

THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of a Cryptologic Hero SSG DONALD D. DAUGHERTY



"He was a person with a great sense of humor and great to be around.... memories of him bring a smile to my face."

Kathleen Garrett

Staff Sergeant Donald D. Daugherty, USA, was born in San Diego, California on the 20th of February 1937. He was born into a Navy family and spent his formative years at the San Diego Naval Station. His father was not only a veteran of the Pacific War but was serving as a Chief Bosun's Mate on the famed destroyer USS Helm on the day Pearl Harbor was attacked. Donald attended the local schools in the area, and graduated from Sweetwater High School in the mid-1950s. In time, he would enlist in the United States Army where he would be trained in the art and science of radio intercept and become part of the legacy of the Army Security Agency (ASA). December of 1961 would find him serving as a member of the ASA's 3rd Radio Research Unit (RRU).

By the early 1960s Don had been in the military for almost a decade and was intending to leave the service. His dream was to one day homestead in the wilderness of the American Northwest. Vietnam was intended to be his last assignment. Don volunteered to go to Vietnam, despite the fact that he was a sole surviving son.

From the earliest days of the United States' entry into Indochina, the U.S. Army had employed cryptologic specialists operating under the RRU cover designation to collect critical intelligence from enemy communications. ASA initially set up its operations at Tan Son Nhut airfield just west of Saigon. In addition to being the central headquarters for ASA operations, Tan Son Nhut was the center for U.S. military offensive air operations within South Vietnam.

By 1966, the ASA units had been in the country for half a decade, and their operations and missions had increased exponentially. The danger of enemy attacks had increased as well. However, because of its proximity to Saigon, the consensus was that the likelihood of a full-fledged attack on Tan Son Nhut was small, so small in fact, that the ASA's weapons were locked in transport containers.

That would all change on the evening of 13 April 1966, when, for the first time, the entire air base was subjected to a deadly Viet Cong mortar and sapper attack. The ASA soldiers on site were limited in their response, because the soldier who possessed the key to the ASA weapons storage area was in Saigon on an evening pass.



Almost immediately, individual soldiers began to fight back, but they were hampered by the general confusion caused by the surprise attack. Daugherty and others were able to make their way into a bunker near the west end of the compound. At one point, the shelling temporarily abated, prompting Don to inform his fellow soldiers that he intended to make his way to the arms room to get his hands on a weapon. His buddies urged him not to go until they could be sure the attack had fully subsided. Daugherty was determined, however, and exited the bunker.

Eyewitnesses to the tragedy noted that as he began running toward the armory, the attack suddenly resumed and he was felled when a mortar shell struck the sidewalk directly in front of him. Daugherty was one of three U.S. servicemen killed that night. In addition, 15 men would be wounded in the attack. The attack was so stunning, that the next day General Westmoreland, the Commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, visited the ASA compound to survey the damage and speak with the men.

The April attack was the first in a series of surprise attacks on the airbase and would forever remind everyone on Tan Son Nhut that the horrors of the war would not be limited to the rural areas and jungles of Vietnam. It would be a part of their everyday lives. Like so many cryptologists before them in countless wars and conflicts, they realized that, while their mission could often be performed in safe, secure surroundings, they could nevertheless find themselves in harm's way, like the infantry soldiers they supported.

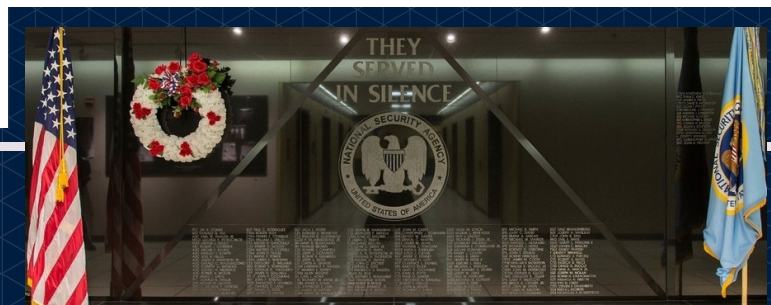
Donald Daugherty left behind a loving family. His niece Kathleen Garrett, herself the wife of a retired Navy Captain, noted that he was "a person with a great sense of humor and great to be around.... memories of him bring a smile to my face." In the end, his service and sacrifice would serve as an inspiration to his fellow soldiers, soldiers who like him had devoted their lives to providing critical intelligence in the fight to gain an advantage over their adversaries and, most importantly, to save lives.



SSG DONALD D. DAUGHERTY

20 February 1937 - 13 April 1966

United States Army



Photographs courtesy of the Brent Family