

War Hero Says Criminal Charges Part of Campaign to 'Get Him'

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By George Hooper

His name is Robert Wesley Jones, but he would rather be known as Bob Rackstraw, and he believes if he can obtain a fair trial in Calaveras County he will be a free man before this month ends.

Jones, 34, sits in the San Joaquin County Jail awaiting trial July 11 in San Andreas for the alleged murder of his stepfather, Phillip Rackstraw, 51, whose body was found in a shallow grave near Valley Center Springs this year.

Jones, who says he would rather be called Rackstraw because he has used the name since he was 4 years old, denies the slaying and says he is the victim of malice and vengeful prosecution.

He also is charged in San Joaquin County with unlawfully obtaining more than \$75,000 from banks and with illegal possession of explosives and a charge of grand theft, involving construc-

Jones' request to have his bail on the murder charge lowered from \$500,000 to \$200,000 was denied Tuesday by Calaveras County Superior Court Judge Joseph Huberty.

At the same hearing, held in advance of next Tuesday's scheduled start of Jones' trial on a charge of murdering his stepfather, Jones' attorney revealed he has filed an appeal in the Third District Court of Appeal seeking to overturn the judge's denial of a change of venue for the trial.

tion equipment, has been filed against him in Calaveras County.

But he discounts these charges, considers them minor — and says he will beat them down in court.

He declares, "There are people in Calaveras County who have been out to get me for a long time. I've been shot at, threatened, lied about and the law there has refused to protect me. Why shouldn't I be worried about this murder trial that is coming up?"

Jones, a helicopter pilot, Vietnam veteran and former member of the Green Berets, says his problems began 18 months ago when he sold his helicopter business and came to Calaveras County to work with his stepfather in the construction business.

Since then, he says, his troubles have multiplied to include financial setbacks, the criminal charges and an injury, suffered shortly before his arrest, which he says has left him with only partial use of his legs.

His lawyer, complicated matters, said Jones, property offered by his friends to provide bond for his release from jail has not been accepted by the Calaveras County Superior Court.

"Here I am, a decorated war hero — I have more than 40 medals and decorations including the Distinguished Flying Cross — and I can't get out of jail to defend myself."



ROBERT RACKSTRAW-JONES IN CUSTODY

Record Photo

Jones served in the U.S. Army from 1964 through 1971, with much of that time spent flying helicopter gun ships in Vietnam. He entered the service as an enlisted man and was discharged with the rank of lieutenant.

After leaving the military he worked for about four years in the petro-chemical industry, he says, then started his own helicopter business in Palo Alto. But by the end of 1976, Jones had sold the aviation business and headed for Calaveras County to join his stepfather in the construction business.

"It really was my business," said Jones, "because I was the one who held the contractor's license, having obtained it in 1971, and my stepfather had been working under it."

The construction business went well, said

Jones. Too well, in fact, as far as his competition was concerned, he said.

"I underbid other contractors, and as a result, I was threatened, harassed, and, in the summer of 1977 some fellows took a shot at me. Put a bullet through the windshield of my pickup truck."

But, Jones said, Calaveras County officials would do nothing about the incident.

"I told them who did the shooting, but apparently the police and the suspects were friends. Nothing was done about it at all. They refused to believe me, even though I was a member of the Calaveras County Sheriff's posse and was the pilot of the posse's helicopter."

Then, according to Jones, other problems arose. He said his stepfather began drinking heavily, and although their construction business was busy, they began having trouble collecting the money for their work.

With his stepfather's drinking, with financial troubles and continuing threats, Jones said, he began looking at other forms of employment.

"I loved that old man and I considered him my father, but his drinking and arguing with people hurt our business. He was always getting into beefs with people and sometimes threatening them."

It was during the latter months of 1977 that he contacted Bell Helicopter International and applied for a job as flight instructor in Iran, Jones said.

He said by that time his stepfather was not spending much time around the construction business, "and, in fact, was moving around so much that I really didn't know where he was."

Jones said after a short vacation in Hawaii he left for Iran around the start of 1978.

He denies his leaving the country was in any way connected with an attempt to avoid prosecution on any of the charges now lodged against him.

"I went there because I had a job, because I was finding it increasingly difficult to carry on a construction business in Calaveras County, and because there were actual threats made against my life in Calaveras County."

"I have a rough way of talking to people—so did my stepfather, for that matter. I had many-made enemies, and I'm afraid some of the animosity toward me was transferred to my stepfather after I left. I believe that is why he was killed."

"Certainly I never killed him," said Jones.

As for the other charges against him—possession of explosives, bking banks out of funds, theft of earth-moving equipment—these are all blown out of proportion, he says.

"I held a legal permit for the explosives—used them for construction work, and how they got into a storage building in Stockton, I don't know," he says.

As for the bank fraud charges, Jones says all they involve is cashing checks with insufficient funds.

And as for the Calaveras County charge of seeding construction machinery, he says it didn't happen.