

# 366th SPS, Đà Nẵng Air Base, 1965

## My Quest!

by Jackie R. Kays

**My quest is about over.** On several occasions, since I've been a member of VSPA I've been asked why I got out of the Air Force after sixteen years service. As the old saying goes "I'm going to let it all hang-out!" First I want to make it very clear that my actions described in the following incident were not motivated by courage, bravery or the desire for glory. My actions were motivated by a deep sense of duty. In no way did I then, nor do I now, consider them as heroic. I simple did what I was trained to do and what I thought was my duty as an Air Policeman.

### **Đà Nẵng 1965**

On the night of 21 November 1965, I was the NCOIC of a four man perimeter patrol. (It was raining as usual and the mud was about a foot deep) We were at the south end of the runway when a C-123 (Flare-ship) crashed near the end of the runway. We were the first on the crash scene. I deployed one man to the right flank of the aircraft and one to the left and instructed the third man to stay with the jeep and radio. I made a quick decision to enter the aircraft in an attempt to aid the crew members. That decision ultimately cost me my career. This action all took place with in approximately six to eight minutes prior to the Crash and Rescue team's arrival. While helping one man from the craft, I fell and the other man fell on top of me. This injured my lower back and right knee. My right knee had been injured before and I'd received treatment for it many time in the past. I managed to get up and hobble around, thinking it was just a temporary injury. The pain subsided quickly due to the adrenaline rush.

I did not go to sick-bay and report the injury, because I'd been in country less than two months, and was afraid that they might send be back to the states. [*Keep in mind that I'd spent sixteen years in the Air Force as an Air policeman and this was my first combat duty. I really felt that my experience as an NCO could make a difference.*] Okay, I was naive and GungHo (smile). I hobbled around for about a week after the incident, but the pain in my back was getting worse and the swelling in my knee was persistent.

The Flight Commander jumped me about limping, and asked to see my knee. It was a swollen mess. He instructed me to report to Sick-bay immediately. The doctor took one look at the knee, handed me a crutch and instructed me to pack my bags for the hospital in Japan. I was air-vac'ed the next day.

I did not mention the aircraft incident to the doctor, nor did I ever mention it there after. I was discharged on the medical records of the old knee injury. There's no mention of the aircraft incident in my medical records. I spent over a month in the hospital in Japan. Then A-vac'ed back to the states. I spent six months in the hospital at Eglin, AFB, Florida. I was medically discharged in May of 1966--sixteen years down the tube.

### **SEVEN YEARS LATER.**

In 1972, I ran into M/sgt. Warren E. Oliff, my old Flight Commander. He asked me if I'd received the citation that he had recommended me for in regards to the Aircraft incident at Đà Nẵng AB. I assured him that I had not received any citation and that I was not even aware of the recommendation. He was highly critical of the situation and informed me that he was going to immediately write an inquiry to Air Force and find out about the recommendation.

A few weeks later I received a copy of Sgt Oliff's letter to the Air Force. A few more week went by and I received as letter from the Air Force which stated that there was no record of Sgt Oliff's recommendation and therefore I would have to contact at least one of the crew members to verify that the incident did in fact occur.

Please keep in mind at that time there were no home computers. I had no way of know who the crew members were are how to contact them. Years past and my little girl grew up and as a young woman started hounding me about trying to obtain the citation. I wrote everyone that I thought might be able to help me find out who the crew members were. At first the Air Force told me that the information was classified. Then they changed their tune, and said that all records of the crash had been destroyed.

Recently by chance, I talk to an old Air Force buddy who gave me the name of a man and a phone number to call. I immediately did so, and Bingo! My thirty year quest for their names was over! But, I still have not been able to locate a one of them. I'm listing their names, and if anyone knows any of them, please e-mail me. (I think two of these men were Air Policemen, who volunteered that night to kick flares.)

Capt Bruce B. Alter (Pilot)(USAF)  
1stLt Roger NMI Rucker (Co-Pilot)(USAF)

SSgt John A. Mesic (Flight Mechanic) (USAF)  
SSgt Arthur V. Swezey Jr. (Loadmaster) (USAF)  
A1C Michael J. Kelly (Flare Kicker) (USAF)  
A1C Nile L. Jones (Flare Kicker) (USAF)  
A2C Kirby R. Wheeler (Flare Kicker) (USAF)  
E-3 Bruce J. Sanders (Guard) (USMC)

Guys, as I said before, this has nothing to do with medals or citations. It's become a point of principle with me. I was recommended for a citation and I think the least the Air Force could do is acknowledge that recommendation. (Hell, it's not the citation. I'm 69 years old. I know with that and fifty cents I can get a cup of coffee anywhere...smile.) It the principle of the thing!

Thank you for taking the time to read this and for your help in locating any of the above name airmen. I'll let you know how this turns out.

Best regards to all,

Jackie

**Read: [To Die Alone, by Jackie Kays](#)**

**Author:Tom Bodden Sr**

**Subject:Re:My Quest**

**In reply to:Jackie R. Kays 's message, "My Quest"**

Jackie,

I'm glad your quest is about over. There are a significant number of Air Policemen/Security Policemen that have done things that were extraordinary, like you in the name of duty or doing their jobs. I think that's what makes our group so special because we often put ourselves in harms way without any thought of glory or reward. I personally know of two decoration recommendation that were submitted on me to 7th AF and somehow lost, so I understand where you are. I looked up a couple of the guys you listed, could find any hometown info or phone numbers. I did find their AFSCs will in Nam, maybe there's a website you can go and locate them. Here's the info I have. A1C Michael J. Kelly, AFSC:73250, Personnel Specialist; A1C Nile L. Jones, AFSC:64550, Inventory Management Specialist; A2C Kirby R. Wheeler, the same as Jones. Sorry no AP's or SP's. Good Luck and God Bless. Thank you for doing your duty as you say it.

Tom Bodden Sr.  
Biên Hòa 64-65  
Phan Rang 68-69  
U-Tapao 75-76 (Siagon Evac)

**Author:Jackie R. Kays**  
**Subject:Re:My Quest**  
**In reply to:Tom Bodden Sr 's message, "Re:My Quest"**

Hi Tom,

Thank you for taking the time to respond and for your efforts on my part.  
I sincerely appreciate the information on these airmen.  
You know, it appears to me that awarding citation to Air Policemen in Vietnam was not a priority concern of the Air Force. There are a lot of cases where the recommendation mysteriously end up in file -13.  
You know Tom it makes me a little angry because I was in some peril that night. There was spilt jet fuel, hydraulic fluid, unexploded flares, land mines, VC in the vicinity just to mention a few of those perils, not to mention that I still walk with a slight limp and still have agonizing back pain.

Thanks again,

Jackie

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