

**VIETNAM**  
**OPEN LETTER TO EVERGREEN ALABAMA**  
**IN REMEMBRANCE OF**  
**SGT BRUCE DALE JONES**

by Don Poss. , LM 37  
Đà Nẵng AB, K-9 Blackie X129  
366th Security Police Squadron, 1965-1966  
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**OPEN LETTER TO EVERGREEN ALABAMA**

**Thank you Evergreen Alabama**  
**In Remembrance of Sgt Bruce Dale Jones**

by Don Poss, VSPA Webmaster/Director of Communications

I am still a bit overwhelmed with the genuine southern hospitality you folks demonstrated to our members of the Vietnam Security Police Association, Inc. (USAF). There is no possible way I can express this in only a few words, so please excuse me if I seem verbose in sharing my thoughts, but I am writing to friends one and all.

Before sharing with you about the memorial, I deeply want to thank all those who helped the Vietnam Security Police Association (VSPA) welcome home Sergeant Bruce Dale Jones, our fallen brother who died in Vietnam while serving his country in 1972. I know there were many who helped smooth the way for our arrival, and although your names remain unknown be assured your helping hands were appreciated.

Fifty-seven VSPA members participated in Sgt Jones' memorial ceremony and extends a special thank you to the people of Evergreen and Conecuh County Alabama, and to those attending and participating in Sgt Jones' memorial, including:

Mr. and Mrs. James Windham,  
Family member Ms. Angela McGee (Aunt),  
The many friends of the family,  
School mates and friends of Sgt Jones,  
Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Chapter 72,  
Michael Jackson, Chaplain and Antioch Church Pastor,  
Evergreen's Mayor Pete Wolff III and esteemed City Council members,  
State of Alabama representatives and dignitaries,  
Conecuh County Sheriff Edwin Booker and his deputies (many of VSPA's members  
joined law enforcement departments across the nation, after discharge from the Air Force Security Police),  
Thurgood Marshall Middle School Principal Ms. Lyons, Sgt Jones former alma mater,  
Evergreen's Hillcrest High School JROTC Color/Honor Guard, commanded by SGM Ralph Crysell,  
The Patriot Guard Riders, Phillip Brown, Ride Captain  
Cherries Blossoms and Blooms, Cherry Gladwell, owner, for an outstanding floral wreath arrangement,  
The Our Place restaurant, Ms. Mary Sermon, owner,  
All of who came to pay homage to the memory of Sgt Bruce Dale Jones, and the  
many who wished they could have been there with us at the ceremony.

James Windham relayed to me an Evergreen minister's comment that he wanted to say he was not easily impressed, but at Friday's memorial ceremony he was definitely impressed. I think what the minister was sensing were the genuine heartfelt gratitude VSPA members felt toward the community for turning out with us. It meant a lot to each of us. Frankly, we were not overly surprised as we already knew we were in the presence of Alabama patriots who care for their veterans both living and dead and inscribe their names in granite for posterities sake.

Most of us have heard the phrase, "...*their sacrifice will always be remembered.*" On veterans' national holidays, those words often ring hollow when T.V. commentators and talking heads mouth that phrase. With Veterans Day upon us, "...*their sacrifice will always be remembered*" will be repeated many times. I would be surprised if most speakers could name a single veteran who died in combat or line of duty in service to our country.

Veterans and others serving today in harms' way certainly remember fallen warriors. Law Enforcement, fire-fighters, and emergency services personal can tell you names of their fallen. Families who've lost a son, daughter, father or mother still feel the void of loss and will forever remember that day when the knock on their door came and they were told the horrible news of their loved one's death in service to our country.

