

THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of a Cryptologic Hero

Sp5 Michael P. Brown
SGT Diego Ramirez Jr.
MSG Robert D. Taylor



A Story of Cryptologic Service and Sacrifice

It was the tail end of the monsoon season in Vietnam, and for most of the men of the 335th Radio Research Company at Dong Tam, November 26, 1967 was a typical day. The rain had held off, and the temperature was a comfortable 75 degrees. However, for Specialist 5 Michael P. Brown, Sergeant Diego Ramirez Jr., and Master Sergeant Robert D. Taylor, it would prove to be a day of destiny.

The 335th Radio Research Company was a proud Army Security Agency (ASA) unit whose legacy reached back to the early days of WWII. Sent to Vietnam in 1966 to support the 9th Infantry Division, like most ASA units, their job was to provide and protect timely and informative signals intelligence to allow their senior leaders to ascertain future enemy operations and save lives.

The unit's headquarters arrived in country in late 1966, and by January 1967 was headquartered at Bearcat Base at Biên Hòa near what was then Saigon. By November the unit had established additional detachments in the area of operation. Brown, Ramirez, and Taylor were assigned to the Dong Tam Base Camp, which in addition to being their home was also the headquarters of the 2nd Brigade of the 9th Infantry Division. Dong Tam lies in the Mekong Delta region, an area characterized by miles of swamp dominated by two major rivers, and a host of smaller streams, all of which served as major supply routes for enemy units.

Brown and Ramirez were both 22. Brown hailed from Hazleton, Pennsylvania, loved the outdoors, and was an avid hunter and fisherman. A year after graduating from the local high school in 1964, he decided to join the U.S. Army, and over time became involved in special intelligence services as a linguist and translator. He had been with the unit in Vietnam since February. Ramirez was a native Texan. Born in El Paso in 1945, he attended Austin High School, where he excelled in the school's ROTC program, and ran track. He had been in Vietnam since January working as a radio teletypewriter operator, and was scheduled to rotate back home in December. Taylor was 41 and senior to both of his fellow soldiers in



both rank and age. He was born in Santa Monica, California, but spent the greater part of his life in the Syracuse, New York. A dedicated Mason, he graduated from the area's Vocational High School and enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1952. Unlike his compatriots, Taylor had been in Vietnam only since September. All were fully dedicated to their mission as ASA soldiers.

Dong Tam Base Camp was located near My Tho, and approximately 50 miles from the main Bearcat base. Due to the distance between the two locations, it was necessary to make regular runs to the main headquarters area, not only for mission-related purposes, but personal ones as well. Due to the fact that it was Sunday, some believed the run by the three men on November 26 was to visit the base PX to obtain some badly needed incidentals. The group arrived safely, took care of business, and decided to remain at the base until late in the day to visit with friends. The men had taken a risk driving by themselves to Bearcat base during the day. Normally soldiers on the move traveled in convoys, particularly at night, when armed escorts and air cover were the rule. Despite this, they decided to return home that evening, and while traveling on Highway 4 near Xom Dua they stopped at a Viet Cong constructed roadblock and came under a well-coordinated attack. Spent cartridges found at the site indicate that the men had fought bravely before succumbing to enemy fire.

All three men were fondly remembered. One of Brown's fellow soldiers related, "I made that trip every week from Tan An to Bearcat but for some reason you, and Diego, and Sgt. Taylor- asked if I would mind if you made the run that day. Only God knows why. I think of you guys every day." A fellow friend who served with Ramirez noted that "It would take a long time to describe how good and brave a man Diego Ramirez was. I have thought about him many times over the last 52 years, and will regret to the day I die that I could not muster up the courage to go to El Paso and tell his family how much we thought of him." Taylor's niece recalled, "My memories are all that remain--you were 'all' Army, such a devoted and responsible son... a true patriot and my Uncle Bob!"

All three men were posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and Bronze Star and memorialized in unique ways the most unique, perhaps, was a Harlem Globetrotters benefit game held in February 1968 to honor the memory of Sgt. Ramirez.

But, more importantly, the service, dedication, and sacrifice of all three men would never be forgotten by their ASA comrades, their fellow soldiers, and the nation for which they so bravely fought and gave their lives to defend.

