Jim Hottenroth was not your typical Aggie. Jim was born in Brooklyn, NY and raised on Staten Island just a ferryboat ride from the southern tip of Manhattan Island. Jim’s father was a firefighter with the Staten Island Fire Department. Jim attended Tottenville High School where he lettered in Baseball and Band.

Although he did well in baseball, music was Jim’s first and foremost love. At an early age, Jim learned to play the trumpet and play it well. In high school he formed a three-piece band that played for dances, bar mitzvahs, and family reunions.

In September 1960, about the time Jim left for College Station, his father retired, sold their house, and moved to California. Jim’s younger brother, Bob, reports that the family did not see much of Jim for the next four years.

Why would a young, very talented trumpet player from Staten Island enroll at Texas A&M? His father was not an Aggie and we have no indication that any uncles were Aggies. From the story that Jim, told it was clear that his method used to select Texas A&M was far from scientific:

“When it came time for college, my parents told me to go see the school counselor. As I was sitting in the counselor’s office, I started thumbing through a book about colleges... my random thumbing of the book had stopped on a page with a picture of a band in a “T” formation. The counselor asked “Okay, so that’s where you want to go?” I nodded yes... and had no idea what I was getting into.”

Jim Hottenroth ‘64

Jim reported to Texas A&M in early September 1960 and was assigned to the Maroon Band. We could not determine which academic major Jim initially declared as a freshman, however the consensus opinion is that he began in one of the engineering disciplines. We know that Jim changed his major to English during his junior year and that is the major shown in the 1964 edition of the Aggieland.
While at Texas A&M (Continued)...

Jim wasted no time coming to the forefront, even as a freshman. Jim’s natural ability as a leader and his trumpet skills were obvious to the upperclassmen of the Maroon Band. Even with these talents and skills, Jim experienced many of the same homesick feelings that we all did at some point in our Fish year. In Jim’s case, his ability with the trumpet may have “bought” some protection.

One afternoon soon after I arrived, I was feeling extra sorry for myself and began to play my trumpet. Col Adams stuck his head in my room and after an initial frown began to smile. I learned later he told several band seniors that if I ever left the band, they would also be gone.”

Jim Hottenroth ‘64

It should be no surprise that Colonel Adams got his wish and “several band seniors” did not have to leave. Jim continued to excel in music and leadership roles. Like most freshmen and sophomores, Jim played in the Drum and Bugle Corps, marching us to Duncan or Sbisa for meals. He also did dance gigs with the Aggieland Orchestra. By the end of his sophomore year, it was obvious to Colonel Adams and the cadet leadership in the band that Jim Hottenroth had exceptional skills. At Mother’s Day 1962, Jim was honored as the Outstanding Sophomore in the Maroon Band.

A “Serge Butt” in the Band...

At the 1962 Final Review, Jim put on the comfortable serge wool uniforms that were the privilege of a Junior in the Corps and quickly assumed the duties of First Sergeant, responsible for all sophomores and fish in a unit of over 130 bandsmen.

In early October, Jim and four of his classmates in the band received the traditional “letter under the door”, announcing that they were selected for membership in the Ross Volunteer Company, the honor guard to the Governor of Texas. In February, Jim and the RVs made the traditional trip to New Orleans for the Mardi Gras Parade where thousands of Cajuns along the parade route told the RV’s to “Smile! It’s Carnival!”, although in most cases their New Orleans accents made it sound like “Connival” instead.

The Commander of the Maroon Band...

At the 1963 Final Review, Jim Hottenroth pulled on his new Senior Boots and took command of the Maroon Band. Thus, began an exciting and eventful year for Jim, for the Band, and for Texas A&M. When classes began in September, for the first time Texas A&M was a co-ed school. Following the tradition in those days, the Aggie football team had an unimpressive 2-5-1 record that year, but as always, the Fight’n Texas Aggie Band finished with a perfect 10-0 record for football half-times. Sadly, in November Jim was honored to be one of the bugles that played Silver Taps for President John F. Kennedy.
Jim’s Maroon Band First Sergeant that year was Sonny Kretzchmar ‘65. Sonny has a folder full of memories of that year, but one of the best is also one of the simplest.

