

Holloman AFB, NM

August 26th, 1985

Recollection and Memory of SSgt. Roy Rector (now legally Roy Rivers)

Somewhere around mid 1984 I cross-trained from the Supply career field into Integrated Avionics supporting F-15 fighter jets. After completing my training, again at Lowry AFB, I transferred to Holloman AFB, NM.

My sponsor when I arrived at Holloman was another very kind hearted Staff Sergeant named Joe Thomas. Joe was also assigned to the same shop I would be working in. He was quiet and reserved. Very well mannered and professional. I would join him and another Staff Sergeant named Tracy Rector as the three of us, Joe, Tracy and myself would be working together as the three supervisors on night shift in the Manual Test Station shop. We would rotate our supervision between the three sections of the shop. Namely the Indicators and Controls, Communication and Navigation, and Radar Sections.

We seemed to ALWAYS be on alert, working 12 hour shifts in full Chemical Warfare suits. The heat was extreme in those suits! The morale in our section would seemingly go through dips that matched up with the amount of time we were on alert.

One day I learned that Joe was not at work because he was in the hospital. He had attempted suicide by slitting his wrists. I don't know the details, except I seem to remember hearing that he had realized he was in trouble and had called the hospital himself to report it. To my understanding, he was being treated at the Psyche Ward of the base hospital. I remember being struck that he was back at work within just 5 or 7 days after the incident took place. I might be wrong on the exact number of days, but I know we all felt that it was really quick. I didn't ask him about it when he came back to work in the shop, but I was there when one of my troops asked him about it and Joe unbuttoned his long sleeves and showed us where his stitches had been removed.

It wasn't a long time after this incident that Joe disappeared. He went AWOL and we were all very worried for him. None of us were given any indication from him that he was having any recurring problems.

Joe had been AWOL for about 30 days as I remember. As I lived off-base in the city of Alamogordo, it was my custom to carry my lunch to work with me, as I did on the night that the incident I'm about to tell you about. For some reason however, on this particular night, I talked with Tracy and told him that I was going to go home for lunch instead. Tracy was fine with that, so I left. I think I left at 7pm and planned to be gone for an hour. It was a 20 minute drive from the shop to my home. I made it there and ate lunch quickly, explaining to my wife that I didn't know why I decided to come home for such a quick lunch. I could only afford to stay for 20 minutes if I was to be back on time, however I only stayed for 10 minutes and was back on my way to the shop.

As I came back to the base, the gate guards were mobilizing and shutting the gate behind me. I knew something was going on, and I guessed that a new ALERT had been called.

As I neared the shop there were emergency lights flashing everywhere. An ambulance was there and they were just getting someone loaded in. There was still mass confusion going on, and as I hurried into the building I overheard someone yelling that someone was shot. Something was said about they still didn't know where the shooter was. Another minute later as I entered the shop, we were in lockdown and were told that the shooter had fled and a search was underway. There was blood everywhere in the office. My heart almost stopped when I learned that Tracy had been shot and it was real bad.

In those first few moments after I arrived there was already someone yelling my name, as both Tracy and myself had the last name of Rector. There were security police everywhere it seemed and all of us were instructed to go into the shop and account for everyone and wait for instructions.

It was there I learned that Joe had come back from being AWOL and had walked in on Tracy and Joni, one of our co-workers (they were on an Autovon call). According to Joni, in that first moment, Joe had asked her where Merle Rusaw (another supervisor) was. Joni jumped off the call and said she would go get him. She immediately exited the office, entering the hallway, and then entered the "Auto's" shop across the hall. Joe calmly put his briefcase on the desk in front of Tracy and pulled out a handgun, and shot Tracy twice at close range. Once in the chest and once in the face.

Upon hearing two "pops", one of my airmen in the shop opened the door to the office and caught Joe off guard. In that instant, he saw Joe with the gun. As Joe made an effort to grab the door, the airman pulled the door closed and held it so Joe could not enter the shop. It was a very heavy steel door. That act of quick thinking likely saved many lives that night.

