

# Tim Jacobsen

I want to document how I met, got to know, and remember Tim Jacobsen. The short time I knew him had a profound effect on my own life, and he will always have a spot in my mind.

I was sworn into the U.S. Army on September 11, 1969. Two of my home town buddies – Mark Merrill and Ronnie Campbell, and myself – officially became part of the Army that day in Spokane, Washington. We had also met another somewhat strange fellow – Ray Eickstadt – that day, as well. He would become another friend in the early stages of the Army, who just recently got in touch with me again after many years. We swore in, packed bags, and climbed aboard a train which ended up in Fort Lewis, Washington for Basic Training.

When we arrived at Basic Training, we soon realized that this was not going to be a school final exam, where we could “Slide” through. All inductees were made to look the same – we were told so everyone was “equal”. Which meant most personal items were taken away, all our hair, mustaches, beards, etc. was shaved off, all unnecessary items were confiscated, and we were essentially confined to our main barracks building and training areas for the following 8 weeks, with few visitation from family or friends. Pretty much we became the property of the U.S. Government, and we could only do what they said we could do.

Of course, there was some attempt at rebellion, in the form of griping or “bitching”. There was not much else anyone could do – we had become soldiers. The timing of this was while the draft was still going on – the number lottery came while we were in Advanced Infantry Training – I was # 246, never would be drafted. So – we became oriented the Army way – they taught us to shoot guns, walk 10 miles with full packs, mingle with all types of people from throughout the country, eat in 30 seconds, and obey the barked orders coming from the drill sergeants and instructors. Many recruits from deep within the country were from the inner cities, and had never traveled outside their city, much less ever shot a gun.

I got pretty good marks on the firing range. The two buddies and I had done quite a bit of shooting before we came into the Army, so there was a good rivalry among us to be the best in the company. Problem was – there was some guy – a “short little fucker” - in another barracks who also wanted that honor. His name was Tim Jacobsen, and everything we did, he was right up there with us at the top of the list. We came to know him, and actually respected him before we ever really met him. I called him Jacobsen, and he called me Carey. I’d hear “I beat you today, Carey” – and I knew who it was before I even turned around.

One day, he said something to that effect, and gave me a shove from behind while we were in the chow line – probably a little harder than he meant to – but it didn’t set well with me, and I charged him. Now - I wrestled in High School, and anytime I got in trouble, I went for the feet and put people on the ground where I was more comfortable. That’s what I did with Tim. I had no idea he was a damn bull rider, and if those guys are any good, they don’t spend a lot of time on the ground. He told me later he was just teaching me how to “Steer Wrestle”.  
..... Right ..... Anyway, we wrestled around on the ground until we were pretty well tired out, without either one of us throwing any punches. It got broke up, and both of us were sent away without dinner. Luckily, Tim knew one of the guys on KP, and came over to my barracks and got me later that night, and we went over to the mess hall and got fed. From that time on, we were good friends. He said I could call him “Jake”, and I never knew him as anything else.

I believe we both respected each other for not throwing punches during our little wrestling match, and him sticking up for me as far as including me for his late dinner. That was a big deal in Basic – you don't want to miss meals – we burned everything we ate. We would literally eat on our feet as we were shuffling through the mess hall, and dump your plate at the exit door – no matter how much was gone. We got to be FAST eaters.

After Basic, our next assignments were handed out, which told everyone where they were headed next. Some of the people, like Ronnie Campbell, had signed up for three years, so he got orders to go to some type of Aircraft school at a base in California. Myself, Mark Merrill, Ray Eickstadt, and Tim got orders to go to Advanced Infantry Training (AIT) right there in Fort Lewis. This was in November, so we got to go through AIT in one of the snowiest winters, often hiking in knee-deep snow. I remember lying on ice to fire rifles at the firing range. There wasn't a whole lot to do, except compete with each other for the different awards.