Jim had a habit of rocking up on his toes as I saluted and gave him the First Sergeant’s report. On one occasion, my mischievous tendencies made it necessary for me to do like Jim would and also rock up on my toes as I saluted and reported: “All Present and Accounted For, Sir!”

“Come by!” was Jim’s reply. Spit shined shoes were the result.

At Texas A&M, the Fightin’ Texas Aggie Band is really just another unit in the Corps of Cadets, given the additional duty of playing musical instruments. In 1964 it consisted of the Maroon Band, traditionally an artillery battery, and the White Band, traditionally an infantry company, each consisting of about 130 members with musical instruments apportioned appropriately. At times during the year, each band performed separately, as during basketball or baseball games. But during football season, or Corps parades or reviews, the Combined Band performed with both units. Jim Hottenroth, as CO of the Maroon Band had a position coveted throughout the Corps of Cadets as the leader of his unit, the same as a company or squadron commander in other Corps units. He was joined in the military leadership of the Fightin’ Texas Aggie Band by George Reese, CO of the White Band, and Jim Morgan, Combined Band CO. The musical leaders were Wayne Noster, standing at 6’5” the epitome of a Head Drum Major, the Maroon Band Drum Major, Bobby Ridley, and the White Band Drum Major, David Creech. They never lost a Half-time!

The 1964 Fighting Texas Aggie Band Drum Majors and Bugle Rank
Jim’s senior year also appears to have been a personal success. His decision to change his major to English paid dividends and his command performed admirably. At the annual Mother’s Day awards ceremony, the Combined Band took the Best Drilled award, as they often did.

Perhaps the highlight of the Mother’s Day festivities was the traditional flower pinning ceremony. All units in The Corps held a ceremony with the mother of the unit commander pinning a flower on each cadet in the company or squadron. The 1964 ceremony for the Maroon Band was extra special because Jim’s mother, Mrs. Jacquelyn Hottenroth, flew in from California to do the pinning. Surprisingly, this was Mrs. Hottenroth’s first visit to Texas A&M.
**Graduation, Commissioning, and Lieutenant’s Training...**

Jim graduated in May 1965 with a BA Degree in English and was immediately commissioned in the United States Air Force. He received his navigator training at Mather AFB in northern California. After pinning on his navigator wings, Jim was told his first aircraft would be the C-130 Hercules.

**The Lockheed C-130 Hercules**

It is unlikely that any member of the original Lockheed C-130 design team realized in the early 1950’s that the aircraft they would develop and produce would be so effective, so useful, and so adaptable that it would be in continuous production for more than sixty years.

When the C-130 entered service in 1956, it was the first military air transport aircraft to use turboprop engines to give it the power, speed and range needed by our tactical forces. The airplane was originally designed to use unprepared runways for takeoffs and landings as a troop carrier and as a medical evacuation and cargo transport aircraft.

Later, the versatile airframe was modified for other roles, including as a gunship, for airborne assault, search and rescue, photo recon, scientific research support, weather recon, aerial refueling, maritime patrol, and aerial fire-fighting.

After sixty years, it remains the main tactical airlifter for many military forces worldwide. More than forty variants of the Hercules operate in more than 60 nations.

The C-130 can carry raw payload of 45,000 lbs., (92 passengers or 64 airborne troops or 74 litter patients). Vehicle capacity includes two or three Humvees or two M113 armored personnel carriers. Carrying these loads, the C-130 can cruise at 336 mph out to a max range of 2,360 miles. With a carefully managed tactical load of 155,000 pounds, the C-130 needs only 1,400 ft of tactical runway to get airborne.
Lieutenant Hottenroth, Reporting for Duty, Sir!

In September 15, 1966, Lieutenant James R. Hottenroth, USAF, reported for duty with the 776th Troop Carrier Squadron, stationed at Ching Chuan Kang (CCK) Air Base, Republic of China. The base was located in Taichung, Taiwan, about 75 Miles southwest of the Taiwanese capital, Taipei, and 975 miles northeast of Danang, Vietnam.

From early 1967, the 776th operated in direct support of the growing war in Vietnam. To do this, the squadron deployed teams of up to three aircraft to “bed-down” at one of the major cargo ports – Danang, Nha Trang, or Tan Son Nhut – for 17 days. The teams would return to CCK for three days of rest before returning to Vietnam.