During the Vietnam War, military were wounded or killed outright and flown away, leaving comrades with unanswered questions. Unless they saw their friend fall and knew he had died, it is likely they might never learn if he lived or died. Some would end their enlistments, return home and try hard to forget what they had experienced. Others felt one last duty and planned their trip home to include the hometown of their fallen friend, and traveled to his gravesite to pay their last respects. *They remembered.*

In 1982, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (The Wall) was completed in Washington D.C.. Only then did veterans have a source to check for names on The Wall, hoping they *would-not* find their friend's name listed. Ironically, years slipped by and memories faded leaving only a friend's first or last name or nickname, and until the early 1990's there was no online web search as we so know it today.

Those in Vietnam who fought and lived generally returned home individually. Rarely was the body of a fallen warrior escorted home, as his remains was simply flown home and given a military funeral, while those who served with him remained at war, fighting to survive another day.

With advent of the World Wide Web, veterans began posting online questions asking for information about their unit, men they served with, and information about who was wounded or believed killed in action. It was common to simply ask if anyone knew what exactly had happened during their tour.

Recently, a member of VSPA, Ed Daubert, asked a question about a Sgt Jones. Ed wasn't sure of Jones' first name but thought it might be "Bruce." It had been Forty years since Sgt Jones fell in line of duty, and for many of those years Ed had thought a similar name, "*James Bruce Jones,*" posted at VSPA's memorial web page, might be his friend who died in 1972 at Tân Sơn Nhứt Air Base near Saigon. In time it became clear "*Airman James Bruce Jones,*" killed in action at Đà Nẵng Air Base in 1966 (coincidentally, *James Bruce Jones* was my tent mate at Đà Nẵng) could not be the Jones he remembered. Ed also knew that both young men had died at age twenty, which meant "his Jones" from Alabama, would have been only age 14 when the other Jones from New York had died.

With Ed's inquiry, I began a web search for Alabama's Sgt Jones. VSPA members who served at Tân Sơn Nhứt Air Base were asked for input, as well as other military veteran organizations. Someone thought the missing name might be "*Bruce Dale Jones.*" The web search continued and a *Bruce Dale Jones* was found and listed as buried at Rabb Cemetery in Alabama. No address was listed for Rabb Cemetery, so the search broadened to include Google Satellite Maps. Rabb Cemetery was located, but it seemed to be in the middle of a forest and fronting on an unnamed dirt road.

I widened the web search to include veterans' monuments in Alabama. The town of Evergreen was near Rabb Cemetery, and my search focused on Evergreen and Conecuh County. A week prior to this search, a veterans' monument was dedicated in Evergreen. The dedication was online and there was a photo of a granite monument and smaller version of the Washington Monument. I enlarged the monument's photo and visible just above an umbrella in the crowd was the name "*Sgt Bruce Dale Jones.*" The web page also included the names and dates of casualties for the Vietnam War's fallen veterans. Beside Sgt Jones' name was his known date of death – *we had found Sgt Bruce Dale Jones!*

I phoned the named contact on the web page and James Windham answered. Frankly, without his extraordinary help and actions, VSPA would not have been able to arrange a memorial visit to Sgt Jones gravesite.

My brother Larry and I decided to rent a car and drive the 109 miles from our VSPA's 18th reunion hotel location in Florida. VSPA's president, Phil Carroll, suggested we mass-email our nearly 1,400 members and see if any could attend the memorial with us. Because the reunion's agenda was already firm when we began our search, all of the members attending the reunion were already signed up for special events and military demonstrations at the nearby Air Base. Within a few days, it was apparent a rental van was too small for those asking to attend Sgt Jones' memorial, and the association chartered a bus.

On October 5, 2012, VSPA's convoy of a bus and three cars began our trip to Rabb Cemetery. Other VSPA members not at the reunion would meet us there in two cars and several motorcycles. Weather was our friend that morning; however, we were committed to our memorial service come rain or shine. We had stood in monsoon rains in Vietnam and were determined we would not be stopped. During the highway drive a light rain fell here and there, but Alabama's sunshine cleared away most of the clouds and we enjoyed the scenic ride. What a magnificent countryside of lush pines and forest that whisked past the bus's picture windows. Like a painter's easel, multi hues of green trees and brush, and golden fields of grass swept by. Tall pines stood in unending clusters with tree tops swaying a welcome. Waves of newly mowed hay sweetened the air as tractors toted giant bales of hay near historic homes. Farms and small villages seemed alive with workers. Hidden homesteads with gray wisps of chimney smoke painted the rustic landscape as only God Himself could do. The land was at peace.

