

# THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of a Cryptologic Hero  
SGT Amanda N. Pinson, USA



*I am an Army cryptologist. In time of peace my work can be done from garrison; but in time of war I take my skills and talents to the battlefield. Like the silent sentinels of the past who served the American nation in times of danger, I remain constantly on watch — always listening. My goal is to gather and protect critical information to secure victory and save lives. I am an Army cryptologist, and I am dedicated, even at the cost of my own life, to providing and protecting our nation's most important communications.*



From an early age Amanda Pinson was ambitious and eager to engage the world around her. A native of the “show me state,” she was raised in the shadow of Jefferson Barracks, an 18th-century military outpost located on the Mississippi River near St. Louis, Missouri. Before being closed in 1946, the post, named for Thomas Jefferson, would be home to a host of famous Americans including Ulysses S. Grant, Zachary Taylor, and William T. Sherman.

Unlike Grant, Taylor, and Sherman, Amanda would never be elected president or achieve flag rank; but, like them, throughout her time on earth she would inspire others with her courage and leadership. As a child she excelled not only in academics and athletics, but also in motivating others to make the world a better place.

In 4th grade, she was among the award winners of the Greater St. Louis Science Fair. Later in her sophomore year at Hancock High School, she would, as the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* described it, “create, design and implement” the Hancock Environmental Leadership Program or HELP. The organization’s main goal was to protect, clean, and improve the environment. However, under Amanda’s leadership the group extended its mission to improve the lives of local senior citizens and underprivileged children. In addition to her philanthropic activities, Amanda also found time to excel on the basketball court and softball field for the Tigers of Hancock High. Most importantly, she was a dedicated student whose name was no stranger to the school’s honor role.

Amanda’s many accomplishments in high school seemed to point to a life of great potential and promise, but making one’s way in the world is



never easy. After graduation, she briefly attended community college and worked at a local restaurant. She soon decided, however, that waiting tables “was not something I want to do for the rest of my life.” In 2003, she joined the U.S. Army with the intent to “become my own person.” After enlisting, Amanda would receive training in the art of electronic intelligence at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. It was there that she would learn the critical role cryptology could play in achieving victory on the battlefield and in saving lives.



In time Amanda would become part of the 101st Airborne Division, one of the U.S. Army’s most storied units. In WWII, the Screaming Eagles had distinguished themselves at Normandy and Bastogne. During Vietnam, they fought bravely at places like Ashau Valley and Ap Bia Mountain. In 2006, the division found itself on the front lines in Iraq.

Amanda was a soldier, but she was also part of a highly skilled group of individuals who fought their battles not only on the sands of the desert, but in the electronic ether. Like so many dedicated cryptologists of the past who served our nation in time of war, Amanda’s role was to provide and protect essential communications that could make the difference between victory or defeat - life or death.

Cryptologic work is an intellectual exercise, but in time of war it must be performed not only from garrison but on the front lines. This means that in order to get the critical information needed, cryptanalysts must frequently place themselves in harm’s way. On 16 March 2006, Amanda and SPC Carlos Gonzalez lost their lives when Iraqi insurgents unleashed a mortar shell into their compound north of Baghdad. She would be the 2,315th member of the U.S. armed forces killed in Iraq since the war began.

The Irish poet James Joyce once wrote that it is “*better to pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age.*” Amanda Pinson’s life was one of great potential that was cut short. But as Joyce noted, during her time on earth, whether at home, at school, or on the battlefield, Amanda lived her life with a glory and a passion that should inspire us all to hold firm to those principles that have allowed this nation, through triumph and tragedy, to endure. Through her selfless devotion to her family and country, she touched countless lives and made an incalculable contribution to the indelible goal of making America and the world a better and safer place to live for all people.



***Sergeant Amanda N. Pinson***

***United States Army***

***31 July 1984 - 16 March 2006***



Photos courtesy of the Pinson Family  
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