Jim’s squadron of C-130’s would deliver just about anything that troops needed - supplies, rations, fuel, and an occasional replacement soldier who was always welcome. The destination was almost always a marginally improved landing strip, just long enough for safe landing and takeoff. If conditions permitted, the C-130s could land and unload. When that was not possible, the delivery would be made by parachute or low-level extraction of the load. Places like Pleiku, Dak To, or Khe Sanh were frequent destinations.

Lieutenant Hottenroth Takes a Wife...

From the time he arrived in Taiwan in October 1966, Jim was very busy either preparing for or executing the delivery missions described above. Judging from the number of Air Medals he received, Jim must have flown at least 100 combat support missions in the six or seven months just before he was killed.

During the three days between deployments, it appears that Jim was able to establish a healthy social schedule and meet some impressive people at CCK Airbase. One person, a young woman named Woo Syar Juang, must have been very impressive. On August 10, 1967 Jim and Woo Syar Juang were married with American Vice Consul Clifton C. Stanley, Jr. as the official witness.

Jim must have seen Woo Syar Juang as a cute, intelligent, and very polished young lady. She was the daughter of a Taiwanese general, so it is likely that she was well-educated and socially-skilled.

On the other hand, Jim was equally impressive. He was a tall, “good-looking son-of-a-gun” who by day flew off into harm’s way, while at night he could blow hot jazz on his horn and lay on the charm. It is no stretch of the imagination to say that these two were made for each other.
Meanwhile, the war in Vietnam changing. In the Autumn of 1967, American leadership in Vietnam received intelligence reports that the People’s Army of North Vietnam (PAVN) (aka: the NVA) was building its strength in the area around the Marine Base at Khe Sanh. U.S. commanders recognized the geographic importance of the US Marine base and began to suspect that Khe Sanh would soon be the target of an attack.

In response, the US Commander in Vietnam, General William Westmoreland, gave the order for Operation Scotland, a plan to build up the defenses at this key location. During October and November, 1967, Operation Scotland increased the Marine garrison to about 6,000, stockpiled ammunition, and refurbished the runway.

The Khe Sanh runway played a significant role in the survival of the Marine base. At the peak of the operation in early 1968, C-130s and heavy lift helicopters delivered an average of 155 tons of fuel, food, ammunition, and building material to the base each day. The cargo came from air bases at Tan Son Nhut (Saigon) and Bien Hoa in the south, and the nearby airlift depot at Da Nang, only a 30-minute flight from Khe Sanh.

The Khe Sanh Approach- “A Very Dangerous Place to Land”

The terrain around the base, combined with any enemy anti-aircraft and small arms fire around Khe Sanh, made every landing an adventure. In bad weather, aircraft approaching the Khe Sanh runway from the east could be guided all the way to touchdown by a Ground Controlled Approach (GCA) system. Unfortunately, the eastern end of the runway could be vulnerable to intense groundfire, either coming or going.

If the eastern approach was not available, a C-130 would make a high pass over the base, make a steeply banked turn to a diving, downwind approach that, with skill and courage, would put the aircraft on the western end of the runway. There was less groundfire on this end of the base, but the terrain made this diving approach necessary.
Mission 41 to Khe Sanh - October 15, 1967

On the morning of October 15, 1967, Jim’s C-130 (Tail Number: 64-0548; Call Sign: TERM 18) departed Tuy Hoa Air Base on a mission that included two or three air-drops on the bases at Lang Vei and Khe Sanh. Weather was an issue that day. Small, fast-moving, tropical rain showers could reduce a pilot’s visibility to zero in an instant. In these conditions, TERM 18 was able to complete only one drop at Lang Vei before recovered to Da Nang to pick up a bulk load of empty sandbags to be dropped “free fall” to the Marines at Khe Sanh. TERM 18 departed Da Nang with this new load at 1245 hrs.

The weather had worsened when Jim’s aircraft arrived in the vicinity of Khe Sanh. The heavy rain showers were moving fast across the hills around the base, forcing TERM 18 to use Ground Controlled Approach (GCA) to reach the drop zone. The first approach was terminated at 7 miles and 4,000 feet when weather went below minimums. TERM 18 moved to a holding pattern.

