



Atlantic Beach  
"Signs of Honor"



Vietnam War

LT James F. Thames (left)  
*United States Navy*



Captain Rexwood S. Thames  
(right)  
*United States Marines*



## *Men of Honor raised in Atlantic Beach, FL*

Mr. Rexwood Simpson Thames Sr. was married to Charlotte Edwards Thames and were raising four children in Atlantic Beach: Rexwood Jr. (Rex), James (Jim), Rozann, and David. A resident of the beaches since 1945, Thames Sr. was unanimously selected as an Atlantic Beach City Councilman on Sept 12, 1949, and served the city until March 13, 1956. He was an early member of the Beaches Rotary Club, the Navy League, and a charter member of the Beaches Area Historical Society. Charlotte taught in public and private schools in the Beaches area, teaching kindergarten, primary grades, home bound high school, and special education. She was a charter member of Jean Ribault Chapter, NSDAR.

R.S. Thames Sr., a well-known home builder in Atlantic Beach, building many homes still standing, including their family home, he built at 377 2nd Street. The family attended nearby Community Presbyterian Church, their children attended Atlantic Beach Elementary School, all learned to swim at the Atlantic Beach Hotel swimming pool and were active within the beaches community. Rex and Jim were safety patrols at Atlantic Beach Elementary School, they were members of the local cub scout/boy scout troops, their mother Charlotte was den mother for their cub scout troop.

Rex and Jim were both selected to leadership positions and served as class officers throughout their years at Fletcher High School. Rex was honored as Most Outstanding Sr. Boy and voted "Most Popular" boy in Fletcher Class of 1959, he also played football and ran track while Jim, Class of 1961, played football and excelled at swimming.

Rex and Jim were members of the American Red Cross Volunteer Lifesaving Corps' summer recruit class in 1958, Jim listed his age as 16 on the entry form. He was 15 at the time, which apparently wasn't a well-kept secret. Jim Thames went on to win the Meninak Ocean Marathon Swim 4 times.

"We all knew Jim was 15," said Harold Mills, a 1958 winter recruit, "but we needed him and wanted him."

Jim Thames, Class of 1961, a powerful swimmer at Fletcher High in the late 1950s and early 1960s, was arguably the toughest swimmer, mentally and physically.

The Senators were state runners-up in 1960 and 1961 and the powerfully built Jim Thames was the squad's No. 1 butterflyer.

"He was almost unbeatable," recalled his former coach, Wimpy Sutton. "You could always count on him. He didn't have any bad meets. He was important enough that I would pick him up and carry him home from practice."

Rex left college to pursue his dream of becoming a US Marine Corps Aviator. He joined the Marine Corps and after completing Officer Candidate School and Flight Training School, he was quickly assigned to a tour in Vietnam. He was assigned to Marine Attack Squadron 214 conducting attack missions from Chu Lai Marine Base in Vietnam from 1965 until late 1966.

Captain Rexwood S. Thames Jr. was a highly decorated aviator, he flew A-4 Skyhawk jets during his 128 combat missions in Vietnam. Amongst his numerous awards, he earned three Air Medals and a nomination for the Distinguished Flying Cross.

On Christmas Eve 1966, shortly after returning home from his tour in Vietnam, Rex along with his future father in law (Commander of Marine Corps Air Station Base of Beaufort, SC) and one other all drowned during a boating accident in Beaufort, SC. He was to be married the following week. Rex was 25 years old.

Captain Rexwood S. Thames Jr. is memorialized at the H. Warren Smith Memorial Cemetery in Jacksonville Beach, Florida and forever remembered on the Jacksonville Veterans Memorial Wall.

Jim Thames joined the United States Navy and completed Officer Candidate School in 1967. His passion for swimming, especially long distances, made him a prime candidate for the Navy's highly specialized guerrilla warfare unit, code-named SEALs. The acronym stands for sea, air, and land. SEALs had been successfully operating in South Vietnam since 1965.

Eight months after joining the elite SEALs, Jim was ticketed to Vietnam, the ultimate proving ground for a combat swimmer.

Jim served with Seal Team One and Seal Team Two, he served 2 tours in Vietnam.

On January 19, 1971, during his second tour in Vietnam, LT. James F. Thames, as a member of Seal Team One, his unit was engaged by a North Vietnamese rocket attack. The deadly river ambush in the Mekong Delta cost LT Jim Thames his life at age 27.

