perimeter wire and a tree, damaging the plane's engines and putting the crew in even greater peril. Undaunted, the flight crew continued the struggle to get the aircraft safely down onto the runway, but at 1740, the engines cut out completely and the plane plummeted into a group of trees around two miles from the base. Seven members of the crew survived the ordeal, but John and the plane's pilot, Robert A. Kohn, perished in the crash.



MSgt John W. Ryon is buried in plot 974 of the Evergreen Cemetery in Stonington, CT, but the service and sacrifice he gave to his nation and the cryptologic service was memorialized around the world. Dormitories were named in his honor at Goodfellow Air Force Base in Texas and Misawa Air Base in Japan. In addition, his widow and family dedicated a memorial in his honor at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.



Ryon Hall, Goodfellow AFB, San Angelo, TX



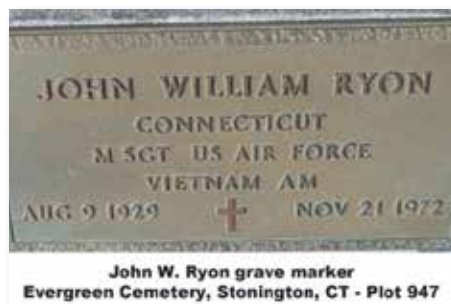
Ryon Hall - southeast view  
Misawa AB, Japan - 2010



Ryon Lightpole - Baylor University  
Waco, TX



Sign on Ryon Memorial Lightpole  
Baylor University, Waco TX



John W. Ryon grave marker  
Evergreen Cemetery, Stonington, CT - Plot 947

