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## Doc Chester Jones III

Jess Lockhart

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Once I was asked, what was my definition of bravery? I responded that bravery was the act of doing something when you were scared so badly that you were shaking, but you did the job anyway. In combat I knew several brave men. One of whom was my platoon medic Chester Jones III from St. Louis Missouri. Doc Jones and I joined the platoon about the same time. When I first saw Doc Jones I was not impressed. He was a skinny 18-year-old, not mature enough to shave. During OCS we studied tactics and leadership, but the only thing I knew about medics was they could dress wounds. Boy was I ever wrong. While on patrol my platoon's line of progression went: point man, pace count man, me, my RTO, then Doc Jones. He was never more than 10 feet away from me.

When we made contact and if someone was wounded, I would start crawling forward with my RTO and Doc right behind my RTO. Less than a month after I took over the platoon, we were walking point for the company and my point man walked into a VC ambush. AK-47 rounds were popping around us like bees. My point man was shot in the left shoulder. He was yelling in pain but was tucked in safely behind a log. When Doc arrived and started dressing the wound, the point man raised up and was shot in the head. This was our first KIA and Doc Jones always thought my point man would have lived if only the man had listened to him. The company pulled back for the night and the next day we found out it was a battalion-size VC element with interlocking bunkers. Had we had not stopped, the VC would have chewed us up and definitely killed more than one man. That afternoon was Doc Jones' first time in action; he passed with flying colors.

The platoon took this high-school-looking boy under their wing and at the first opportunity they took him to the village to get him drunk and laid. Doc's personality was never

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the same afterwards. Doc had become a veteran tested under fire as he transformed from a boy to a man.

Medics held a revered position in the platoon. Not only did they patch you up when wounded, they also gave out penicillin when you caught a bug from the locals. My medic was exempt from all platoon details such as guard duty or anything else handed down. Technically they were not assigned to me—they were assigned to the Battalion Aide Group—but they slept, ate, and shared stories with the platoon. Our medics were only assigned in combat roles for six months. Afterwards they went back in the Battalion Aide Station for the remainder of their tour. In my company the medic was the only person that could initiate paperwork for a soldier to be awarded a Purple Heart. Doc Jones did not put you in for a Purple Heart for a scratch.

As I stated, medics were some of the bravest men in a combat situation. They proudly wear a Combat Medical Badge like grunts that wear the Combat Infantry Badge (CIB) that can only be awarded in a combat MOS. When you see a veteran wearing a CMB give him the respect he earned.

When we were preparing to go on a mission, I would call for a platoon formation to see that the men had all the equipment that the mission required. Doc Jones stood at the rear with his medical supplies, plus his food for seven days, two quarts of water, and looked like vagabond. I don't know what was in those bags he carried but he never ran out of supplies when needed. Unlike Hollywood medics Doc Jones did not wear a red cross emblem to distinguish himself as a medic, this would have made him a primary target for snipers.

Most medics didn't carry rifles because they didn't have time to use them but one evening as we set up for an ambush, I looked over at Doc Jones and saw a rifle that he had been carrying. The ammo was so dirty that I don't think he could have fired two or three rounds

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without having a jam. When I asked why he carried the dirty rifle and ammo his only comment was it helped him sleep at night. I just chuckled to myself. That was the last mission he carried a weapon. The platoon was very protective of our medics. One time the point platoon walked into an ambush and their medic was shot so they radioed back to have our medic sent forward. I responded “no,” not until the air strikes and artillery fire had subdued.

Doc Jones and I were taken out of the field at the same time. I became the company XO and Doc Jones was reassigned to the BN Aide Station. Doc would come around to see me periodically to check on the platoon’s status, they were still his boys.

My platoon became a tight group after all we went through. We have a reunion every two years during the last weekend in July. Doc Jones never comes to the reunions. When I asked back in the mid-nineties why he wasn’t there, I was told he had to look after his mom. Later his mom died, and Doc still didn’t attend the reunions. We had a reunion one year in Kansas and my RTO and I met Doc and his wife for lunch. Doc told me he had too many bad memories to attend the reunions. I asked Doc if he’d thought about going to medical school. He said he tried to go to school but, again, too many bad memories. He now lives in St. Louis, MO, and runs the impound yard that your car is towed to when picked up off the street. So, if your car is ever towed in St. Louis ask for Doc Jones and he will give you a break.