

Da Nang Air Base Memorial Day Room

Dedicated to the Memory of
SSgt Terance K. Jensen

Silver Star
23rd ABG (MAAG)/Air Police
and

A3C James Bruce Jones
Bronze Star w/V

35th Combat Air Police Squadron
(USAF Light Infantry),
Da Nang Air Base, SVN

By: [Don Poss](#), WS LM-01
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Da Nang, Vietnam - 1966 Since receiving an e-mail from the 48th Security Police Squadron, USAF 48 TFW, RAF Lakenheath, England, from [Jim Calcutt, CMSgt](#) seeking information regarding [SSgt Jensen](#)'s death, I have not been able to look at any of my photos of the 1,100 men Air Police Squadron. I have not been able to walk down the hall to sort out the photos of SSgt Jensen and A3C Jones Memorial Service, or of Da Nang Air Base. This is the first *positive* act I've done ... to set down and just write it out. I started War Stories, unknowingly, for just this purpose---to help others *write it out*, and I guess that now includes me.

I want to ... *need to* ... write about my friend, J. B. Jones, his death, and the Squadron's Memorial Service for J.B. and SSgt Jensen.

The 48th TFW in England is honoring enlisted men KIA in Vietnam, to preserve their valor and the memory of enlisted service in SVN. A barracks will be named after SSgt Jensen, and for decades to come, men of the 48th TFW will know of his passing.

[SSgt Jensen](#) died a death of valor and in so doing, gave up his life, won the Silver Star, and saved the lives of 25 men who were about to be blown away by satchel charges thrown by sappers in an attack on Da Nang. He was the first of over 100 USAF Air/Security Police to die in Vietnam (*click on his name to read his story*).

A3C Jones was killed in action during a 122mm rocket attack by Viet Cong on Da Nang AB during the Christmas truce 24 December, 1965 to 31 January 1966. J.B. was award the Bronze Star w/V, and was the second Air Police KIA in Vietnam. The list of dead would continue growing to 111.

Both SSgt Jensen and Airman Jones were to die within a few hundred yards of our *366th Gunfighters'* tent compound. Both men were remembered and honored by the Squadron at a memorial service held at the newly constructed *Jensen and Jones Memorial Day Room*.

111 Saigon.

Major Truces/Bombing Pauses	
1965	1-6 February: Tet Truce. 13-18 May: Bombing pause.
1966	24 December 1965-31 January: * Bombing pause. 23 December: Bombing of Hanoi area restricted. 24-26 December: Christmas Truce.
1967	8-12 February: Tet Truce.
1968	15 January-10 February: Bombing of Haiphong area suspended. 18 January: Bombing of Hanoi area suspended. 31 March: US ends bombing of North Vietnam, except near DMZ. 31 October: US ends all bombing of North Vietnam.
1972	6 April: Bombing of North Vietnam recommences.
1973	15 January: US ends all bombing of North Vietnam. 27 January: Peace Agreement signed in Paris. 28 January: Ceasefire effective.

* J.B. KIA



The Christmas-New Year bombing halt and Truce was a joke from the beginning. The 105 Howitzers were not silent---they still fired in support of calls for illumination and HE support. The F-4's were not silent---Phantoms still streaked into the night, and even Northward. The Viet Cong were not silent---they still probed the air base and lobbed mortars at Da Nang and Marble Mountain.

Around 0200 hours, January 25, 1966, the quiet night was shattered by the first of a dozen 122 mm rockets to arc toward Da Nang Air Base. Mortars began *krumping* across the flightline, sounding much like a heavy oak door slamming shut. Launched from between Marble Mountain and Da Nang,



the mortars and rockets began thumping in the outer perimeter, skipped to the flightline, and pockmarked the fields across the taxiway and only active runway.



My K-9, Blackie (X129), and I took cover in a K-9 fighting hole between the active runway and the new under-construction runway, and waited. *krump ... krump ... krump-krump*. No exploding aircraft. *krump*. No fires. *krump-krump*, and a very loud *Krump* nearby. No penetration of the perimeter. Just another round of near nightly mortars at Da Nang and Marble Mountain.

