

THEY SERVED IN SILENCE



Service and Sacrifice on the Kanto Plain

"A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself."

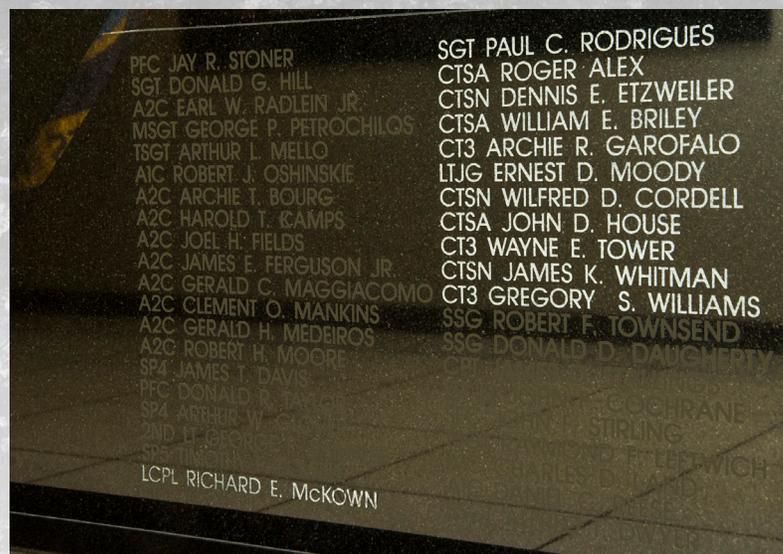
~ Joseph Campbell

For the men and women stationed at the U.S. Naval Security Group's Kamiseya, Japan, listening post, September 23, 1965, had been an all too typical day. The weather had been a comfortable 75 degrees with bright sunshine. Back in the United States, President Lyndon Baines Johnson occupied the Oval Office and the number one song, typical of the times, was Barry McGuire's "Eve of Destruction." In Vietnam, U.S. forces were ramping up for operations in the Ia Drang Valley and the onset of "Operation Rolling Thunder." Sunset that day occurred at 1743. At the time, portions of the base personnel were coming off duty and heading for the dining hall, others were gearing up to report for duty. There was no hint or suspicion that the night and following day would be anything but routine.

Established in the early 1950s, the naval base was the brain child of the pioneering U.S. Navy cryptologist Captain Wesley Arnold "Ham" Wright. Previously, radio intercept activities had been conducted at the U.S. Navy Shipyard at Yokosuka. Over time, however, electrical interference at the site prompted the authorities to seek a more suitable location. Kamiseya, on Honshu's Kanto Plain near Atsugi Airfield, proved to be the perfect spot.

The site was not only optimal for receiving signals, but also provided a secure environment that would be hard to find elsewhere. It suited the sailors as well. Many remarked that the site was a "sailor's dream," in that it provided an environment where one could be involved in interesting and challenging work, while at the same time it provided "... opportunities for liberty that couldn't be beat."

Later on the evening of the 23rd, over 110 personnel reported to their duty stations for the mid-watch, entering the operations complex through Building 25. The structure was a two story wooden facility, in front of "the tunnel" where the actual work took



place. In the early morning hours of the 24th, a fire broke out in the building and thick black smoke began filtering into both floors and also, tragically, into the air conditioning system of the operations area. To this day, there is debate about the initial cause of the blaze. Some blamed faulty wiring; others attributed it to an overheated incinerator. The fact was that a serious, life-threatening situation was developing.

Shortly after the outbreak of the fire, the watch leadership informed the Officer of the Day of the emergency and began working to determine the appropriate course of actions to deal with the situation. It was not until almost an hour after the fire had started that orders were given to evacuate the area. By that time, Building 25 was engulfed in flames.

Fire units soon arrived and by 0550, the blaze was finally brought under control. Twenty-five men had to be carried out of the building and 14 were eventually hospitalized. Most tragically, 12 members of the watch perished in the conflagration. Survivors told many stories of courage and bravery related to the efforts of those on the scene to protect the lives of their fellow Marines and Sailors as well as classified information.

With this in mind we honor and remember those who perished that night:

LCPL Richard Eugene McKown, USMC

LTJG Ernest Don Moody, USN

Sgt Paul Charles Rodrigues, USMC

CTSN Wilfred Dewey Cordell, USN

CTSA Roger W. Alex, USN

CTSA John Dewey House, USN

CTSN Dennis Eugene Etzweiler, USN

CT3 Wayne Edgar Tower, USN

CTSA William Edward Briley, USN

CTSN James Kenneth Whitman, USN

CT3 Archie Russell Garofalo, USN

CT3 Gregory Scott Williams, USN

Today, Kamiseya is an abandoned patch of land overgrown with grass and weeds. Many of the early buildings still stand, but the current day scene resembles that of an abandoned frontier ghost town. However, despite that, the base will forever remain part of the proud past of the U.S. Navy's cryptologic service, and the deeds and accomplishments of the many dedicated men and women who served and died there will remain in our memory for all time.

Kamiseya serves as a reminder that the deeds and accomplishments that helped to win the Cold War did not come without cost. We should never forget that while life in the U.S. military is tough and demanding, it can also be fraught with peril both on and off the battlefield.

It is with this thought in mind that we honor and remember the 12 brave and dedicated members of the cryptologic sea service who gave their lives that day. In addition, we remember all those who fought and died during the Cold War in an effort to preserve freedom and liberty for generations to come.



Visit our web site, www.nsa.gov
MEMORIAL DAY 2017