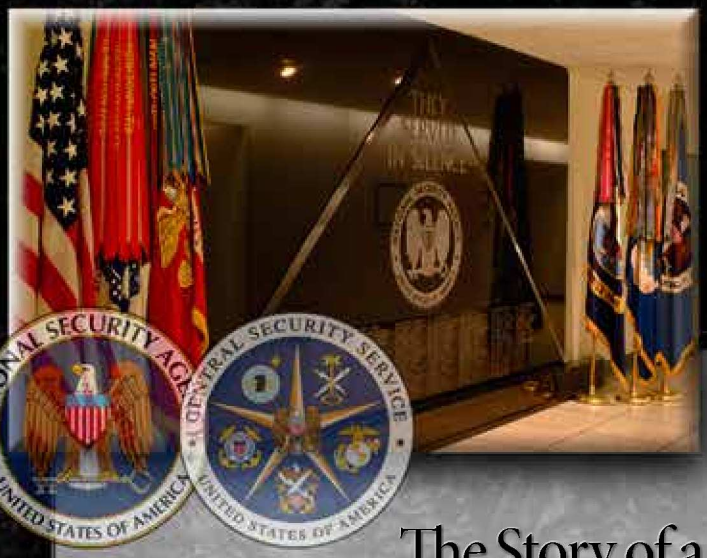

THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of a Cryptologic Hero
Staff Sergeant Richard A. Dickson

Those who serve supreme causes must not consider what they can get but what they can give.
Winston Churchill

Staff Sgt. Richard A. Dickson was a native son of the Golden State of California. Born in the state capital of Sacramento in 1988, Richard and his family moved first to the city of Folsom and eventually settled in Rancho Cordova. During his time at Cordova High "Richie," as his friends called him, achieved excellent grades and developed a keen interest in technical subjects, particularly computer science. His sister noted that "he never ran across a computer he couldn't fix."

Greatly influenced by his older brother and brother-in-law, in 2006 Richard enlisted in the United States Air Force. After basic training and extensive Korean language training at the Defense Language Institute, he served first as an airborne cryptologic language analyst but then cross trained to become an Airborne ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) Operator.

U.S. Air Force ISR Operators help fellow warfighters gain information superiority through a network of worldwide ground sites and a wide variety of airborne reconnaissance and surveillance platforms. Richard served the ISR mission at Offutt and Beale Air Force bases before being deployed to Afghanistan, with the 361st Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron.

The 361st, founded in 1943 during World War II, notes that "the group's Airmen are qualified to operate as aircrew on almost every aircraft type within the United States Air Force Special Operations Command." As an Airborne ISR Operator, Richard certified on a wide range of aircraft with the aim of collecting critical information and saving lives. By the time he deployed to Afghanistan, he had logged over 1,400 hours of combat aviation time and gained a reputation as an expert in his field.

In addition to his prowess in the air, Richie had a reputation as a fun and intelligent person with a wonderful heart and a dry and engaging sense of humor. To his friends and, most importantly, his family he was someone on whom you could always depend – on duty and off. He was liked and respected not only for his personal and professional attributes, but he was also revered by his fellow service members in Afghanistan for his ability to fix broken Play-Station consoles.

In the early afternoon of April 27, 2013, Staff Sgt. Dickson and his fellow crew members were slated to take off from Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, to provide ISR support. The mission was expected to last 5 hours. Approximately 40 minutes after take-off their MC12W "Liberty" aircraft encountered inclement weather and stalled. Despite the pilot's best efforts to regain air speed, the airplane was unable to maintain altitude and crashed northeast of Kandahar Airfield. All aboard were lost.

During his short but meaningful life Staff Sgt. Richard A. Dickson, through the application of his skills and talents, more than lived up to the mission of his command by preserving "freedom through vigilance." His was a life dedicated to helping those in harm's way not only to survive but to prevail.

Staff Sgt. Dickson left behind his wife, Lacie, two-year-old daughter, Sophie, and a loving mother, brother, and sister. He also left an impressive record of service and sacrifice to his nation. For his dedication and service accomplishments he received the Bronze Star (posthumous), the Air Force Medal with five oak leaf clusters, and the Air Force Achievement Medal. For all he achieved and for all he was, he will be remembered for his legacy as a son, husband, father, and brother who deeply loved his family, his nation, and his work.

Staff Sergeant Richard A. Dickson
07 May 1988 - 27 Apr 2013

Photographs courtesy of the Dickson family

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