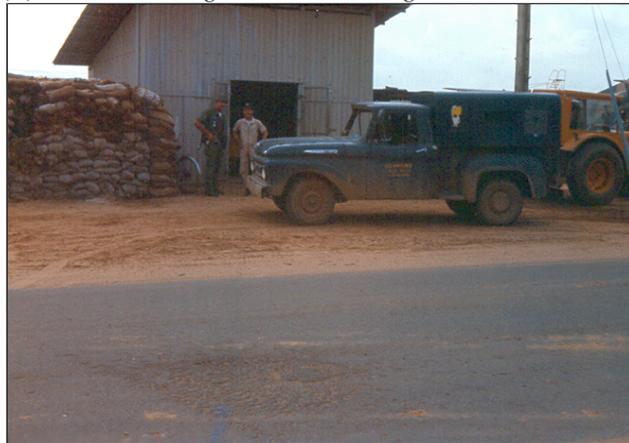
After about twenty minutes, the night was silent again. Revetment lights winked back on. Pop-flares lite the perimeter. Flaeships took off and circled, kicking their star lights in nova-beads spiraling around the base. Activity began anew with men moving amongst aircraft checking for damage. Da Nang routine quickly returned.

At 0330 hours, a Strike Team drove up checking posts for casualties. The truck approached my K-9 fighting hole and a front wheel bounced down then back up out of a 60 mm mortar crater within 20 yards of my post. Sandbags around my K-9 fighting hole were bleeding sand. The men on the Strike Team were silent. No joking or cutting up. The Sergeant came toward me and I called Blackie to heal, reigning in his leash (he liked to suddenly charge anyone within ten feet). No one offered coffee, and no one said a word until the Sergeant said, "J.B.'s dead." I heard the rest in snatches. ". . . the first rocket hit the asphalt road he was crossing to cover ... he had over a hundred wounds above the waist ... we took him to the medics on the hood of a jeep ... dead already ... are you okay?"

(1) N/B view of perimeter road.



(2) Bunker JB sought cover at during attack.



Photos above (1) N/B view: JB was in the Petroleum depot to the right.

when rockets and mortars began hitting the base, he sought cover on the west side of the perimeter road that paralleled the runway and hangers, and neighbored the Air Police Squadron tent compound. He was heading toward cover in the bunkers, but as he crossed the road, a 60 mm mortar hit the road close by and killed him instantly. Photo (2) shows the bunker JB was trying to take cover at. Road repair crew had just finished patching the asphalt surface where the mortar impacted.

"Yes ... I'm ... okay, Sarge." He shined his cupped flashlight on the punctured sandbags, walked to the scooped out mortar hole, then looked at me for what seemed a full minute, then turned and got in the truck and drove on down the runway to the next K-9 post, lights out.

... Hours passed. J.B. -- Dead. Not possible.



At first daylight, the K-9 truck relieved us from post. A dozen handlers and vicious sentry dogs, muzzled, rode in silence to the kennels. I put Blackie away in his kennel, then headed for the dispensary where J.B. was taken a few hours earlier.

Still wearing my flack-jacket and helmet and carrying my M-16 weapon, I entered the dispensary. Two medics came out of a back room ... *is that*

where he is? I asked ... a medic looked at my Air Police patch then pulled the door closed and stood in front of it. "I want to see J.B.'s

body." No salutations. No B.S. *"He's not here. He's on his way home ... we put him on a C-130 to Saigon an hour ago."* I don't know why, but I accepted that as truth. I turned and walked back to the new hooch hut-barracks we had just moved into. Today, I believe that J.B. was still in that back room, and the medics had spared me seeing his body with its severed limbs.