After about 30 minutes, the weather improved slightly, and TERM 18 tried another GCA. The aircraft was proceeding with a normal approach and was within ½ mile of the Drop Zone when something went wrong.

The GCA controller told the C-130 they were slightly below glide path and very near the DZ. At that point, TERM 18 told GCA they could not see the DZ. Seconds later, at exactly 1405 hrs, TERM 18 impacted 150 feet short of the runway and proceeded to bounce and skid 800 feet down the runway.

Notification of Next of Kin....

We have no information describing how or when the next of kin of the TERM 18 crew were notified of the crash or the death of their loved one. Six crewmembers, including Jim, had died in the crash. The only survivor, the pilot, suffered serious injuries.

It is conceivable that four or five of the crew members had families back on Taiwan at CCK Air Base. There is no doubt that news of the crash was relayed back to the squadron headquarters at CCK, and word of the crash spread quickly.

On October 16th a Casualty Affairs Officer went to Jim’s quarter to notify his new bride. Notes of his first visit suggest that Woo Syar Juang had already learned of Jim’s Death.
An Air Force Lawyer... and an Aggie Buddy...

Air Force Captain John Ed Hilliard, TAMC Class of ’64, reported to Norton AFB in the Autumn of 1967. Earlier that year, John had finished Law School at “that school over in Austin”. After the short orientation course for Air Force lawyers, John arrived at Norton AFB eager to serve - just like every young officer at his first assignment.

Unfortunately, John’s enthusiasm was dampened by what was happening 9,000 miles across the Pacific. By the Autumn of 1967, the Vietnam war was building to the crescendo that would come in 1968. John’s Aggie buddies were already fully involved. Vic Thompson from Hellcat 7 was shot down in March of ’67 and listed as MIA. Several of John’s Air Force buddies were already stacking up combat missions in the air over Southeast Asia, and some of his “ground pounder” classmates were deep in the triple canopy jungle of Viet Nam.

John was deeply saddened when, in October, he learned that his classmate and buddy, Jim Hottenroth, was dead. John and Jim developed a strong friendship their senior year when they enrolled in a course that met in the Academic Building just before lunch.

Any regret or guilt John may have felt would quickly evaporate and his sense of purpose would strengthen during his first few days at Norton. Sometime in early November, John arrived for work at the JAG office and accepted from his receptionist a 3 x 5 card showing all his office appointments for the day. He walked only a few steps toward the door to his office when the first entry stopped him in his tracks:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAILY APPOINTMENT SCHEDULE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“0900 – 0930 Legal Assistance:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. James Hottenroth (Widow: Lt James Hottenroth KIA VN) and Mr. and Mrs. Frank Hottenroth (Lt Hottenroth’s parents)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is unlikely that the meeting lasted only 30 minutes. The excitement and emotions of the first introduction lasted at least that long. When they finally were able to focus on the Hottenroth’s problem, John Hilliard realized he had an exceptional opportunity to serve a buddy he had lost in Vietnam. In return, Jim’s widow and his parents quickly realized the value of the Aggie Buddy system.

Almost immediately upon learning that Jim was dead, Woo Syar Juang had boarded a flight to California. She arrived on October 21, 1967, just six days after the crash at Khe Sanh. Although they had never met, Jim’s...
parents greeted Woo Syar Juang as if she was their own daughter. Together, they endured the burial, with full military honors, and began to restore a state of normalcy to the Hottenroth household.

Shortly after her arrival, Woo Syar Juang decided that she would remain in California, enroll as a student, and take a job at California State Polytechnical – Pomona. In an extraordinary measure, Woo Syar Juang changed her name to Marjorie Hottenroth, taking her mother-in-law’s middle name.

This is when the Hottenroth’s encountered the problem that brought them to John Hilliard’s JAG office. Woo Syar Juang (later Marjorie Hottenroth) entered the United States under a tourist visa that would expire in April 1968 and could not be extended. Marjorie needed a resident visa to stay longer. That meant returning to Taiwan to wait several months if not years before she could fulfill her dreams. Surely, the fact that she was the widow of a Vietnam war veteran would change that.

