

Dismount
Jacob (JJ) Chestnut

by **Jim Murray**
Phu Cat, 65/66

*Taken from the Boston Sunday Herald November 8, 1998, titled "Officer survived Vietnam only to be struck down back home".
Written by Jim Murray, Vietnam Security Policeman from Phu Cat 1965-1966.*

In that one point this summer just about everyone in American knew his name. His picture leapt out from the front page of newspapers across nation, from big city tabloids to back water broadsheets. Likewise from millions of television sets on that nightmarish Friday in July when Jacob Chestnut and a fellow Capital Police officer were brutally and insanely gunned down while performing routine security duty near the U.S. House.

Checking tourist's passes and giving directions was a long way from ducking rockets and mortar rounds in places like Pleiku and Phu Cat where Jacob (JJ.) Chestnut had served as a U. S. Air Force security policeman during two tours in Vietnam many years before. He certainly was entitled to a little "skating" or easy duty, at this stage of his life.

They say he never had a chance. Reportedly, the gunman walked up behind Chestnut and pumped a bullet into the back of his head. He then began the wild shooting spree that ended with the wounding of the gunman by another valiant officer who, like Chestnut, was killed in the gun battle as hundreds of shock and frightened visitors ran screaming for cover.

The thread of violence was probably the last thing on Chestnut's mind that lazy summer afternoon. He had recently joined the Vietnam Security Police Association, a relatively new organization comprised of Vietnam peers. He planned to attend the groups annual reunion, which was scheduled to be held in Washington D.C. in October. "He was really looking forward to the reunion and maybe getting together with some of his old Pleiku buddies," said VSPA official Steve Ray. Instead, the group gathered at Chestnut's grave for one final farewell salute.

Because of his career military service, Chestnut qualified for burial in Arlington National Cemetery. His grave, still unmarked, is located on a gently sloping hill graced by stately oaks and rolling turf that was still lush and green on that raw, blustery October day when his comrades came to say goodbye.

They came from all over the country, a good number of them in places such as Huntsville, Ala; Gulf Breeze, Fla. and Hinesville, Ga., to pay homage to an African-American man most had never met but all considered family because of the common bond of Vietnam service. The men walked as a group from the main gate of Arlington to Chestnut's grave, a considerable distance, much of it uphill. Some were joined by wives and children and even grandchildren. Others limped with canes, some still carrying shrapnel or bullet fragments in aging, aching limbs.

The group gathered Solemnly at the grave side, joined by Chestnut's son and daughter. Their chaplain offered a prayer and spoke the obvious irony of Chestnut's having survived Vietnam as a young man only to lose his life through senseless violence years later in his own country. The group then snapped to attention and, as one, offered a crisp salute to the fallen comrade, friend and brother.

The television lights in cameras and hordes of reporters of July were long gone by now that no one seemed to care. The smiles of love and appreciation of the faces of Chestnut's children shown brightly through their tears, like the sun that eventually peaked its way through the dreary overcast of a blustery autumn day in Arlington National Cemetery.

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