As word from the security police and OSI came in, there was a lot of shock and fear that set in to all of us. We didn't know where Joe was, we didn't know if we were all still in danger as Joe had seemingly gotten away.

Our Shop Chief, MSSgt. Fred Smith came in at some point and directed me to get a couple of airmen and get the blood cleaned up, as photos and the initial investigation had been done. It was just a terrible job. One that these days would probably be done by people in HazMat suits. We had buckets, paper towels and mops.

The next morning it was revealed to us in the shop that Joe's car had been found up against a fence on the base golf course. He had hurriedly pulled up to the fence, jumped on top of his car, jumped the fence, and had escaped into the open desert. In the front seat of his car was a detailed plan for how he was going to go into the shop and mass murder as many people as he could. As he didn't know whether Tracy or Myself would be the one in the front office, he had made two lists of the first people he

was going to kill. Tracy was the first person on one list, and I was the first person on the other list. This information absolutely set in with a horrific reality. There were over a dozen people on each list. He was just going to kill as many people as he could. He planned every bit of it, including his escape route, which was correct with the location of where his car was found.

Of course, we were all extremely worried that Tracy would die. He somehow pulled through and was later medically discharged. I remember talking to my wife Nancy about all the shock of the events. We, along with everyone on the list were afraid for our own lives. Joe had never been to my home in Alamogordo, but he had been to the homes of several people on the list who lived on the base. The base police provided protection services to those living on the base, as everyone was literally quaking in their boots about whether they were being watched or targeted.

A newspaper article (attached) that also outlines some of the information, appeared in the Alamogordo newspaper a couple of days after the attack.

I have struggled with the images of that night and the tremendous fear that I felt. I can still vividly smell the metallic scent of Tracy's blood. It just seemed like so much blood. I didn't know how Tracy was going to live through it. I remember the look of the water as we wringed out the blood. Coming back into the shop was never the same for me. These many years later I still have a hard time with blood. I can't watch movies that depict blood loss, without replaying the events of that night over and over. Immediately after seeing something like that, or even talking about it, I can also see Tracy's face... from the first time seeing and talking to him after his initial surgeries. Even that image in my mind is hard to remember.

Supervisor and Co-workers

MSgt. Fred Smith  
SSgt. Tracy Rector  
Brian and Joni Cline  
Merle Rusaw

# Suspect found dead

## Connected with base shooting

Alamogordo Daily News Staff

The search for a man wanted in connection with a shooting at Holloman Air Force Base Monday evening, ended last night when he was found dead at Oliver Lee State Park, the consequences of a self-inflicted bullet wound.

The search for SSgt. Joseph Cleveland Thomas, Jr., 27, 1401 Aspen Dr. No. 5, Alamogordo, by Holloman Air Force Base military police and the Otero County Sheriff's Department, ended when his body was found at campsite 20 in the Oliver Lee State Park. The body has been sent to William Beaumont Hospital in El Paso for an autopsy.

According to military sources, SSgt. Tracy Rector of the 49th Component Repair Squadron, Holloman AFB, was shot Monday evening while at Building 823. Rector was shot twice, once in the head and once in the chest. SSgt. Thomas left the base in his vehicle, which was later found at the West gate. A search was conducted of the base by Military Police unsuccessfully.

The body was found by Eldred Nelson, a park ranger at the state park, after he had been notified by Otero County Deputy Dennis Brown, that the suspect in a base shooting incident had been seen in that area.

At the present time there is no information as to what prompted the shooting at Holloman.

The first report of Thomas's whereabouts came when Sgt. Wetzel of HAFB called the Sheriff's office around 8:30 p.m. saying he had seen a black male wearing fatigues walking up Dog Canyon. Deputy Dennis Brown searched the area but was unable to locate Thomas, and then notified the Park Rangers that he might be in that area, and Nelson found the body around 11 p.m.

SSgt. Rector was taken from the Holloman Base Hospital after the shooting to William Beaumont Hospital in El Paso.

Charles Bowers, public affairs officer at Beaumont, said that Rector is in the trauma unit and is listed in stable condition.