THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of a Cryptologic Hero
Spc. John A. Pelham

In a conventional conflict, ground units depend heavily on intelligence from higher commands to help them navigate the fog of war…Information flows largely from the top down. In a counterinsurgency, the flow is (or should be) reversed. The soldier or development worker on the ground is usually the person best informed about the environment and the enemy.

Lt. Gen. Michael T. Flynn,
U.S. Army

Spc. John A. Pelham was a true son of the state of Oregon. John was born on November 9, 1991, in the city of Beaverton, a town that the famous explorers Lewis and Clark once noted was the "only desired situation for settlement west of the Rocky Mountains." John's father noted that from the beginning his son showed a great concern for others. Whether he was participating in the activities of his local scout troop or knocking baseballs out of the park for the Sunset High Apollos baseball team, John always sought to be a hero to the underdogs of the world. He abhorred bullying and was always coming to the defense of the defenseless.

During his junior year he joined a program sponsored by the Oregon National Guard and began to consider following in the footsteps of his grandfather and uncle who had both served with distinction in the United States Army. John's father noted that over the years the Pelhams had come to consider military service as the "family business." After high school, for a brief time John attended the local junior college on a baseball scholarship, but ultimately his desire to move forward with his life and to continue his family's tradition of service to the nation won out. In 2011, he joined the United States Army.

After enlisting, John underwent training to become a signals intelligence analyst and was ultimately assigned to the 3rd Special Forces Group (SFG). The motto of the U.S. Special Forces is "De Oppresso Liber," which means "Free the Oppressed." Since its

inception in the 1960s the 3rd SFG had more than lived up to that motto. John deployed with the unit on his second tour in October 2013, and in 2014, the unit found itself facing another immense challenge in fighting the enemy on battlefields of Afghanistan.

As a signals intelligence analyst Spc. Pelham's job was to collect electronic communications with the aim of allowing his chain of command to determine the future intentions of the adversary. His efforts to detect hostile enemy movements and objectives prior to engagements not only provided his unit with untold advantages on the battlefield but also saved lives.

On February 12, 2014, while on patrol within Kapisa Province, Afghanistan, John's squad came under fire from gunmen wearing Afghan security force uniforms. During the firefight all four assailants were killed but during the attack, John and a fellow soldier, Sgt. 1st Class Roberto Skelt, fell to enemy fire.

In his all too short time on this earth, John Pelham will be remembered for being a caring son; a loving brother; a fun uncle to his nieces; a loving companion to his fiancee, Laura; and a true inspiration to all who knew him. His fellow soldiers will remember his constant and courageous efforts to help them prevail in battle and save lives. John, himself, noted that during his time in the service he had "never been happier and never been more at peace" with who he was and with what he was doing. His service and sacrifice will forever be remembered by those who loved him and by those he served.

Spc. John A. Pelham
09 Nov 1991 - 12 Feb 2014

Photographs courtesy of the Pelham family

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