

**Ft. Myers, Virginia
Old Post Chapel
Tribute to Jim Jefferson
Class of 1964 (USAFA)
October 16, 2000**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen; I am Bernie Cooney, a classmate of Jim's from the class of 1964 at the U.S. Air Force Academy, and a fellow Squadron-mate from the 22nd Squadron at the Academy. The last time I saw Jim was on graduation Day in June, 1964, however, his memory remains fresh in my mind and I have received E-mails from many of his classmates in our squadron.

Jim and I enjoyed playing intramural football and rugby together at the Academy in our early years; he went to the fencing team and water polo and I went on to boxing and basketball. I visited Jim's home here in D.C. and met his parents during either a holiday pass through or a University of Maryland-Air Force football game that a group of cadets attended; which one I can't quite remember; I do remember that Col. Jefferson had recently retired from the Army.

Jim's tenure as a cadet was marked by his seeming natural ability to adapt to military life with great ease. We were all envious -- he had -- from the get-go -- outstanding military bearing, posture and a positive attitude that was contagious. He evidenced a determination to excel and a spirit of commitment that made him stand out as a leader; one of Jim's most attractive traits was that he supported other cadets who didn't adapt so easily to military routine and life and he didn't take himself too seriously -- he lead by example,

and as a result he became our Squadron Commander during the Fall Semester of our First Class Year.

He did a great job, and was a hard act to follow for me, who became Squadron Commander in the Spring Semester. To continue to utilize his talents; I had him as our Representative to the Wing Ethics Committee -- which was the beginning of the Academy trying to go beyond the technical requirements of the Honor Code to a broader approach to character development -- something that has come full-blown today with a major emphasis on Character & Value Development.

There is one story about Jim that speaks volumes about his determination; after classes we would drop our books (& slide rules) off in our dorm rooms, and then go out the back of the dorm to the gym to get ready for intramural sports. The stairwells were surrounded by glass and had glass doors and in those days when a strong wind came off the mountains, the glass doors would be locked to prevent them from breaking. Well, Jim was so determined to get to intramurals one afternoon, when he found the glass doors locked, he headed back upstairs and proceeded to jump out a first story window onto the grass -- when he landed he put both hands out and sure enough, fractured both wrists. Well, you can imagine what a field day the upper classmen had with Jim as he tried to maintain a military routine with casts on both wrists -- he must have had to explain how it happened 100 times. Embarrassed he was, but he never let it erode his positive attitude.

Jim's dedication to an Air Force flying career was evidenced when he first failed the eye exam for flight school; he did special eye exercises twice a

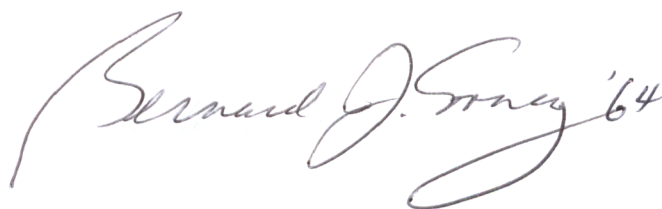
day during his first class year to strengthen his eye muscles so that he could, as he later did, pass the eye exam; after graduation was able to go to flight training.

What is Jim's legacy -- what is the legacy of other Vietnam MIA's that were and are still so long unaccounted for, including Al Trent from our Squadron? I think it is a powerful legacy that resounds today.

During the POW Homecoming in early 1973, I met Col. & Mrs. Jefferson at the Hilton Hotel in Washington. They had come up from Gainesville where they had retired to see if they could learn anything about Jim's whereabouts from the returning POWs. It was a tough time for them. They were happy for the returning POWs and their families, including Tom Browning and Ed Mechenbier from our Squadron. They were very disappointed about Jim. They had pictures of Jim and gave me an article about him that was carried in the Gainesville Sun about one year earlier.

The article spoke about their efforts in the early 70's to make sure there as a full accounting of both the POW's & MIA's as the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam. This, of course, was a harbinger of things to come -- a tremendous outpouring of concern across the county for the MIA's -- I believe servicemen and woman are forever indebted to the Jeffersons for their struggles and for what we, as a nation, have learned about insisting on an immediate accounting for each and every service man and woman lost during service to their country.

May Jim Rest in Peace.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bernard J. Soney '64". The signature is written in dark ink and is located in the bottom right corner of the page.

WAYNE O. JEFFERSON, JR.

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Oct 28, 2000

Dear Bernie,

Thank you so much for honoring Jim with your wonderful remarks at his service at Ft Myer. You spoke so eloquently for your classmates in '64 and from your own heart. You made his memory come alive again with stories we had forgotten or never knew (yes - I remember slide rules, but my kids don't) and we were once again very proud of who he was and what he stood for.

I'm glad that Jean could be there too - I enjoyed meeting her and wished that I had had more time to visit and talk.

Bernie, thanks again for your tribute to Jim. I know he would've been very honored by it and proud that you (and the Class) were there.

Sincerely
Wayne