

THEY SERVED IN SILENCE



The Story of a Cryptologic Hero **CTICS Shannon M. Kent**



"Shannon's desire to protect and care for her family, shipmates and her country is reflected in her relentless pursuit of the enemy and the life she built for our sons.

She was the best of us, my best friend and soulmate."

Joseph Kent

Senior Chief Petty Officer Shannon Kent (nee Smith), USN, was born in Oswego, New York, and raised in Pine Plains, New York. Pine Plains is in historic Dutchess County, an area that contributed manpower and resources to the fledgling American nation's efforts to win and preserve freedom. Shannon's life and accomplishments would become a part of this history.

Shannon hailed from a family characterized by service. Both her father, who has had a distinguished career as a senior official in the New York State Police, and her uncle, a firefighter, braved the Twin Towers on 9/11. She also has a brother currently serving in the United States Marine Corps. From her earliest days she proved to be a true renaissance woman in every sense of the word. During her youth she developed a wide range of talents and abilities and pursued excellence in the classroom, the volleyball court and most notably in the realm of languages. A lover of horses, she trained herself to speak Spanish to enable her to converse with the local stable hands, and she also had time to teach her little sister to do likewise.

During high school, Shannon Smith excelled academically, and for a few years she attended college. Like many others, however, the events of 9/11, and the inspiration provided by her father and uncle prompted her to join the military, and in 2003 she enlisted in the US Navy. After basic training, she graduated from the Defense Language Institute in 2004 and became proficient in Arabic and numerous other languages. From there, she began a stellar career as a gifted intelligence professional serving at Ft. Gordon, the Naval Special Warfare Support Activity Two, and finally Special Operations at Ft. Meade, where she ultimately became a member of the Technical Support Activity of Cryptologic Warfare Activity Sixty Six, an elite intelligence unit.



Only the best are judged worthy to serve with the TSA in CWA-66, as was the case in her previous assignments. Senior Chief Kent proved to be a "rock star" in her efforts to provide and protect critical information during dangerous, demanding and perilous assignments around the world. She was not just a superb analyst, but also a true warrior who embodied all of the attributes that term denotes.

In addition, during a training class at Ft. Belvoir, Shannon met a Green Beret Warrant Officer. Joseph Kent would become the love of her life. They married in 2014, and by 2017 the couple, despite demanding lives, were the parents of two beautiful sons, Colt and Josh, the middle names of both in honor of close friends who had been lost in combat.

Being a superstar both in the intelligence world and as a wife and mother was not enough for Senior Chief Kent. Somehow, she found the time to complete both her bachelor's and master's degrees in Psychology. In March 2018, she was accepted into a PhD program at the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences. Her goal was to become a US Navy psychiatrist to help her fellow shipmates and service members better cope with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Her dream was put on hold in November 2018 when she deployed with her unit to Syria. During her time there, she was part of a highly skilled, multi-disciplined armed forces task force involved in critical and demanding intelligence work. On 16 January 2019, while involved in special operations against the Islamic State in the Syrian city of Manbij, Senior Chief Kent was felled by an improvised explosive device detonated by a suicide bomber.

It was once said of William Friedman, the father of American cryptology, that while he was largely unknown during his life, the effect he had on history was "incalculable." Like Friedman and others in the cryptologic service, the specifics of Senior Chief Kent's successes and achievements during her service to the nation are also largely unknown, but the results of her work can only be described as vast, meaningful, and enduring. A close relative of Senior Chief Kent summed up the sense of loss felt by her husband, family, friends and comrades in arms when she noted: "My God, I love you, Shannon. I don't know how any of us will go on without you, but your strength is such an inspiration."

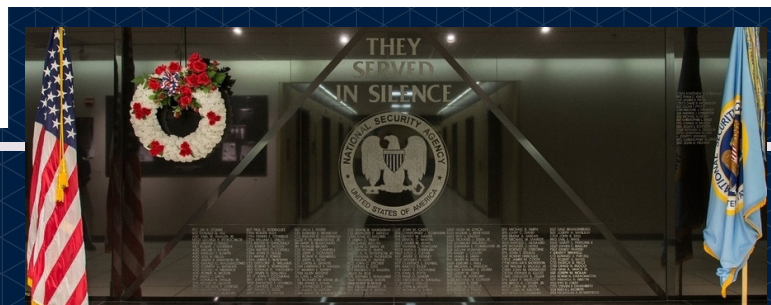
Our nation today is beset by any number of daunting threats and challenges that can prompt the most optimistic of us to fear for the future. At the same time, however, it can be said that as long as individuals of the caliber of Senior Chief Petty Officer Kent are willing to answer the call to service, we can be assured that freedom and liberty will not perish but will prevail until the end of time.



CTICS Shannon M. Kent

11 May 1983 - 16 January 2019

United States Navy



Photographs courtesy of the Kent family