The single floor hooch was quiet when I entered. We had arranged our bunks and scrap-wood built lockers in living areas, like *circled wagons* of friends. I sat on my lower cot took off my helmet and looked up at J.B.'s taped-up locker. *They've been here already.* One of the guys said grave registration had boxed up Jim's personal belongs to ship to his folks. *Don't worry, they said they'd take out stuff his folks shouldn't see.*



Photo: A2C Maxie C. Pierce standing in front of my homemade locker.

I looked at the warning label on his locker---Maxie Pierce said it was empty---and I saw that it had J.B.'s home address, not his APO address, hand written on it. Maxie and some of the guys gathered round. Someone said, "We want you to write them ... J.B.'s folks ... tell'em how we all feel."

An NCO had said that Colonel Phillips requested Jim's friends write to his parents. I sat down, and they drifted out of the little cubicle housing of four bunks.

'... *tell'em how we all feel.*' I can't do this now, I thought, and lay back on my bunk. I can't *not* do it either. I began writing to J.B.'s parents. I wrote the truth, how I felt and

I suppose the other's who knew him too, about Jim's being good-natured, naive, an infectious smile, a genuine joker with no enemies, countless friends, and as innocent as any 19 year old in Vietnam. I didn't write that he liked the cheap watered-down beer at the [Da Nang Airmen's Club](#), and would be laughing with tears in his eyes and rolling on the floor by the second can; that he developed a keen reading interest in the cheap local novels, yet never *went downtown*; and had bluffed his way past Marine M.P.s by wearing his Air Police helmet, to see the [Bob Hope, Ann Margaret](#) USO show.

A few weeks later, I got the first of two letters from his mother. The first said that the family minister read my letter at Jim's funeral. Both parents were grieving at the loss of their son. I share this letter with you now, so that you will know how decent his family is and was:

February 27, 1966

Dear Don,

We had hoped to get one more letter, from Jimmy, but we didn't. Some of his other friends wrote real nice letters too. We had the minister read part of your letter at the funeral, the part about his always being happy and smiling and being a good Christian. Your Company Commander (Dad says you call them Squadron Commanders in the Air Force) wrote a very nice letter. It didn't sound like he knew Jimmy personally, but I guess it was difficult for him to write anyway. Colonel Phillips' letter arrived first, and repeated what the two Air Force Sergeants had already told us about his dying in a mortar attack at Danang.

Dad and I went to the slumber room at the chapel, the night before the funeral, and just sat there. Jimmy looked so peaceful, so, truly at peace. He even had his usual slight smile,

and I thought of your letter then.

Dad went over to see him, and then went outside. He's having a hard time accepting his son is gone. We all are. I sat alone for a while and re-read all of the letters you boys wrote to us. I went over to Jimmy by myself. I know they say he died quickly and did not suffer (mortars: aren't they little bombs?), and I closed the slumber room door and something just came over me and I began running my hands all over his body. My hand went down his right leg, and I stopped. I just had to know how badly he had been hurt. No one had told us he had lost a leg. I never told Dad.

I will treasure the letters from you and his other friends. They are comforting, and it is nice to know that Jimmy had such friends with him. We love him, and miss him so much.

May God bless, and keep you safe,
Mr. & Mrs. Jones

Years later, I would write again, wanting to send the family photos that I had of J.B., but the letter was returned *Address Unknown*.

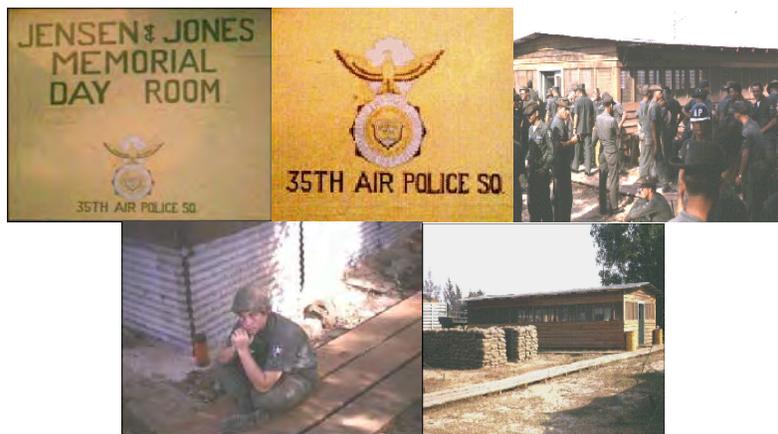
They say that *time heals all wounds* ... it doesn't. Weeks passed. An R&R to Tokyo. It still hurt. Then LTC Art Phillips announced construction of a Memorial Day Room to honor SSgt Jensen and A3C Jones. That was greeted favorably by all, and seemed to mark an acceptance.