“The Light SEAL Support Craft (LSSC) in which Thames was embarked was hit by two B-40 rockets, the explosion damaged the craft badly, knocked several personnel overboard, and killed both Thames and two LDNN (South Vietnamese SEALs).” Jim was the first SEAL fatality of 1971 and the 45th of 49 SEALs killed in Vietnam.

LT. James Franklin Thames is buried at the H. Warren Smith Memorial Cemetery in Jacksonville Beach, Florida and forever remembered on the Vietnam Memorial Wall on Panel 5W Line 57 and the Jacksonville Veterans Memorial Wall.

LT. James F. Thames awards include:

- ★ 2 Bronze Stars with Valor
- ★ 2 Purple Hearts
- ★ Combat Action Ribbon
- ★ Presidential Unit Citation
- ★ National Defense Service Medal
- ★ Vietnam Service Medal with 3 Bronze Stars
- ★ Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal

**Rex & Jim Thames “Signs of Honor” Sponsor ~ Jean Ribault Chapter, NSDAR**

Refs:

<https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/51488/JAMES-F-THAMES/>

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/76415314/rexwood-simpson-thames>

~ Johnny Woodhouse

~ Zann Thames Williams and David Thames

~ COAB City Council Meeting Minutes 1949-1956

~ Florida Times Union

~ Beaches Leader

~Beaches Museum

~Jacksonville Historical Society

*\* Many thanks to Johnny Woodhouse for sharing the amazing stories he wrote for the Beaches Leader and for keeping the memories of our local veterans who paid the ultimate sacrifice alive and never to be forgotten.*

*\* A heartfelt thanks to Zann Thames Williams and David Thames for sharing the wonderful stories and pictures of their hero brothers.*

*\* Thanks to our Mayor and Atlantic Beach Commissioners for their unwavering support of our Beaches Veterans Memorial Park and all veterans throughout the area.*

*\* A special thanks to Sherry Saucerman, Regent along with the entire Jean Ribault Chapter, NSDAR for their support and sponsorship of many of the “Signs of Honor” for our local beach heroes.*

*\* Much thanks to the Beaches Veterans Memorial Park Committee, American Legion Posts 316 & 129 and VFW 3270 for their tireless efforts to ensure all veterans and their families are never forgotten.*

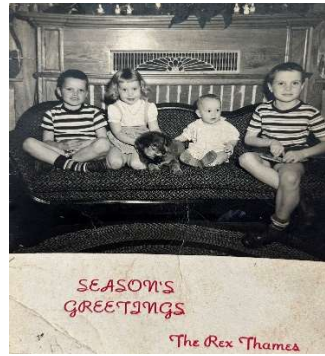
*\* A big thanks to John Graham of Florida Transcor Inc. and his creative crew for helping make this program a reality by designing and creating these beautiful Signs of Honor!*



"Captain Rex"



Rex, Zann, Jim



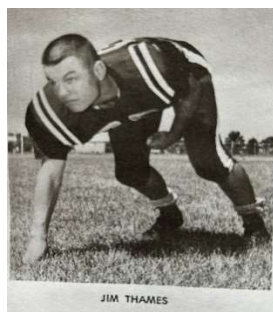
Jim, Zann, David, Rex



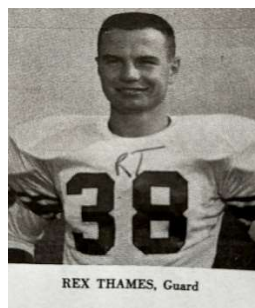
Jim @ Fletcher HS



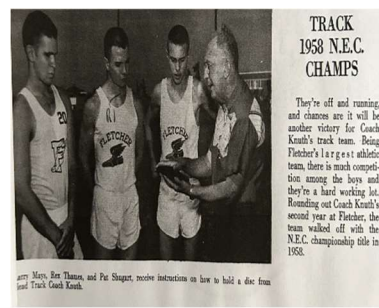
Jim after 4<sup>th</sup> Meniak  
Congratulated by his  
mother, Charlotte



Jim  
Fletcher Football  
Team



Rex  
Fletcher Football  
Team



Rex listening to  
Fletcher Track Coach Knuth  
1958 N.E.C. Track Champs



Fletcher Class of 1961 – Class Officers  
Vice President Jim Thames  
(second from left)



Fletcher Class of 1959  
Most Popular Boy  
Rex Thames