We all got "Expert" marksmanship medals, and became "11 Bravos" – which was the term for the Infantry skill category of 11B. Not a recommended career choice for anyone. We were too young and dumb to understand. The last week or so of AIT, you get your orders for your next assignment. Fully everyone in the company was expecting to go to Vietnam. Just the opposite happened – they sent almost everyone to other places all over the world. Ray Eickstadt went to Georgia, Mark Merrill went to Germany, and several of us, including Tim and myself, were sent to Fort Hood Texas, where the Army mixed us in with 'L' Company of the 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry Airborne Rangers, being redeployed from Vietnam. This was an elite unit, one of only two companies of Airborne Rangers in the Army at that time.

Now – we had gone through AIT, were certified Infantrymen, but had not had any Airborne training or jumped out of any airplane – so we were not "Airborne". Therefore, we acquired the term "Leg". This was a company of men fresh out of Vietnam, carrying some wild war stories and the mental problems associated with their experiences. They all had short time remaining in the Army, and didn't really feel too "Gungho" anymore. They had gone through AIT, got sent to war, now had the remaining 4-5 months of their enlistment remaining, before they would be sent home.

Our main purpose for being in Fort Hood was to test electronic sensing devices that were being deployed in Vietnam to pick up troop movement down the Ho Chi Minh trail and other places with heavy concentrations of enemy troops. These devices were dropped out of helicopters and picked up ground vibrations of movement, including trucks, bicycles, and human walking. We also were testing the early versions of the night scopes that let us read name tags on the uniforms of exercise participants in the middle of the night. There were multiple field operations where we were the enemy, and other Fort Hood troops were the "Friendlies". Those other "Friendlies" really got hell from our guys, and Tim and I were right square dab in the middle of it. We actually ran amuck at will among their campsites in the middle of the night, firing weapons with blanks, etc. We would throw explosive devices inside tents, etc. – sometimes blowing up sleeping bags! Lots of fun !!! However, it also led to many sleepless nights later on in the Vietnam jungle, knowing what was possible in the cover of darkness.

In addition to these exercise operations, we were also getting more extensive training. We learned how to repel out of helicopters and down steep cliffs, often up to 150' tall cliffs. Tim and I got so we could repel down a 150' cliff without touching the side of the cliff, braking ourselves just as we hit the ground below. We both earned the "Recondo" badge after completing the school. We also had extensive evasion and survival training, which led me to

have some false hope after Tim was shot down, because I knew that he could make it out of there if anyone could.

Our time in Fort Hood allowed us free weekends, which meant we could travel around and see parts of Texas. Tim, myself and a few others would spend weekends in places like Dallas, San Antonio, Houston, and Laredo, Mexico. Mainly seeing the countryside, bar hopping, playing pool, etc.

One of these trips was an interesting experience. While at Fort Hood, I ran into one of my friends from home – Dick Howard. He lived in Benton City, a small town of about 1,500 people. We started including him in some of our weekend trips, and Tim took to him just as if he had known him all his life. We ended up in “Boys Town”, Laredo one weekend, which was a place just inside the Mexican border. We were walking down the street and got approached by two Mexican Policemen. They singled out two of us – Dick Howard and somebody else, and put them against the wall and started frisking them – apparently looking for weapons. Dick commented to them “You’re Not Gonna Find Anything On Me Except A Hard Dick”, probably something he had said many times before. The policemen immediately cuffed him, stuffed him, and drug him down the block to a holding cell, the rest of us just bewildered about what had just happened.

They took him to their little “Hoosegow” – a flat-roofed building with bars over the windows, and put him in a cell. The building couldn’t have been much more than 1,000 square feet. The rest of us followed them, and gathered our friends up as we went along. There were about 8-10 of us, in three different cars from Fort Hood. We made up our minds we were not leaving without Dick. So – we began to intimidate the Mexican police. I found out later, somebody pulled the phone wire out of the outside wall, so those two policemen had no way to call for help. Remember, there weren’t even words in the dictionary like ‘cell phone’ or ‘computer’. All of us just basically circled around and started yelling at the building. Once in a while, one of the policemen would stick their head out the front door and look around, but didn’t say or do anything.