Within a few weeks, the Squadron gathered to dedicate the Memorial Day Room and decorate Major Arthur B. Rupert, who directed Base Defense during the attack that Airman Jones was killed in. The Chaplain opened with prayer and a blessing upon the Memorial Day Room. The new base commander, Colonel Eisenbrow, a full bird, pinned a well deserved Bronze Star on Major Rupert. Later, when the Colonel stepped forward to cut the ceremonial ribbon opening the Day Room, Captain Owens told me to step back out of the way. The Colonel said that it was okay, and to let me take all the pictures I wanted. I did.

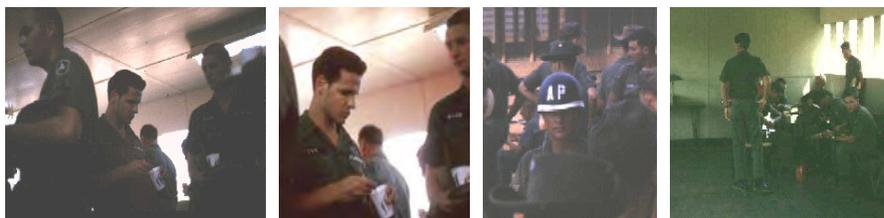


I had already taken photos of men who had gathered, *waiting*, remembering, and *thinking*. Their somber expressions. The aging of weary young eyes. The growing up too fast honest to God maturity. Light joking at forced punch lines ---then instant somber or melancholy.





The men and officers of the Squadron entered the Day Room. Rank forgotten. Quiet words exchanged over too sweet punch. Photos snapped. Memories filed away. Faces seared into future dreams. Word had spread through those gathered that U.S. casualties were 1 KIA and 6 WIA. RVN casualties were 5 KIA and 25 WIA.



After an hour or so, the crowd began to thin. Men reported to duty. Rank reassumed. Some eager to leave. An hour later only a dozen or so men were left. Someone brought a guitar and strummed a *Peter Paul & Mary* favorite, singing softly a voice alternately choked with emotion then clear and haunting. No one applauded, but all appreciated the song was the real service that lay memories to rest.

" . . tell'em how we all feel ... "

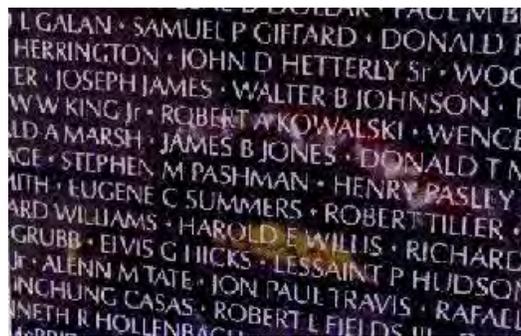


... I would simply pray, O'Lord

... look into my heart ...

for I have not the words to tell You.

Rest In Peace, my friend ...



[Official Information for A3C James B. Jones](#)

[The Memorial and POL Area](#)

The men of the Air Police Squadrons remained at Da Nang, however, the squadron designation (name) changed *four times* during a 12 months period from 1965-1966. From 1 July 1965, when SSgt Jensen was KIA, to 25 Jan 1966, when Airman Jones was KIA, the squadron name had changed three times.



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