

THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of a Cryptologic Service and Sacrifice

MGySgt Edward R. Storm, USMC

CTC Robert S. Gates, USN



I know that I shall meet my fate, Somewhere among the clouds above;

W. B. Yeats

On December 28, 1969, the men of the Phu Bai combat base and airfield in Vietnam were being subjected to the full effects of the winter monsoon. Heavy wind and rain had pelted the base throughout the day, and did not abate as nightfall ensued. Despite the weather, on the flight line, standard operating procedure was the order of the day.

Since 1963, the base had served as a major cryptologic center of operations for both the Army Security Agency and the United States Marine Corps. Due to the base's importance, it was common practice to ferry personnel to and from the area on a regular basis. On the evening of the 28th, 1LT Charles K. Butler and the crew of helicopter flight 153379 were planning to transport a group of Marines and sailors the 57 short miles to Da Nang. The harsh weather conditions and onset of nightfall meant they would be flying by instruments. Even so, the entire flight was not expected to be more than 30-45 minutes. Among those slated to board the aircraft were two dedicated and experienced cryptologists, MGySgt Edward R. Storm and CTC Robert S. Gates.

Gates was born in Hamilton, Massachusetts on August 28, 1933. He graduated from Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School in 1952, and enlisted in the U.S. Navy just in time to serve in the Korean War. Navy life agreed with him, and after making Chief he served with the Naval Security Group Activity (NSGA) at Kamiseya, Japan before being deployed to Vietnam in 1969. He spent a short time at the Naval Inshore Operations Training Center before finally moving to Headquarters, NSA Da Nang. In addition to his naval and cryptologic accomplishments, he was a devoted husband and father to three children. In December of 1969, he was coming to the end of his sixteenth year of naval service.



Storm hailed from the American Northwest. Born on January 8, 1930 in Portland, Oregon, he enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1948, and like Gates, was a veteran of the Korean War. In addition, before deploying to Vietnam in 1969, he spent three years as division chief for the Curricula Research and Development Division at Corry Station in Pensacola, Florida. Storm was well respected in all quarters of his life; his neighbors in Pensacola regarded him as "a

splendid father, great neighbor and scout master." By December 1969 he had over two decades of service to the Corps.

Soon after lifting off, the chopper was beset with a host of challenges. For one, the weather, which had been dismal all day, took a turn for the worse and reduced visibility to the point where the craft was totally dependent on its instruments. Even worse, the copter began to experience radio communication problems, putting the crew and their passengers in grave peril.

Due to the need to operate by instruments alone, the crew's flight plan required them stay at a minimum of 5000 ft. above sea level to avoid a series of dangerous terrain features between Phu Bai and Da Nang. Somehow, the crew mistakenly locked on to a level of 3000 ft. The control tower at Da Nang immediately realized the copter was headed straight for a looming mountain range and valiantly worked to contact them to warn them of the impending danger. Their efforts proved in vain. Tragically, the CH46 crashed in the vicinity of Quang Nam Province. Gates and Storm, along with eight others, perished in the heartbreaking incident. Both would be buried in their respective home states of Massachusetts and Oregon.

Day-to-day life in the military is demanding, but also exceedingly dangerous. Those who die in battle are to be honored for paying the ultimate sacrifice, but in some sense, honor must also be accorded to those who fall victim to the perilous nature of military duty. It is in this spirit that we remember the service and sacrifice of MGySgt Edward R. Storm, USMC, CTC Robert S. Gates, USN, their compatriots, and all those in the cryptologic service and U.S. military who have given their lives in the cause of freedom.