They were surrounded by what appeared to be irate American soldiers. We stood around and took turns going into the nearby bars while the others “Stood Guard”. Sometime over the next couple hours, the American soldiers started throwing rocks up in the air, landing on that Hoosegow’s flat roof. I’ll always remember coming out of a bar back to the circle, and seeing Tim with a rock twice the size of his fist, leaning way back with arm cocked, leg out in front, to get a good, high, rainbow-type arch for that rock to make the most noise possible when it landed on that roof. Looked like a statue. That picture will be in my mind just about as much as his bull riding picture is in yours, and I will always be laughing when I think of that !!

Dick Howard was inside the hoosegow all the time this was going on. He said there was a LOT of noise coming from the rocks hitting the roof – can’t imagine why - and a lot of jabbering going on in Spanish, sounded like swearing because the phone wasn’t working. In general – some anxiety on the policemen’s part. Sometime after midnight, they cracked open the hoosegow door, and let Dick go. We jumped in our cars, and were back across the border in the U.S. within 5 minutes.

Army life at Fort Hood was somewhat demanding. There was a little bit of resentment from the Vietnam Vets towards those of us who were not Airborne, ie: ‘Legs’, and also towards those of us who had not been to Vietnam. The Ranger company we were in was really gung-ho, and those of us who had not been to ‘Nam went along with the “Lifer” attitude, which was frowned upon by the Vietnam Vets. Not openly, but we could feel the tension.

They were tired of the Army, and had served their time, and were just waiting to be discharged. In the meantime, they were jogging around the base in company formation chanting "I Wanna Be An Airborne Ranger, I Wanna Be An Airborne Ranger, 1....2....3....4 - 1,2 .... 3,4 - Airborne !". Looking back on it after I got back from 'Nam, I could totally understand their attitude.

I never remember Tim ever being too vocal about his displeasure with the Army – because I don't believe he was ever against it. I was regular Army – which means I volunteered for the Service, 2 year enlistment. Not drafted. .... Actually ..... to be honest ..... a Judge put me in – but that's another story. I don't remember if Tim was drafted or not.

Anyway, after 3-4 months of time at Fort Hood, Tim got disgusted with it all. I believe he and I were a lot alike. We knew what hard work was, and were fed up with all the spitting and polishing for no apparent good reason. There's only so long before you figure out there's a lack of common sense here.

So – Tim went to the Company Commander and told him he wanted to go to Vietnam. That was where I drew the line. Not me, fella. I'll go when I'm asked to go, not before. Well, about 30 days after that, we all got orders to go, so we landed in Vietnam about a month after he did. I never heard from Tim again, until I ran into someone from our Fort Hood company, and he told me he had seen in the Stars And Stripes where Tim had been shot down, and was Missing In Action.

I spent a lot of time in later years trying to get information on Tim's case. It was a hard trail, and I went through a lot of emotions, as I'm sure everyone did. At the same time, I also had my own mind scars, and never really believed in Richard Nixon, or for that matter – was convinced about JFK's assassination – I didn't trust the government much. I also went to Washington, D.C. in 1982 when we dedicated the Vietnam Memorial – the wall. If you have not been there, make it a point if you're even remotely in the vicinity. Tim's name is on one of the panels at the center of the wall.

However – the eventual excavation and identification of Tim indicates to me the government has a side that wants full accounting for the missing U.S. soldiers. I gave a CD to Cindy of all the files I found that have been released about the efforts in retrieving Tim. I haven't gone through all of the files - but there are some interesting facts in some of them. I have also been out to the Comanchero web site, and have included their link here. They have done a great job documenting the funeral services in October.

I really enjoyed meeting the family, and hope those of you who read this, learn a little more about Tim's time with me in the service. Probably more than he would have told Mom and Dad in letters. But – it was all totally in fun, and didn't hurt anyone or anything. Thanks for taking the time to read. If you're ever in my neck of the woods, please look me up.

Sincerely,

<http://www.a101avn.org/>

Dwight

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