

THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of a Cryptologic Service and Sacrifice Sgt. 1st Class Antonio Rey Rodriguez



"History does not long entrust the care of freedom to the weak or timid."

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Sgt. 1st Class Antonio Rey Rodriguez was born on 26 July, 1991. Rod, as his friends and family called him, grew up in Las Cruces, New Mexico, in the beautiful Mesilla Valley region, not far from the banks of the Rio Grande.

As a young man, he attended the local elementary school and entered Mayfield High School in 2006. Prompted by interest in a possible future career in the military, he joined the school's ROTC unit and, after graduation, enlisted in the U.S. Army in October of 2009.

Rod opted for combat arms and soon found himself at the U.S. Army's infantry school at Fort Benning. After basic training, he continued to develop his infantry soldier skills by attending and graduating from a number of U.S. Army leadership courses, as well as airborne school and Ranger training.

Following his initial training, he was assigned to the 3rd Ranger Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment. The 75th Rangers have a storied history that dates back not only to Vietnam but to the exploits of the famed Merrill's Marauders of WWII. Rod became part of this storied legacy by deploying overseas with the unit a total of eight times. By 2015, Sgt. 1st Class Rodriguez had become a skilled infantry soldier. In addition, he continued to add to his accomplishments by undergoing additional training as cryptologic linguist.

After successfully completing the course, he was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group, at Eglin Air Force Base. Known by some as "the Red Empire," the unit had long been recognized for taking on and carrying out difficult and challenging special operations missions around the globe. Rod was now not only fighting on the ground, but in the electronic spectrum to provide his unit an advantage in combat and, ultimately, to save lives. As a cryptologic linguist in the battlespace, Rod was responsible for analyzing critical communications with the aim of allowing his leaders and fellow service members to gain a better understanding of what the future held.

Over time he would develop not only into a highly skilled soldier and cryptologist but an inspirational leader as well. A fellow soldier noted that "Rod was the guy... that always put his men before himself. He was a familiar face, both in and out of the U.S., whose personality radiated on those around him. No matter where you went on the globe, Rod always had a friend there."



Rod's second deployment with the Red Empire found him on the harsh and unforgiving battlefields of Afghanistan. On February 8, 2020, his unit was ambushed by a rogue Afghan policeman in the Sherzad district of Nangarhar Province, in eastern Afghanistan. During the attack, both Rod and his comrade in arms, Sgt. 1st Class Javier Jaguar Gutierrez of San Antonio, Texas, fell prey to enemy fire. Six other soldiers from the unit were also wounded during the attack.

Rod's body was flown back to Dover Air Force Base, where it was received by President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence, and then eventually back to his hometown. On the day of his funeral back in Las Cruces, his former elementary school principal reflected, "I can't even say in words what it means to me (for him), to be such a hero and to know that he was a part of our community."

Sgt. 1st Class Antonio Rey Rodriguez was indeed a true hero in every sense of the word, leaving behind a loving wife and family. During his far too short but meaningful life, he proved to be a sterling example of service and sacrifice to the U.S. Army and the cryptologic service, to his nation, and to the world.

