

# THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of a Cryptologic Service and Sacrifice

## SP5 Harry J. Colon



**"It is always easy for people to see the performance of an infantry battalion or brigade in fighting and winning the battle. The performance of a support unit is not so obvious, and yet, in your case you have probably contributed to the winning of more battles than any maneuver element in the country."**

**Lt. Gen. Frederick C. Weyand in a speech to the 409th RRD**

SP5 Harry J. Colon was born in the Spanish Harlem section of New York City on the seventh anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1948. He attended the local schools, and enlisted in the United States Army in 1967. After initial testing, he was selected to serve in the Army Security Agency (ASA), the cryptologic element of the U.S. Army during the Vietnam era. After training, he served with a variety of ASA and regular army units, including the 856th Radio Research Detachment (RRD) and the 199th Infantry Brigade (motorized).

In August of 1968, he deployed to Vietnam with the 409th RRD at Long Gieo in Tay Ninh Province. The 409th at the time was in support of the 11th Cavalry Regiment and provided real-time cryptologic-based intelligence to tactical units in the field. Due to its efforts, enemy forces could be more easily located and ultimately destroyed. Harry was dedicated to the ASA mission, but unlike many of his fellow professional cryptologists, his work was not done in the electronic spectrum, but in the logistics arena. In order to complete their missions and keep their operations running at full efficiency, ASA units, like all military entities, required a solid, ongoing, logistical chain of parts and hardware to sustain them. Harry's job was to ensure that the 409th had what it needed to get the job done. All ASA units were in the business of providing and protecting critical information in the battle space, but supplying the equipment of the 409th was a bit more challenging because its mission was performed not only from fixed locations, but also via a fleet of modified Armored Cavalry Assault Vehicles (ACAVs). Thus, Harry not only had to be sure the unit had the cryptologic equipment and resources they needed, but also the parts required to keep the tactical vehicles in good working order.

On June 21, Harry and several other soldiers were riding in a quarter-ton armored vehicle on a supply run to the 303rd RRBn at Bien Hoa. About nine miles from their destination, they rounded a curve with a high bank on the left side of the road and came under heavy sniper fire. Harry was traveling in the passenger seat and was killed instantly. For his courage and bravery that day he was awarded the Bronze Star. He is buried in St. Raymond Cemetery in Bronx, New York.

Harry left behind countless friends and family who loved and admired him. A fellow soldier noted that "the men of the 409th Radio Research Detachment meet every year and... say a silent prayer for you... 'You will not be forgotten.'" Joann Zerafa, an old friend, posted her thoughts about Harry on a digital site: "51 years have passed by & you are still in my heart & mind... I don't know what the future would have been for us but I like to think we would have been happy."



SP5 Harry J. Colon's life was cut short, but his devotion to his fellow soldiers and the legacy of the service and sacrifice he established will forever serve as an inspiration to his nation and the members of the cryptologic service in this day and time.

