THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of Two Cryptologic Heroes
SP5 Timothy F. Powell, Jr., USA
2LT George P. Samples, USA

"For two days, American forces have been in Santo Domingo in an effort to protect the lives of Americans and the nationals of other countries in the face of increasing violence and disorder.... Meanwhile, there are signs that people trained outside the Dominican Republic are seeking to gain control. Thus, the legitimate aspirations of the Dominican people ... are threatened and so are the principles of the inter-American system."

~ President Lyndon Baines Johnson

The struggle known as the Cold War lasted for over four decades. Lieutenant General Kenneth A. Minihan, the Director of the National Security Agency during the late 1990s, noted that the long struggle was characterized "by battles not fought," and "lives not lost."

For a host of substantive reasons, the moments of open warfare during the conflict were few. There were critical moments, however, when the Cold War turned hot. On those occasions, Americans were sent to defend freedom in places like Korea and Vietnam.

One of the interesting but largely forgotten events in the conflict was the invasion of the Dominican Republic by U.S. forces in 1965. During the six-month period of the invasion, dozens of Americans gave their lives and hundreds were wounded.

For decades, the Dominican Republic had been ruled by the U.S. backed dictator Rafael Trujillo. When his reign finally came to an end in the early 1960s, chaos ensued. By 1965, the American Ambassador on the scene, W. Tapley Bennett, Jr., feared that the country was descending into "collective madness." Of even greater concern were the predictions in certain quarters that suspected Marxist elements involved in the struggle would ultimately gain power.

In an effort to protect American lives in the region and to prevent Communist takeover, President Johnson ordered the launch of "Operation Power Pack" by combined elements of the U.S. military. The invasion began in the late afternoon of April 30, 1965, when elements of the 3rd Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division landed at the San Isidro Air Base. Ultimately more than 40,000 U.S. troops would participate in the operation.

Accompanying the 82nd was the Army Security Agency's 313th Military Intelligence Battalion, based in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Since its inception, the 313th's mission had been to provide critical information to U.S. Army forces in harm's way. Initially the action was thought to be more of a

"peace keeping," rather than a combat, operation. The harsh reality, however, was that the fighting between the competing groups, particularly the rebel factions made for a dangerous situation.

On the ground, sniper fire from rebel units was constant. Eventually, the combined forces were able to establish a "safe corridor" through the capital city. Despite the best efforts of the troops to secure the route, the corridor nevertheless could be dangerous. At one point, to demonstrate that American Forces were indeed in charge, the 82nd Airborne's military band paraded down the corridor.

The morning of May 13, 1965, found the 313th hard at work providing critical intelligence regarding rebel plans and attacks. Due largely to its efforts, objectives had been achieved and lives had been saved. Near mid-day, 2LT George P. Samples and SP5 Timothy Powell were preparing to transport a collection of documents to company headquarters.

Samples hailed from Mineral Wells, Texas, and was the prototype of a young, ambitious army officer. He was born a leader, motivated and well organized. His enthusiasm and persona engendered a large degree of trust and loyalty among his men; and his future was certainly bright.

Powell's outlook was positive as well. In 1961, his service career had taken him to Germany, where he excelled as a soldier and also found time to meet Patricia Smith of Winnipeg, Canada, whom he would eventually marry. She would become the love of his life. Shortly after her husband's deployment with the invasion force, Patricia had gone home to her family in Canada to await his safe return. Powell had a matter of only months remaining in his enlistment, although he had applied for, and was looking forward to, attending officer candidate school. He was due to join his bride in Winnipeg in June for a family celebration.

The drive to headquarters was only five to six miles and would take them through the corridor. In some places, the road was clearly marked. In others, the landscape made it harder to stay on the beaten path. At some point during the trip, the two men mistakenly took a wrong turn into a rebel controlled area where they were attacked and felled by enemy fire.

Despite the tragedy of the loss of their comrades, the 313th would continue its vital work providing and protecting critical communications in the battle space. In September when the crisis ended, as in so many other Cold War skirmishes, it was hard to definitively identify winners and losers.

It was beyond doubt, however, that the service and sacrifice of Samples and Powell had not been in vain. Due to their sacrifice and the work of countless other dedicated soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines, the operation had left behind a more stable situation in which political order had been restored and the threat of a Communist takeover extinguished.

Sadly, both men left behind loved ones and devoted friends. They would always be remembered for their devotion to duty, and most importantly for the work they did in helping to preserve the lives of their fellow soldiers.

During the Cold War, millions of men and women answered the call to the colors in an effort to preserve freedom and liberty. Some, like Samples and Powell, paid the ultimate sacrifice. Let us then endeavor to honor the work they did by remembering not only their service and sacrifice, but the efforts of all those who fought and died in the effort to win the Cold War.

SP5 Timothy F. Powell, Jr.
May 25, 1940 - May 13, 1965

2LT George P. Samples
February 9, 1944 - May 13, 1965

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