

THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of a Cryptologic Hero Staff Sergeant Alfred T. Dwyer



In the run up to the Tet Offensive of 1968, Gray's Radio Battalion (RADBN) knew full well where and how the enemy would attack across I Corps. Senior Marine leadership became increasingly confident in the ability and usefulness of the well-trained, albeit mysterious intelligence unit.

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Radio Battalions in Vietnam,
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Staff Sergeant Alfred Thomas Dwyer was born on February 18, 1935 in the "Sun City" of El Paso, Texas. In 1916 the region served as a base camp for Gen. Pershing's efforts to find and capture the Mexican bandit Pancho Villa. During the Putative Expedition, as it came to be known, the U.S. Army established the beginnings of the modern-day cryptologic services. In time, Dwyer's service and sacrifice became part of this rich legacy.

Growing up, Dwyer attended the local St. Patrick's Parish School and Cathedral High School. After graduation, he received permission from his parents to enlist in the United States Marine Corps and began training as a cryptologic professional. Prior to his deployment to Vietnam, he served in a number of diverse places, including the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, where he served as a Marine Guard; Annapolis; Puerto Rico; and Ft. Devens. Most importantly, perhaps, during his tour of duty in Maryland, he met Miss Margery Goodnow. They would marry, and have two sons, Kenneth and Michael, and a daughter, Kelly Lynn.

As his career progressed, Dwyer found himself part of the 1st Radio Battalion, a unit that consisted of signals intelligence and electronic intelligence professionals whose main mission was to provide and protect critical communications on the battlefield. Former Commandant of the Marine Corps, General (then Lt. Col.) Al Gray was the driving force behind the establishment of the unit. In 1967, Dwyer got the chance to use his cryptologic talents and abilities when the battalion deployed to Da Nang, South Vietnam, near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

U.S. Marines had been in Vietnam since March 1965 and been involved in countless combat operations since that time. Towards the end of 1967, credible intelligence sources indicated a major enemy offensive was in the offing. Senior U.S. military leadership initially anticipated that the enemy was waiting to launch the attack until after the Vietnamese holiday and that the U.S. Marine base at Khe Sahn was the main objective. When hostilities finally commenced, it became clear that the enemy's aim was not limited to one or two objectives but on the entire country of South Vietnam. Dubbed the Tet Offensive, it proved to be the largest and most comprehensive enemy effort up to that point in the war.



As part of the 1st Marine Battalion in Quang Nam Province, the mission of Dwyer's unit was to defend the area south of the DMZ and the city of Da Nang. By January 30, it was

clear from a wide range of intelligence sightings and reports that enemy action in the area was imminent. At 0300, enemy sapper units attacked the unit's combat and communications center near Hill 200. Using a wide range of weapons and explosives, the attackers speedily moved through the gaps in the wire and overran the bunker where Dwyer and his fellow Marines were located. The swift and sudden attack was ultimately repulsed by artillery fire, but tragically, Dwyer and three of his comrades in arms were killed during the onslaught.

On the day that Staff Sergeant Dwyer paid the ultimate sacrifice, he had been "in country" for over a year and was slated to return to the States in a matter of days to see his mother and family. Al left behind a loving family and a host of comrades and friends. Mr. Alan Lashway, a fellow Marine who served with Al in Vietnam, noted that Dwyer was affable and "was well liked and respected." His son Kenneth was only three years old at the time of his death, but noted, that while he has no real memory of his dad, "every person I have ever met that knew him told me he was a jokester who was easy to work for and an incredible human being."

Vietnam was a time of trial for our nation, and historians and pundits will forever argue about the actions of the United States during that time. However, we should never forget that, despite the many controversies related to the conflict, brave individuals, including those who worked in critical cryptologic work, went to war and, at times, paid the ultimate sacrifice for the nation. Staff Sergeant Alfred T. Dwyer was one of these, and those who follow in his footsteps should always remember and honor his dedication to the effort to gain critical information and save lives.

