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*In Memorium to
James Edward Francis
(June 16, 1946 - March 11, 1968)*

by Robert E. Francis



Birth: June 16, 1946 Oak Ridge, Tennessee

Military: 1966/1968 U.S.A.F. Age: 19

Death: March 11, 1968 Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand Age: 21

Burial: March 22, 1968 Wichita, Kansas Age: 21

Marriage: April 9, 1966

Spouse: Carolyn (Smith)

Religion: Southern Baptist

Father: John Virgil FRANCIS (1915-)

Mother: Margaret Louisa SMITH (1924-)

Siblings: Full brothers--John Virgil Francis, Jr. (July 8, 1943-); Thomas Russell Francis (July 12, 1945-); Robert Eugene Francis (March 15, 1949-). Half brothers--Richard Francis, Charles Francis; half sisters--Carolyn Larson; Anita Francis; Patricia Francis; Jennifer Francis

James Edward Francis was born June 16, 1946, in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Born prematurely (at 7 months), Jim was not given much of a chance to live. The story goes (told by my father, John Virgil Francis) that at birth Jim was so small that his head and body fit in the palm of Dad's hand with his little arms and legs extending out on each side. The doctors told the family that Jim's chance of surviving was very small and that they might as well take him home to die. Dad fed Jim beer rather than milk "to fatten him up" and it worked! When asking my mother about the truthfulness of this story, she just laughed. "This is just one of your dad's crazy tales," she said; and, since Dad is rather good at telling tall tales (and believing them!), I can only suppose that the kernel of truth (Jim being premature and small) had undergone the magical transformation of oral tradition.

Jim was almost three years older than me; yet, emotionally, psychologically, and physically, we were about the same age. We did everything together: played, fought, laughed, cried, got into mischief--even slept in the same bed--together.



Because of his premature birth, Jim was always small for his age. This may have been the cause of his frequent bouts with low self-esteem; something that plagued him throughout his childhood and adolescence. From time to time, this need to be recognized prompted him to do things that got him into trouble. I'll never forget one incident where Jim and I sat together in a small wooded area behind our house in Cahokia, Illinois (the family lived on Howell Avenue, within a short walking distance of my mother's parents, John Frances SMITH and Ina McDONALD Smith. They, in turn, lived just behind my uncle Archie Pearl SMITH and his family). At any rate, Jim decided to see what would happen if he lit a fire. Well, our stepfather Richard M. BUCK (nicknamed "Buck") came running out of the house just in time to save us. In later years, Buck described the scene in the following way, "I looked out the window and saw the back yard on fire. I ran outside and there the two of you (Jim and me) were sitting calmly in the middle of the fire."

What I remember most about Jim was his sensitive, loving nature. Of all the brothers, Jim was clearly the most spiritually minded. In his teens, he became actively involved in the local Baptist church, often dragging me along with him. This involvement in the church eventually helped Jim through the difficulties associated with low self-esteem and he began to blossom into the caring, gentle, and compassionate soul that we all remember so well.

Jim joined the United States Air Force as an enlisted man in the fall of 1965. His technical training was as a Security Policeman. On April 9, 1966 he married Carolyn Smith, a young woman that he met in Osage Beach, Missouri. She was the daughter of Robert Smith, the owner of Camp Marina, a resort boat dock and camp ground on the Lake of the Ozarks.

Carolyn and Jim began their married life as all young military families do and he was assigned to the 838th Air Police Squadron (TAC), Forbes Air Force Base, Topeka, Kansas, from 1966 until October, 1967. I remember visiting Jim one time while he was stationed there. They lived in modest circumstances but seemed very happy. Jim then received orders to Korat Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand. As he made his way overseas, he sent postcards sent to our mom and stepdad:

(Postmark 18 Oct 1967)
Mr. & Mrs. R.M. Buck

Box 132

Lynn Creek, Mo.
Hi, Ma.

Well we are on our way. We stopped over in Alaska and we are heading for Japan. As soon as I find out my address I will write more. I sure miss you and Buck. We take care of the station.

Love, Jim

(Postmark 18 Oct 1967)
Mr. & Mrs. R.M. Buck

Box 132

Lynn Creek, Mo.
Hi, Ma.

