SGT PRESTON TRIBBLE, JR.

United States Army
3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry

The turbulent 1950's and 1960's shaped Preston Tribble's future of service to his country and support of his family. Raised on the Southside of Atlanta, he met his future bride, Mattie, in grade school where she sat behind him in class. When tragedy disabled Preston's father, he worked several jobs while dating Mattie.

As the movements of the 1960's captured America's focus, Preston struggled to find a job and in 1965, he enlisted in the United States Army to serve his country. While Preston was at basic training at Fort Gordon, their son Ricky was born. Since frequently moving and living abroad on a soldier's pay was impossible for a small family, Mattie stayed in Atlanta to raise her son. Preston was stationed in Fort Hood, Texas and then in Italy. Their family was completed when they adopted Florence, Mattie's niece, during Preston's second tour in Vietnam.

Mattie recalls her happiest times were when Preston was home. While stationed away from home, Mattie and Preston corresponded regularly. "We did not have a pot to make water boil!" recalls Mattie. "We were separated for over a year and could not afford to travel to see him."

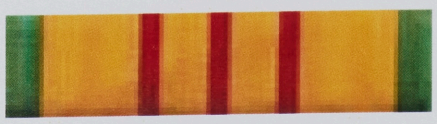
Preston was serving in intelligence when he received orders for a second tour to Vietnam. Mattie continued, "This time it did not feel right. There was something weird about this time. Even the plane that took Preston away was different and yet, Preston was determined to serve his country and family. He wanted to go to Vietnam."

"I'll never forget it. A bird had flown into our house which is a superstitious sign of death and I worried so about my Preston, only to have an Army Captain and Lieutenant show up at my house the next day. They told me that the Secretary of the Army had asked them to express his deep regret that my husband was killed in action." She continued, "I remember that day as if it were yesterday. I could tell by the look on their faces that something was wrong. My children were standing there when they told me Preston had been killed. Thank goodness my mother was there as she was a rock."

Mattie's fondest memories were moving into their first apartment where they had no television or anything, yet they had each other. "Preston was such a good guy and a good person and he was always looking out for me." In fact upon Preston's passing, four year old Ricky told his mom that when dad left, "he told me that he would come back from Vietnam and if something happened, I was to be the man of the house. I now have to take care of you so I'm going to get a job."

Mattie worked hard at a hospital and post office to raise Ricky and Florence. She would often visualize Preston and could not believe he was gone. Many years passed and when she remarried, her husband, Hercules, supported her grief. Mattie said, "I could not bring closure with Preston as it was a closed casket. Not a day passed that I did not think of my Preston. He is forever young, forever 22."

SGT Preston Tribble Jr. was a good American citizen and soldier who died May 12, 1969 in Quang Nam province, Republic of South Vietnam.



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