

## MSG Robert Joseph Sullivan

Vietnam

Hometown: East Alstead, NH

Robert J. Sullivan was born in Fall River, MA on November 19, 1936 to John Joseph and Jeannette M. (Corriveau) Sullivan. Robert was the youngest of four children, having three older brothers and a sister. His father worked in the Cotton Mill in Fall River while his mother took care of the home.



At the age of 20, in 1956, he joined the US Army serving in the Infantry. A year later he would marry and he and his wife would have three children, two girls and a boy. He and his family established East Alstead, NH as their home of record, though being stationed at various Army bases, especially Fort Bragg, NC. Robert became a member of the highly trained US Army Special Forces.

In May 1967 he was sent to Vietnam with the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Groups. His unit was assigned to Military Assistance Command, Vietnam – Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG). They conducted highly classified unconventional warfare operations deep in North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Conventional US Military forces were not allowed to operate officially in Laos and Cambodia per the Geneva Convention Accords as both countries declared neutrality. However, much of North Vietnam's supply line to their southern elements, known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail, was in both of these countries. To give the Vietnam Military Command deniability, SOG took its orders directly from the Pentagon and the President. SOG units also worked very closely with the CIA.

An operation team was normally made up of 2-3 Special Forces men and 6-12 Nungs (Vietnamese of ethnic Chinese descent). In the early morning hours of July 10, 1967, *Spike Team Georgia* consisting of SFC Samuel Almendariz (Team Leader), SFC Harry D. Brown, SFC Robert J. Sullivan, and 8 Nungs flew into Laos by Huey helicopters. They took a position along the Ho Chi Minh Trail at a point where they could observe what activity was moving towards the Ashau Valley. On July 11, 1967 the team moved on where they came upon a telephone wire. They cut the wire and decided to follow it the next day in daylight to see where it would take them.

As they were following the phone wire mid-morning on July 12, 1967, the Team was attacked by at least a platoon size force with small arms and grenades. Two of the Nungs were killed but the rest of the Team was able to evade the attack and had moved over 50 yards from the spot of attack. SFC Almendariz was attempting to make contact for air support but was unsuccessful when the Team had been flanked and attacked again. At this point both SFC Almendariz and SFC Sullivan were wounded; SFC Brown was still able to return fire though he was slightly wounded. The 6 remaining Nungs had run off.

SFC Brown was eventually able to make contact for air support and helicopter extraction. He also bandaged SFC Sullivan's thigh wound and Sullivan was able to return fire. SFC Almendariz was seriously wounded in the groin and back and the bleeding couldn't be stopped. SFC Almendariz did manage to return fire in his grave situation until he was shot in the head and killed. In another burst of enemy fire SFC Sullivan was killed and SFC Brown was wounded again but survived. An H-34 helicopter flew out of Khe Sanh and under heavy fire was able to extract SFC Brown but could not stay long enough to pick up

the bodies of SFC Almendariz and SFC Sullivan. Flights were sent back on July 13 and 14, 1967 to recover the bodies but were unsuccessful in finding them. To date neither body has been recovered.

Robert J Sullivan was posthumously promoted to Master Sergeant. His name is on the *Courts of the Missing at the Honolulu Memorial*, Hawaii and Panel 23E, Row 63 of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, Washington, DC.