

THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of a Cryptologic Hero Captain James D. Stallings



Field commanders in Vietnam continue to say that [signals intelligence] is the backbone of their intelligence effort. They can't live or fight without it. I want to stress to everyone ... just how important this effort is. ... I can't think of anything more important because they are just blind over there without this effort."

BRUCE PALMER JR
General, U.S. Army

Captain James D. Stallings was a son of the Volunteer State of Tennessee. He was born on August 31, 1932, in the town of Carthage in Smith County, Tennessee. Named for Daniel Smith, a hero of the American Revolution, Smith County was also the birthplace of former U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull and former Vice President Albert Gore.

Known as "Stagger," Jim graduated from Carthage High School before enrolling at the Tennessee Polytechnic Institute, where he studied engineering and joined the ROTC program. After graduation and commissioning in 1954, Jim was ordered to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, to begin his military career.

Over the next decade, Jim dedicated himself to becoming an experienced and effective electronic warfare cryptologic officer. In addition, during this time he met and married the love of his life, Miss Ann Parkinson.

Jim's hard work resulted in his being named the commanding officer of the 337th RR/ASA Company. Stood up in the early 1950s, the 337th was one of many Army Security Agency organizations under the cover designation "radio research." Its mission was to collect critical enemy communications.

Since the early 1960s when America first entered Vietnam, the work of units such as the 337th had helped U.S. forces gain foreknowledge of enemy plans and intentions. Oftentimes, due to this critical information, enemy plans were thwarted, battles were won, and lives were saved.

In the early spring of 1966, Jim and his unit deployed to Vietnam in support of the U.S. Army's 1st Infantry Division. During his time in-country Jim was committed not only to the unit's critical mission, but also to making the world a better place. A fellow soldier recalled a time where Jim visited a group of orphans who he and his men were sponsoring and supporting. During the visit he took some time to sit down with them to watch Laurel and Hardy movies the unit had provided. Despite their not understanding one word of the dialogue, the children laughed uproariously and Jim laughed right along with them.

On September 25, 1966, Jim left the company area with several other soldiers to visit and inspect several forward-deployed PRD-1 intercept sites. As they neared the village of Bien Hoa, their vehicle hit an anti-tank mine and came under enemy fire. Despite heroic efforts by his men to save him, Jim was mortally wounded in the attack.





In 1986 a fellow comrade in arms left a handwritten letter at the Vietnam Memorial to honor Jim. It read in part, "I place this wreath in memory of my commanding officer, Capt. James Stallings, who 20 years ago today at 1245 hours on Highway 15 South Vietnam made the supreme sacrifice. ... I promise you this, that I will never give up the struggle, never let your memory or sacrifice be forgotten, and if God wills it, I will see you all again, in a place free from human frailty and corruption."

During his days at Carthage High School, Jim had no idea what his future held, but if one glances at his yearbook photo they will notice the inscription "whatever is worth doing, is worth doing well." Captain James D. Stallings not only aspired to that standard but exceeded in countless meaningful ways for his family, his fellow soldiers, and his nation.

