

# **James A. Swenson '57**

Died: 5/16/2020

will be interred at: Bay Pines National Cemetery (future internment due to closing)

James "Jim" Arnold Swenson was born at Ft.Riley, Kansas, the son of Corporal Arnold Swenson, a Norwegian immigrant, and Lillian May (Butts) Swenson. His only sibling, his younger sister, Sandra and he grew up as "Army brats", as his family moved from Army Post to Army Post with each of his Dad's new assignments. His Dad served with the fledgling Army Air Corps, the horse cavalry and Armored Cavalry, and as an Ordnance Officer in WWII in both the European and Pacific Theaters. Jim always knew that his life career would be as a soldier because of his experiences in and around the Army from his Dad's assignments with the 13th Cavalry at Ft.Riley, KS, through the Armored Cavalry at Ft.Knox, KY, Army OCS at Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD, and postings to the Black Hills Ordnance Depot at Igloo, SD, Ft.Shafter, HI, and Ft.Douglas in Salt Lake City, UT. He liked to say that when he was born he had "U.S. Army" branded on his rump.

Jim moved through more than fifteen schools, (five of them High Schools) before he graduated from East High School in Salt Lake City, UT. Three months after graduation from East High School he enlisted in the Army. Basic training at Camp Gordon, GA in the Signal Corps was followed by training as a Radio Repairman at Ft.Monmouth, NJ. He aspired to get a commission as an officer one way or another, signing up for Army OCS, and planning to get enough financial and experience credits to enter college ROTC after his first hitch. In 1952 his unit First Sergeant, aware of these aspirations, "volunteered" him to be a candidate for the USMA Preparatory School at Stewart Air Force Base in Newburgh, NY. Jim received an Army competitive appointment there while attending USMA Prep, and he was also offered two Congressional appointments from Senators from Utah, which he accepted. Struggling with the mathematics program at USMA Prep, and aware the he stood little chance of winning an Army competitive appointment, he chose to resign from the Prep School and focus on OCS and ROTC. Although it was 1952 and anticipated being posted to the war zone in Korea, he was assigned to Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) in Hollywood, CA as an Electronic Recording Equipment Repairman. While at AFRS he received notification that he was eligible to take the West Point

entrance exams at March AFB, CA. Jim entered USMA on a first alternate Senatorial appointment with the Class of 1957 in July 1953.

While Jim, or "Swede" as he was known to his classmates, didn't exactly enjoy Plebe year at WP, he adjusted well, with characteristic humor, he volunteered in many activities, including KDET (The Cadet radio station), Plebe football and lacrosse, The Pointer cadet magazine and various "art" projects. He spent many late hours cramming for academics, especially during his first two years. He was selected for Cadet Corporal in his Cow year and as Cadet Captain Company Commander of Company A-1 First class year. He was on the Class Ring Committee, the First Class Committee and the Art Editor of the "Pointer".

Upon graduation, Jim went Infantry, his first love. He always said that the other branches and the Air Force and the Navy were all good supporting elements to the Infantry, "The Queen of Battle". Infantry Basic Course, Airborne and Ranger Schools prepared him for his first assignments. However, before he left for his initial assignment with the 502d Airborne of the 11th Airborne Division, he persuaded a beautiful southern belle, Linda Lu Frith of Tampa, FL, to marry him in April of 1958. After their marriage at MacDill AFB in Tampa, FL and a short honeymoon, they headed for Munich, Germany for three years where the first of their four sons (James, John, Mark, and Matthew) was born.

Jim always viewed all of his assignments as exciting and challenging. He served as Platoon Leader, Company Commander, unit Executive Officer, S-2 and S-3 and Instructor, as well as a Military Adviser twice in Vietnam. He served as a MACV ARVN Battalion Adviser during his first tour in 1964/1965. His team consisted of only himself and his NCO Adviser/Radio Operator. During this tour their location was on the edge of War Zone D near Phouc Vinh, VN. His second tour was in 1967/1968 as the MACV Senior Advisor to the District Chief of the District surrounding Danang, Hoa Vang District. His favorite assignments were as XO of the 5th Special Forces Group, and Battalion Commander of the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion, when it was the only CA Battalion in the active Army. He attended the Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth, KS, and received his MBA and Comptroller Sheepskins from Syracuse University, NY. He was Comptroller and G-1 at the JFK Center for Military Assistance at Ft. Bragg, NC. He was Budget Chief in the office of DCSRM, USARUER and 7th Army, Comptroller at MTMC Western Area, Oakland Army, CA,

and Comptroller/DCSRM and Chief of Staff at the Reserve Component Personnel Administration Center (RCPAC), St. Louis, MO.

Jim retired as a Colonel in 1984 and Linda and he migrated to Tampa, Florida, their starting point almost three decades earlier. During his military career he was awarded The Legion of Merit, three Bronze Stars (One with a V device), a Purple Heart, Two Meritorious Commendation Medals, an Army Commendation Medal, an Army Good Conduct Medal, a Parachute Badge, a Combat Infantry Badge, an Expert Infantry Badge, a Ranger Tab, a Special Forces Tab, and several foreign (VN) medals for service and gallantry.