Well I thought I would drop you a few lines while I had a chance. We are in Japan and it is raining. It shouldn't take too much longer before we arrive in Thailand. Will write later.

Love, Jim

Upon his arrival in Thailand, Jim was assigned to the 388th Security Police Squadron. He evidently performed his duties well and looked forward to the day when he could return home. In a letter dated December 29, 1967, Jim writes:
29 Dec 67:



Dear Mother & Buck,

Well I figured I had better sit down and write you all a letter, before you disown me. Everything seems to be just fine over here, except me hating the place. I know it will take a year to get used to Thailand.

Everything seems to happen over here all at once. First of all the President flew in for a suprise (sic) visit. We had to go into expanded security to secure the base. We only had 2 hours to do this. All together there were 510 men posted, counting G.I.'s and their guards. I guarded the area surrounding the presidents trailer. We had to work 14 hours plus our 8 hours of regular duty. It really didn't seem too long because we were in a way proud to do it. Then just 2 days ago "The Bob Hope Show" was at Korat. I had to stand guard on it also. The show lasted around 2 hours but I got to see the last 20 minutes of it. I had to stand guard on the rear of the stage. I think I could have been in some of the pictures taken. I was sitting right up front. They told us the show will be on T.V. around the middle of January. So look for the listings in the T.V. guide you might see me on the show. I'll try to send some pictures of it. I thought Miss World was so beautiful. I got to meet her for a while back stage. She had a great personality. The rest of the actors seemed a little stuck up. I had to work 17 hours for that including my 8 hours of regular work. I enjoyed every minute of it, and I would do it all over if I had the chance.

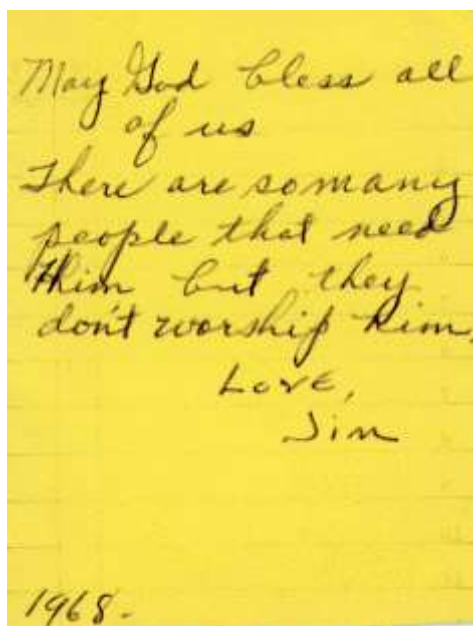
Well I guess I had better close. I hope you are feeling better after the operation. Buck I hope you have a Happy Birthday. And I hope you have a good year at the station. I am sorry to make this short, but I have to get ready for work. I will write more later. May God bless you both and keep you safe.

Your loving son,

Jim

P.S. I sure miss you both very much.

As mentioned earlier, Jim was a very religious person. He never missed church on Sunday and had a simple yet profound faith. Following is a small note that I found among his personal belongings which illustrates this faith:



I believe, in the end, it was compassion that killed him. Jim died on March 11, 1968, in a bomb dump accident at Kurat Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand. He died as he lived--a compassionate human being who readily put others before himself. By the time of his tour in Thailand, Jim had "come into his own" as the saying goes. Adulthood suited Jim well and, though it is rather foolish to speculate on what he may have accomplished had he lived, I like to think that he would have added a great measure of kindness to this old world. In his letters home, Jim expressed concern for the conditions of poverty in Thailand and had visited nearby orphanages. He even took the time to learn the Thai language as a means of communicating with the local population. This sense of compassion and lovingkindness was tested on that long ago day in the bomb dump. Jim responded in a way that his whole life had prepared him to do: he selflessly gave his life for someone in need.

The last moments of Jim's life can now be told; first by Frank Paul, a man who actually served with Jim, and secondly by me. I recently came upon Frank's account on the Vietnam Security Policeman Association website (see below). Frank recounts the events as follows:

"My name is Frank Paul, I was at Korat Air Base, Thailand, in March of 1968, and I was on duty at the time A1C James E. Francis was killed. I still have a copy of the Memorial Service Pamphlet that was held for him at the base chapel, on 16 March 1968.