A little more than two hours passed and we were rapidly approaching our turn off toward Rabb Cemetery. I cell phoned James Windham and gave him a heads up on our location. Minutes later, a Sheriff's patrol car turned on his blue-lights and we followed his lead. He turned off the main highway and led us slowly down the dirt road named Antioch Church Road. Ahead, I could see a waiting gauntlet of cars, pickup trucks and assorted vehicles parked along the narrow country road. A number of people stood amongst the parking-lot of vehicles stopped on the road itself. It looked like Evergreen had turned out for the memorial, and I found that most gratifying.

VSPA members and wives climbed off the bus strong as the cars following us also emptied their passengers. We began moving the hundred yards or so toward the cemetery gate. Old veterans in their 60's and 70's don't move as fast as they use to, but we all knew that Sgt Jones' grave would wait patiently for us as it had for four decades. Thankfully, the road was solid and dry. Eagerly I

walked the red clay road ahead of those who followed and was impressed by the vivid Alabama colors of forest tree tops bowing creating a canopied cover here above us. Simply beautiful! Cobalt blue skies radiant to the point of illuminence, with stark white cotton clouds drifting lazily above, like islands of welcomed-shade from the hot humid sun.

So many local citizens had gathered inside and along the road awaiting our arrival, it was difficult to count the number on hand. Our next association president and Silver Star recipient Pete Piazza remarked, "Everyone showed that even with passing of time, we do not forget our own Sky Cops even after these many years. It is good to know that we have folks in Alabama who care about our Vietnam era Vets too."

As we gathered, everyone inside the cemetery seemed focused on the gate funneling in new arrivals; not staring, but more like searching out friends they had only heard about. I noticed the Patriot Guard Riders Association had formed a line of honor with unfurled American flags flying, providing a safe corridor of peers guiding us to where Sgt Jones lay at rest. The local populace wrapped about the grounds in a loose "L" from near the Patriot Guards to the gate's fence line bordering the road. The JROTC stood at attention resplendent in colorful red uniforms and white "cowboy" type hats with turned up side rims. Their flags wafted lazily in an occasional puff of welcomed light breeze.

I paused at the gate as my eyes searched out the one gravestone I had remembered from James Windham's beautiful photo taken from the cemetery roadside the day of our first phone call. I realized I had quietly been holding my breath, but at last -- *there it was*. I entered the cemetery and stood momentarily, nodding hello to friendly faces. I knew beyond doubt that I was standing on hallowed ground. I also knew there were many other veterans at rest nearby Sgt Jones' grave. All were at final rest beneath a blanket of manicured green, bordered by a tall standing forest like vigilant sentinels that had weathered many a storm since the early 1800's. All the while, there was a silence as those awaiting our members had gathered. Something *special* was happening as all came together with a single purpose, within the protective heavy forest of nature's honor guard, and folks began to close in as if joining ranks with family. I knew at that moment Sgt Jones' sacrifice will indeed always be remembered.

While entering the cemetery, I had noticed other gravestones large and small, and it was apparent that even names carved in granite would in time seemingly melt and fade due to exposure to the elements. I then stood near the podium, shook James Windham's hand for the first time (he really does look like Santa!) and stole a glance at Sgt Jones' weathered gravestone which seemed to have held up extraordinarily well through the years. I knew that James Windham and his gracious wife had scrubbed and washed the granite tombstone, thoroughly removing four decades of weather.

