THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of a Cryptologic Hero
Specialist Joshua N. Nelson

Liberty, as well as honor, man ought to preserve at the hazard of his life, for without it life is insupportable.
Miguel de Cervantes

Specialist Joshua N. Nelson was born in the nation's capital on November 2, 1989, and, at the age of 3, moved with his family to North Carolina. During his formative years in the Tar Heel State he would live in the town of Williamston and eventually, Greenville, an area named in honor of General Nathaniel Greene, the author of many great victories during the Revolution. Like General Greene, Nelson would one day serve his nation during a time of trial.

As a young man he developed a passion for music. In time he would become an all-state musician for the fighting Panthers of North Pitt High School. Joshua possessed an impressive singing voice, but, as his mother noted, he avoided any display of this for fear that he would be asked to sing rather than display his musical prowess on the drums, tuba, and trumpet.

After high school he would enroll at the local community college. It was also then that he would meet his future wife, Quamisha. After marrying in 2011, in an effort to better himself, he made the decision to join the United States Army.

After his initial training, Nelson was assigned to Company D of the 297th Military Intelligence Battalion at Fort Gordon, Georgia. The 297th's motto is "Always Forward, Yield to None." At the time Joshua joined the unit its mission had evolved to one of providing "…multi-disciplined intelligence … to defeat adversaries, promote regional stability, support partner nations and allies, and protect U.S. interests." In pursuit of this mission, in May 2012, Nelson and his unit were deployed to Afghanistan. Knowing the importance of his work, Joshua committed himself to the task of gleaning critical intelligence from enemy communications. With this information, his commanders would be able to raise the odds of victory on the battlefield and save lives.

On September 16th, Specialist Nelson and five of his fellow soldiers and six Afghan National policemen were defending a remote observation post in Afghanistan. Later that day, a report of a shooting would prompt nearby coalition units to respond to the area to investigate. Sadly, on arrival, they found Nelson and three of his comrades dead, and several others wounded. In addition, one of the Afghan policemen had perished in the attack, but there was no sign of the others. All evidence indicated that segments of the Afghan assignees had instigated the attack. At the time, he was only one month away from coming home.

During his all too brief life, Specialist Joshua Nelson left an indelible impression on the lives of many people. He would leave behind a loving wife and family. His father noted that "Everybody loved Josh…people just loved him, man, they just loved him." North Carolina Congressman Kenneth Butterfield prayed that Joshua's life would serve "as a guiding force" and that he, the state of North Carolina, and the nation would be "forever indebted to his family for the ultimate sacrifice he paid on our behalf."

Winston Churchill once noted that the prosecution of war is "never smooth or easy," and that when a nation commits itself to combat those who carry the fight to the enemy are subjected to "unforeseeable and uncontrollable events." In his efforts to support his fellow Soldiers and save lives, Specialist Joshua Nelson paid the ultimate price. His time as Soldier and warrior in the cryptologic realm, however, will forever serve as a reminder of the noble legacy of those Americans who have always found the courage and resolve to defend their nation during difficult and challenging times.

Specialist Joshua N. Nelson
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Photographs courtesy of the Nelson family

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