"James E. Francis was killed along with James W. Reese of the 388th Maint. Munitions Squadron. A1C James Francis died in a very heroic way I thought, as he was on duty at the Munitions Bomb Dump which was approximately 3-4 miles off the installation. Francis was on two men Response Team patrolling the area with another SP, Sgt Miglarese, of Pennsylvania. While on patrol they were called to a certain bomb dump bunker, because the bombs had started fragmenting, and told to help the MMS troops out of the bunker. Sgt Miglarese got one man out and Airman Francis went in to rescue A1C Reese, but at that moment both Airmen were killed when the whole bunker went up.

"I also noticed that his name was not on the VSPA Medals roll of honor, I remember an assembly we had later and we were told Francis would be awarded the Airman's Medal. We thought he should be awarded something more but they told us this was the highest award he could receive, because he was not in a combat zone.

"Thanks for listening to what I had to say about this, I helped pack his footlocker to send home, and I just have not forgot the tragedy his family must of felt at the time."

Thanks again,
Frank Paul

My account. My story of Jim's death begins on the night of March 11, 1968. At the time I was living with my father, John Francis, and stepmother Wilma, at Ormsby Village, Kentucky. Ormsby Village was a school for delinquent children and Dad worked there as an instructor. As a part of his employment, he was provided a large dormitory as a home. The dormitory was huge and our family used only a portion of it for our quarters. My room was upstairs overlooking the driveway and it was there on that warm rainy evening while laying in my bed that I saw a car pulling up in the driveway. I was then only four days away from my 19th birthday; yet, the events that transpired over the next hour completely and forever changed the course of my life and that of my family. I forgot about my own little celebration.

As I lay in the bed looking at the car pulling up, I noticed two men dressed in U. S. Air Force uniforms. The men came to the door and knocked and I got up and ran down stairs. I don't know who answered the door but the men asked to come in. We ushered them into the living room and asked them to sit down. Dad, Wilma, my step sisters Janet, Leigh Ann and Jody, my half-sisters Anita and Patty and I were waiting for the "bad news." We knew that whenever military folks dressed in official uniforms came to a home, it only meant one thing-- someone close had died. At that time, two of our family were serving in the Air Force overseas: Tom Francis, a SGT assigned Camranh Bay Air Base, Vietnam, and Jim, an A1C assigned to Korat Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand. We expected the "bad news" to be about Tom since he was stationed in Vietnam. After an awkward time of greetings, the officer said (something to the effect) "we are truly sorry to inform you of the death of Airman First Class James Edward Francis who was killed in a bomb dump explosion at Korat Air Force Base, Thailand..." what was said after that, I am not certain. The scene became one of great sorrow. Dad became ashen and couldn't believe what he was hearing. I was so totally stunned by this news that words failed me--as they do even to this day. I felt like someone had just reached inside my heart and ripped it out. In it's place was a kaleidoscope of thoughts, memories, and a blackness that built up inside of me like a volcano. No! Surely this could not be happening! Yet, in those few words my brother was forever taken from me!

The next several days were a complete blur. Jim's funeral took place in Wichita, Kansas, and I received a phone call from Jim's wife or mother-in-law, inviting me to come to their house. The next thing I remember I was on a plane and landing in Wichita. Later, my mom would angrily lash out at the Smith family for their actions (including my staying with them) but such were the horrible family dynamics brought about by this tragedy. In our grief, we all acted badly during this time and made many mistakes in family relations--but that's another story.

The day of the funeral was a nightmare. Evidently, Jim's body had been so badly mangled by the explosion that it was necessary to have a closed-casket funeral. My stepdad tried to view the body but was strongly encouraged not to by the funeral director. Buck surmised that no actual body existed and that only a flag was housed in the flag-draped coffin. Lacking any evidence to the contrary--and now knowing the details of Jim's death--I strongly suspect that Buck was right.

The photo below was taken on the morning of the funeral, March 22, 1968. Though smiles were duly shown for the camera, none of us felt like smiling that day. We were heartbroken, for our brother was not among us.