For Captain John Hilliard ’64 the mission was clear. This was a chance to use his legal skills to do more than serve an Air Force family. This was a chance to help the widow of a classmate and buddy.

John’s research showed that he would need the recommendation of the Secretary of the Air Force and approval by Congress to bypass the immigration process. The first hurdle in this process was approval by the Commanding General, Norton AFB. At this level the “Aggie connection” again came into play, but not through the Base Commander who was not an Aggie. Instead, the general’s Senior Enlisted Advisor – or his “Command Sergeant Major” – was an Aggie. Several years earlier, the Norton AFB Command Chief Master Sergeant completed two years in The Corps and built two bonfires before he flunked out, enlisted in the Air Force, and rose to its highest enlisted grade. The Command Chief Master Sergeant took the Hottenroth request as a personal mission and quickly ushered it through his boss and Department of the Air Force. (Note: In his phone call, John Hilliard did not name the Norton AFB Command Chief Master Sergeant.)

In January 1968, a request was sent to the United States Congress requesting that Jim Hottenroth’s widow, Marjorie J. Hottenroth, be granted Permanent Resident status. The request included letters from the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Department of the Air Force, Jim’s parents, and Marjorie. In her letter, Jim’s mother stated:

In our eyes and our heart, Marjorie is a member of our family. We no longer have James, sir, but we have someone just as dear to us, James’ wife. We want to keep her with us, not just a year, but for so long as she wishes to remain.

On July 1, 1969, the 91st Congress approved House Resolution 1991 approving Marjorie J. Hottenroth’s status as an immediate relative of a U. S. citizen, thus making her exempt from the procedures that immigrants must follow. The mission of Captain John Hilliard ’64 was complete.

One last Aggie Connection: Marjorie Hottenroth completed her bachelor’s degree at Cal-Poly Pomona, an MBA from St. Mary’s College in Moraga, California, and Ph.D. in Human and Organizational Development Systems from Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, California. She now lives in Shanghai where she was a co-founder of the Keystone Group, a business consulting firm.

She is married to another co-founder of Keystone - Dr. William H. Mobley, former President of Texas A&M University.
An Afterthought

War leaves clear and obvious scars on everything and everyone it touches. The massive bombing strategy used by the Allied Forces to defeat the Nazi’s left German cities as little more than piles of rubble. The cities like Berlin, Frankfurt, Wurzburg, and Cologne were leveled by war’s end. In the Vietnam War, our efforts to “defend” Saigon left a visible mark on the Vietnamese rural landscape 100 miles from the capital. Armored bulldozers, called Rome Plows, cleared mile upon mile of jungle cover, while Agent Orange defoliant stripped the remaining jungle, and B-52s left strings of bomb craters that seemed to “perforate” the countryside to the north, northeast, and northwest of the city.

While these scars were so deep and obvious, they did not prove to be permanent. Thirty years after the end of WWII, the bomb damage seen in German cities was gone, replaced by modern and thriving urban centers. A visit to the Vietnamese countryside north of Saigon, in person or via Google Earth imagery, shows no evidence of past destruction. Instead, the visitor finds large farms, orchards, and even an extensive vineyard.

There is, however, one aspect of war’s damage that time will never mend. War takes from us the talent, the skills, the creativity, the charm of those it kills. There can be no better example of this than the loss we all suffered when Jim Hottenroth’s C-130 crashed into the red, laterite dust off the east end of the runway at Khe Sanh. Jim took with him that afternoon all the special gifts he had, including his music. Through Jim Hottenroth’s early death, the Vietnam War also robbed us of any talented and creative off-spring that he and Marjorie Jacqueline (Woo Syar Juang) might have given us.

First Lieutenant Jim Hottenroth

was buried with full military honors at the

Bellevue Memorial Park, Ontario, California

The Memorial Section, Sublot 3

Jim is remembered on the Vietnam Memorial at

Panel 28E, Line 09

Jim will also be remembered with the

First Lieutenant James R. Hottenroth ’64 Rehearsal Room

in the new

John D. White ’70 – Robert L. Walker ’58 Music Activities Center

WELCOME HOME, JIM HOTTENROTH