

THEY SERVED IN SILENCE



The Story of a Cryptologic Hero Corporal Stephen L. Traugher, USMC



A Story of Cryptologic Service and Sacrifice

"A lot of things stuck with me. One thing I recall well was the strong person-to-person bonding and reliance from Marine to Marine. Realizing that your lives are almost overlapping, you become one...You almost become like a band of brothers living together. You learn how perishable life is...You see life one minute, you see death the next minute. But you move on quickly because the war still exists."

Lt. Col. Richard LeVa Ret. Former special radio operator, 1st Radio Battalion

Stephen L. Traugher was born on April 17, 1946 in southern Indiana in the city of New Albany. New Albany lies along the banks of the Ohio River and contains some of the hilliest terrain in the state. Stephen attended the local schools, and graduated from high school in 1964. He worked part-time for the Colgate-Palmolive plant in nearby Clarksville both during and after high school, and in December 1964, he made the decision to enlist in the United States Marine Corps. After initial training at Parris Island, South Carolina, he was sent to the Naval Communications Training Center, Pensacola, Florida to attend Communications Technician "O" Branch School. After graduation in 1966, he was posted to E Company, Marine Support Battalion at Kamesaya, Japan.

In 1967, Traugher was assigned as part of an augmentation force to Marines Sub-Unit Company "E" First Radio Battalion in South Vietnam. The roots of the First Radio Battalion (1st FRB) reach all the way back to World War II. Since that time, various reiterations of the 1st FRB had served throughout the Pacific and Southeast Asia. The unit had sent the first group of U.S. Marines to Indochina to operate near Pleiku in 1962. In 1967, Cpl Traugher, along with his unit, was ordered back to the area to conduct their work in the Da Nang region of Vietnam.

Their mission revolved around small tactical teams whose mission and purpose was to collect intelligence related to the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army through radio intercept, and radio direction finding. The information culled was used for both offensive and defensive fighting purposes, and provided critical support to units in the field. As a special communications operator, Stephen was devoted to his work and quickly rose to the rank of corporal.

On September 10, 1967, Stephen was tasked with transporting a series of code books to Gio Linh in Quang Tri Province. During the trip he was severely injured by a claymore mine and died on the medical evacuation helicopter on the way back to Dong Ha. He would be the 394th serviceman from Indiana to die in the Vietnam conflict. Sergeant Richard McDaniel, a fellow Marine, remembers the day.



"Steve and I were talking about cars the day he left to take some code books ... to a small detachment near Gio Linh in support of the 12th Marines. I had just returned from there

after being there for 60 days. I will never forget that day, talking with him. My sincere condolences to his family and friends who knew him. Semper Fidelis means always faithful, to him and my lasting memories of him."

A childhood friend remembered him fondly as well:

"I grow up on Oriole Drive, just around the corner from Steve. He was a bit older, but we all played football in my yard. I remember Steve going into the service, and will always remember the sorrow I felt when I heard my childhood friend was gone. I miss you Steve and think of you often."

For his service he was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart, Combat Action Ribbon, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Distinguished Unit Citation, Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation, Good Conduct Medal, and Marine Corps Expeditionary Medal.

Stephen's dedication to duty and sacrifice would not be forgotten by his fellow Marines or the Sea Service. In December of 1969 in a ceremony attended by surviving family members and 500 guests, and presided over by Colonel Douglas D. Petty, the Marine Corps representative to the Chief of the Naval Air Training Command U.S. Navy, Traughber Hall, a brand new 500-man Bachelor Enlisted Quarters at Corry Station was dedicated to his memory.