To the left from left to right: Brothers John Francis, Jr. (Skip), Robert E. Francis (Bob), Richard Francis (Dick), Thomas Francis (Tom), Charles Francis (Butch)

The funeral took place at 3:00 PM at the chapel at McConnell Air Force Base, Wichita, Kansas. I vaguely remember the funeral but I will never forget the graveside service. Even today, some thirty two years after the event, I still feel a powerful chill when I witness the 21 gun salute followed by the most lonely heart-wrenching sound in the world, the solo bugle call commonly known as "taps." Every time I hear taps--I mean EVERY TIME--I am transported back to that cold gray day in March when I witnessed my dear brother being lowered into the grave. (As I write these words I am a chaplain in the United States Army and as a part of my profession I must regularly perform liturgical rites for the honored dead at graveside services. Yet, whenever taps is played, I mentally brace myself for the inevitable feelings of bitter loss and for a moment I always see my brother's flag-draped coffin before me)

I made up my mind while standing on that burying ground that day to find out what actually happened to my brother in far off Thailand. Therefore (to my mother's horror), the following month I joined the U.S. Air Force as a Munitions Maintenance Specialist. It was my vague hope that by becoming a munitions man I would somehow find out about my brother's death. To my complete surprise, within four or five months I discovered the actual events leading up to his death. I joined the Air Force on April 12, 1968 and after basic training at Lackland AFB, I went to Lowry AFB, Denver, Colorado, for Technical School. Sometime during the training, I was fortunate enough to be given a safety briefing on the subject of the Korat AFB bomb dump explosion and was provided the sequence of events leading up to the death of my brother and another airmen. The instructor showed slides of the actual explosion site as well as detailed diagrams of the revetment (bomb bunker) and the location of those killed. I sat in rapt attention listening to the details of my brother's death and did not say a word about my relation to him, fearing that the instructor would stop the briefing. Afterward, I told the instructor who was the security policeman and he just about fainted! Nevertheless, I got the details straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak, and they were as follows:

Tragically, the bomb dump explosion was the end result of somebody's goof-up at a factory back in the United States. Some person (or persons) incorrectly mixed the chemical compounds which rendered that particular lot of bombs unstable. The "trigger" that set off these bombs was the accidental dropping of a 750 lb. bomb by a fork lift driver. He was lowering the bomb onto a trailer and accidentally missed the rails which held the bombs in place. The 750 pounder rolled off the trailer and hit the ground, injuring an airman and causing the bomb to go "low order" which, in munitions parlance, was smoke, sparks, and fire. Normally, an accidental dropping of an unfused bomb would not have been a problem--theoretically, an unfused bomb can be dropped from 35,000 feet without exploding. However, because of the unstable chemical compound, the bomb began to "fragment," as

Frank Paul stated above. Responding to the call for help, Jim and Sgt Miglarese went to the site to help the injured. Jim saw the accident and -- unaware of the potential danger of a "low order" bomb -- pulled the injured man out of the revetment area. I am not sure how much time passed between the time Jim pulled the man out of the immediate area, but the bomb eventually went "high order;" i.e., it fully detonated. When it detonated, it caused the entire revetment of over one hundred 750 lb. bombs to go off.* The result of this explosion was the immediate death of James Edward Francis and the wounded man that he tried to save. Can you imagine what the impact of this explosion had upon a man only yards away? I believe Jim did not know what hit him. One moment he was a living human being, the next moment he was gone.

*As an example of the tremendous explosive power of a single 750 lb. bomb, I recount an experience when I was stationed at Phu Cat Air Force Base, Republic of Vietnam, in the summer of 1969. The bomb dump was located near the end of the runway. One day as an F-4 jet took off loaded with 750 pounders, one of the bombs accidentally fell from the plane. At the time, I was standing on the running rail of a thirty foot rig about 3/4 of a mile from where the bomb dropped. The impact of the explosion was so powerful that it knocked me off the rig and flat on my face.

I saw the slides of the hole left by the explosion at Korat AFB. The forklift (what was left of it) sat beside the hole and looked like a miniature toy in comparison to the depth of the blast at ground zero. The instructor told us that the blast created a hole nine stories deep! I also saw a slide of Jim's vehicle. It was a total wreck and blasted by shrapnel. Below is a drawing of the revetment as I remember it:

Jim's wife Carolyn and my mother received several letters of condolence from various commanders. Following is one of the letters written by Jim's commander, Major Bill G. Stricker:

Letter to Mrs. Francis from Commander, 388th Security Police Squadron:
16 March 1968

Dear Mrs. Francis,

It is with great sorrow that I write you as your husband's commanding officer. Jim was a dear friend of mine and an outstanding Security Policeman. Since his arrival from Forbes Air Force Base my office has received only the highest praise for Jim's work and performance.