After brief introductions a quick agreement on how best to conduct the ceremony was decided. Newell Swartz, VSPA's past president, gave a heartfelt speech in which he offered up the reasons why fellow veterans would travel across the nation to a small Alabama country cemetery to honor a young man who died in service to his country some four decades ago: "*... for as long as a man is remembered, he is not truly gone.*" In many ways, the war still seems like yesterday to many of us. It was as if a Star Trek science fiction *time-portal* had opened and allowed us to step through from war zone to gravesite. Our memories of Vietnam are at times still too vivid and fresh... but today we had added a new memory of comfort in that we had found a lost fallen warrior taken from us. In that moment we could step away from Vietnam into the fields of Alabama and stand at last beside one who had stood with us seemingly only moments ago. We remembered Sgt Jones, and his service to country. We remembered that once we were young, as he will always be, and had stood shoulder to shoulder against a determined enemy. For those brief moments, we were young Airmen again and savored the renewed camaraderie and friendship.

Like shadows of distant years we remembered times both good and bad. We remembered shared hopes, fears, and talks of home and family. We could not forget the hardship and memories still too painful for many who witnessed unbelievable destruction of war. We could not forget decades later the feel of smooth black granite and the touch of engraved names of friends long dead upon The Wall of 58,178.

Mayor Wolff read a fitting proclamation stating that October 5th will be Sgt Bruce Dale Jones day now and for perpetuity. Sgt Jones' Aunt Angela McGee said a few words of remembrance, and of her joy that a memorial was being held for him. I could see the stress she then felt, and thought of English Warrior-poet Wildred Owen, killed in action in 1918 on the fields of France the last week of WW I. Owens once wrote: "*Above all I am not concerned with Poetry—my subject is war, and the pity of War ... the poetry is in the pity.*" To me, *the pity*, as Newell Swartz stated is found in Thomas Jefferson's quote: "*The Tree of Liberty has to be watered by the blood of patriots and tyrants.*"

A tribute poem by Howard Yates, bagpiper, was read by Pete Piazza.

Then came the moment when thirteen comrades who served at Tân Sơn Nhứt Air Base were called forward for the wreath laying ceremony. These men, shadows of the past if you will, stood tall and followed those who served with Sgt Jones carrying a floral wreath with ribbons inscribed: "VSPA Remembers Sgt Bruce Dale Jones, Welcome Home." Nearly three dozen fellow members, and numerous citizens and dignitaries of Evergreen and Conecuh County followed the procession.

The wreath was placed by Ed Daubert and suddenly we are old men again, each with thoughts of lost friends and times past. Aunt Andala McGee stands near Ed, as all quietly listen to the moment of requested silence. A VSPA member in Scottish military dress plays Amazing Grace on the bagpipes, creating such feeling it tugs at every heart and sets free glistening tears. I could not help but see the parallel in the lyrics: "*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. Lonce was lost but now am found ....*"

As the last note of Amazing Grace faded into history, I found myself recalling in part the poetic lyrics of Taps:

*"Day is gone ... gone the sun,*

*From the lake, from the hills, from the sky;  
All is well, safely rest, God is nigh...  
While the light fades from sight,  
And the stars gleaming rays softly send,  
To they hands we our souls, Lord, commend."*

Yes, Sgt Bruce Dale Jones, you were remembered by those whom you served with, and your fellow countrymen; your soul commended to the Lord; and I tell you plainly and from the heart: Though forty years have passed, your sacrifice will *always be remembered*. We will not forget this day, or your service that brought us here, as long as we draw breath.

Thank you Evergreen and Conecuh County for helping VSPA Welcome Home our brother.

**Don Poss,**

Vietnam Security Police Association, Inc. (USAF)  
Communications Director, Webmaster

*Photo: James Windham presents awards to Bruce Dale Jones' Aunt Angela McGee and Rev Michael Jackson, as VSPA President Newell Swartz (far right) looks on.*



*Photo below: James Windham was presented the below framed poster, with signatures of USAF squadron members that served with Bruce Dale Jones in Vietnam.*