I know Jim was a very devoted Christian and lived close to God daily. In fact, Jim had composed a poem I believe he intended for you which I feel you should be aware of, if he hadn't already sent to you. The poem was found among his personal affects and is stated agan (sic) for you.

*"Darling, God placed me miles from you;
He's made my world a better blue.
Yet he put my heart on the wings of a dove.
And flew to you my thoughts of love.
To place in your heart or hold in your hand,
Until I'm set from this hot barren land;
But if I don't come home once more,
God's promised to let us meet at heaven's door."
by James E. Francis*

I am sure he would have wanted you to hear the poem. I hope I didn't do wrong sending it to you in this letter.

Jim gave his life heroically for his country. You should feel only pride (sic) of him and have faith that God is taking care of him from here on into eternity. Jim's love for his fellow man was not merely a feeling of affection, but an unselfish, willing sacrifice and

giving of himself for mankind, without any thought of being thanked or rewarded. His love like gods (sic) love was demonstrated in everything he said and did. The climax of his love was seen when he gave his life for his fellow man.

Carolyn, agan (sic) let me say that I am terribly sorry and pass on to you the sympathy of the entire Security Police Squadron with which Jim served. If there is anything I or the Squadron can do for you Please (underlined) contact us directly or through the nearest base.

God be with you,

Major Bill G. Stricker

Commander, 388th Security Police Squadron

Below is a rubbing of his name from Section 44E, Line 14, on the Vietnam War Memorial ("The Wall") in Washington, D.C.

Jim will be remembered by his living family as long as they have breath. His life is ever before me as a witness to the sacred passage, "There is no greater love than this: that a man lay down his life for his friend..." Jim embodies this great truth and I will always carry his courageous spirit of love within me throughout the remaining days of my life.

Here's to you, Jim!

Your loving brother, Bob Francis

Postscript

March 4, 2000--Over the past few weeks, the most remarkable sequence of events have transpired. After almost thirty-two years, I have made contact with several people who either knew my brother personally or whose family members were involved in that fateful tragedy of March 11, 1968.

Shortly after receiving information from Frank Paul (see above), I contacted him and we arranged a meeting. As luck would have it, Frank lives only a few hours from me in Salem, Virginia. We met at the home of my wife's parents, Lee and Lucille McClure. Frank shared his memories of Jim. He described Jim as a quiet yet "always neat and considerate of others. He was a compassionate person who was not only faithful to his wife and church, but who genuinely lived his faith through service to others. Jim attended chapel every Sunday and was involved in all of the chapel activities.

Frank described the last day of Jim's life with deep emotion. He (Frank) was assigned to flight line duty and remembered the moment the bomb dump went up. He described it as a powerful blast that shook the base and looked like a nuclear explosion. Frank turned and saw the explosion with the accompanying mushroom cloud and fire reaching to the heavens. He learned the details of the accident as he listened to the security police radio conversations.

I felt a great rush of emotion when Frank told me that some years ago he marched in a parade in Washington, D.C., in memory of my brother. To think that this man would carry my brother's memory for so long and actually take the time and energy to participate in a march on his behalf was almost too much to bear. Frank, thank you so much for caring for my brother and keeping his memory alive. It means a lot to me to know that Jim indeed impacted the lives of those with whom he served.

#

From Those Who Knew Him

Subject: Your Brother James

Date: Wed, 10 Jan 2001 17:40:45 -0600

From: "PWC" <pwc@texasfop.org>

I am a member of the VSPA and was happy to see your brothers name listed with the other heroes, who gave the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

I was a SSgt working in Security Police investigation at the time of the explosion. I was on call that evening, which required me to respond to any crime scene or incident that would need further investigation. The bomb dump was located approximately 5 miles off base. I was on base and heard a loud explosion and the ground shake, I immediately called in and asked what had happened, They only knew that an explosion had occurred at the bomb dump. I had a vehicle assigned to me, and immediately headed out to the bomb dump. Upon my arrival at the entrance, most emergency crews fire department, ambulance, and EOD were on scene. We could not let anyone into the area until EOD, had declared it safe from unexploded ordinance. I cannot remember who brought the other Security Policeman that was with your brother out, but he was dazed and in shock. I took off his gun belt and pistol for safekeeping, and they put him in the ambulance. I later turned his equipment into the armory.

I was later told he had made it back to the vehicle, and was blown about fifty yards by the explosion.

I read your account of the incident which is very accurate, the only thing I could add was that at Commanders call because of the incident we were all briefed not to respond into a bunker or revetment after a small explosion had occurred, because more than likely a large one will follow. This happened a few months later and the two man security alert team remained at a safe distance, which saved their lives. Id like to think your brother saved there lives because he went down the dangerous path first, and we all learned from it. Although I did not know your brother personally know that he was a true hero and will not be forgotten. It was an honor to serve in the same Squadron

God Bless

Peter W. Coxon

Additional Information About The Accident:

Department of The Air Force
Headquarters, Thirteenth Air Force
APO San Francisco 96274
16 May 1968

Subject: Report of Explosives Accident

To: (Various Agencies)

(SAFETY)

1. The following is a resume of a recent explosives accident which occurred in a munitions storage area and involved M-fl7 bombs in their shipping configuration:

a. The Initial Explosion

At approximately 2100, a munitions crew consisting of qualified munitions personnel went to a barricaded aboveground magazine in the Munitions Storage Area. Their task for the night was to remove M-117 bombs from their shipping pallets and place these bombs on dunnage. The crew consisted of five airmen and one was assigned the task of driving a RT forklift that would be used to lift the bombs off their shipping pallets. Two were assigned the task of removing the empty wooden shipping pallets after the bombs had been lifted from them, and

two were to perform the task of positioning on 4" x 4" wooden dunnage the bombs lifted by the RT forklift. The crew entered the revetment. A liteall NF-2, was started to provide illumination. After positioning the necessary dunnage, the crew proceeded through the use of approved Standard Operating Procedures. The operation started at the East end of a row of five stacks of palletized bombs. One airman drove in with the RT forklift and picked up a single bomb on top of stack 1 (numbering from the East). He backed up and after the pallet was removed, picked up the two bombs on the second level of stack 1. This gave him three bombs on the forks of the RT forklift. This was considered a normal load for the forklift. The airman drove the forklift around to where two airmen were ready to receive the bombs and place them on dunnage. After placing the bombs on the dunnage, the forklift returned to the East end of the row of stacks of palletized bombs to get three more bombs. The forklift then picked the 2 bombs off the top of stack 2 and began to back out in preparation for picking up one of the bombs that was on the remaining pallet in stack 1. When the forklift was approximately 15 feet East of the row of stacks of bombs, two of the airmen saw the top pallet of stack 5 (West end of row) begin to tilt. When the tilt of the pallet reached approximately 10 degrees from the horizontal, a low order detonation occurred. This fact was confirmed by two airmen in separate statements taken before they had a chance to discuss events. The time of the initial detonation was 2125 local. **THE BOMBS IN QUESTION WERE IN THE SHIPPING CONFIGURATION (NO BOOSTERS, BANDED TO SHIPPING PALLET, NOZE AND TAIL PLUGS INSTALLED) AND WERE NOT BEING HANDLED IN ANY MANNER.** The explosion was described as a fireball which rapidly enveloped the bombs. This explosion knocked two airmen to the ground and temporarily, partially blinded and deafened them, but shortly after this explosion, they ran over the revetment wall. The forklift driver was either knocked off his forklift by the explosion or jumped off while stunned by the concussion, but he evacuated the revetment by running out the East opening. Two airmen who were approximately 10 feet from the explosion when it occurred were seriously injured at this time and were unable to leave the revetment. As a result of the explosion there were fires set throughout the revetment. The liteall and the coleman tractor attached to it were set on fire. The palletized bombs were partially scattered. The pallets were burning. Grass fires were started on all the walls. Dunnage was ignited and there were pieces of burning HE thrown throughout the revetment.

b. The Second Explosion

At the same time in the vicinity of the munition storage area office, at the Security Police guard shack there were five Security Policemen and four Thai guards. The Security Police present were members of two SAT (Security Alert Team) teams and one gate guard. At 2125 all personnel noticed a muffled explosion. One Air Policeman shouted to another that there was a fire in the area and that a crew was working in the general vicinity of where the fire was located. Calls were made in request of emergency vehicles and the Air Policemen responded to the fire. On arrival they saw fires encompassing the liteall and coleman tractor, the grass on the revetment walls, the bomb dunnage, the pallets the bombs had been resting on prior to the first explosion, and small intense fires scattered throughout the interior of the revetment. They also saw two individuals inside the revetment. One was lying in a burning area, the other was crawling about evidently not being able to tell where he was headed. The Air Policemen began to shout and the crawling individual responded and came towards them. As he came out of the revetment, they caught him and put out fires that were still burning on his body. An Air Policeman ran into the revetment, grabbed two buckets of water from the revetment fire barrel, ran to the individual who was lying in the burning area, and doused this individual with water. At this point, another Air Policeman ran into the revetment to assist and they carried the individual to the fire barrel which they tipped over on him to extinguish fires that were burning on his body. He was placed behind the East revetment wall and an Air Policeman volunteered to stay with him. Seven minutes had elapsed from the time of the first detonation. At 2132 there was a high order detonation. The two airmen by the East revetment wall died at this time. All other personnel were stunned and suffered temporary partial blinding and deafness. Shrapnel, exposed HE, and unexploded bombs were throughout the area. The remaining personnel were met by ambulances and other emergency vehicles. During the night, there occurred two low order detonations. These consisted of one M-117 bomb each time. The area had been secured and there was no further injuries. The times on the low order detonations were 0335 and 01415.

c. The Investigation

The same night, at approximately 2300, statements were taken from all other personnel involved in the accident and a survey of the area in and around the revetment was started. This survey included an EOD cleanup of the area. Distribution of fragments of HE, intact bombs, and shrapnel was plotted on an area map. Pictures of the damage were taken from a helicopter. Orders were published appointing a formal accident investigating board. The lot numbers of the bombs involved were identified and a random sample of remaining bombs of the suspected lot numbers was taken and held for investigation. A 100% inspection of these lot numbers was carried out without any visible defects being found.

A re-enactment of the events leading up to the incident was carried out in a revetment in the Munitions Storage Area. Two of the personnel who were in the revetment at the time of the original occurrence guided the operation.

The board determined there was no fire prior to the initial detonation. The two eyewitnesses had a clear view of the bombs in question. The liteall and coleman tractor were also in open view and a flash fire at either piece of equipment could not be mistaken for a detonation in the area of the bombs.

The initial detonation was a low order detonation consisting: of two M-117 GP 750 lb bombs that occurred at 2125 local. The detonation started in one bomb on the pallet in question and probably propagated to the other M-117 on the pallet. The second detonation was a high order detonation that occurred at 2132 local. This detonation was a direct result of the initial detonation and was caused by the burning HE and the fire that resulted from the initial detonation.

2. The exact cause of this accident is unknown. A suspected cause was identified and is being reviewed by responsible commanders in their through channels indorsements to the formal report so it is not appropriate to comment on it in this letter.

FOR THE COMMANDER

ROBERT M. HANSEN, Colonel, USAF Inspector General

Gallery of Photos

[Jim and Bob as little boys](#)

[Jim and Tom Francis, Cahokia Illinois, about 1959-60](#)

[Jim and wife Carolyn, 1966](#)

[Jim in Thailand, 1967-1968](#)

[Memorial Bulletin Cover, Korat AFB Chapel, March 16, 1968](#)

[Memorial Bulletin Order of Service, Korat AFB Chapel, March 16, 1968](#)

[Memorial Bulletin Obituary, Korat AFB Chapel, March 16, 1968](#)

[Funeral at McConnell Air Force Base, Wichita, Kansas](#)

[McConnell Air Force Base Funeral Bulletin, Front Side](#)

[McConnell Air Force Base Funeral Bulletin, Inside](#)

[Airman's Medal Official Orders](#)

[Airman's Medal](#)

[Telegraph Notice of Jim's Death, Page One](#)

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