

Brothers In Arms: When Twin Brothers Go To War

BY RANDY TRAMP
P&D Correspondent

Thomas and Tim Jacobs truly were brothers in arms during the Vietnam War.

Thomas enlisted in the Marine Corp and served in Vietnam, while his twin brother, Tim, enlisted six months later.

They met once while in Vietnam. Thomas found out that their battalions would be together, so he walked around the perimeter until he found his brother.

"It's rare that you run into your brother while on an operation, not to mention twin brother," Thomas said. (Tim declined to be interviewed for this story.)

By the expressions in the photo on this page, they had a good reunion.

"Signing up for a two-year enlistment meant I had to go over to the pond (Vietnam)," said Thomas, who was in the 3rd battalion, 4th Marines as an S-2 Scout.

His first experience in combat was outside Camlo Village.

"The patrol went really bad," Thomas says and continues, "Of the 83 that went into battle, only 35 came out uninjured." (He was not injured.)

As an S-2 Scout, Thomas gathered

information about a battle. By aircraft, truck or foot, he went into combat and recorded what he observed. Who fired? What happened? Any other pertinent intelligence concerning the event would be recorded. He interviewed the people of a village and prisoners of war. When he had to walk, sometimes it would take a couple of days to get to his assigned destination. Other times, he was flown to wherever he was ordered to go. Thomas noted he saw a lot of combat, men being shot and killed, including witnessing a downed helicopter.

Since there was no time to sit down and write down all the details of the battle, Thomas had to rely on his memory. After the battle, he compiled a report and submitted it to his company officer. The report was then forwarded to a colonel up the chain.

"I traveled with Kit Carson Scouts," Thomas said. Kit Carson Scouts were North Vietnamese combatants, serving as interpreters for the American infantry.

"There was a time when a scout just disappeared," Jacobs said. He explained that the Kit Carson Scouts, who worked with the military, would collect information and at times give it to the enemy.

"I didn't trust them," Thomas said of the scouts. He also noted that,

after collecting information from the prisoner of war soldiers, they were turned over to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, or MACV.

Thomas tells of one terrifying night. Someone had forgotten to give the password to another battalion. He was assigned to get the password to the colonel of that battalion.

"Believe me, I was scared," he recalled.

In pitch darkness, he left his battalion, snuck past the other battalion's sentry and completed his mission. As he was leaving, he heard the colonel yell for his troops to strengthen security. As an afterthought, he considered it comical that he was able to break through their security.

He was wounded in an operation on Aug. 22, 1968.

"(The enemy) were picking us apart," Jacobs said.

He was doing a crater analysis on a round from a recoilless rifle. Simply put, Thomas was digging inside a crater that was created by the enemy's cannon. He had to find the cone and determine the shell's origin. He successfully made that determination and reported it. With his unit surrounded, he moved amidst the flying bullets and shells to call in an airstrike. Somewhere in this chaos, he was hit by shrapnel



PHOTO: THOMAS JACOBS

Twin brothers Thomas and Tim Jacobs are shown together when they met for the only time during their tours in the Vietnam War.

and was laid up for a couple weeks with head and neck wounds.

"I still have shrapnel in my neck," he says.

Thomas was discharged three months ahead of schedule.

"There were too many non-commissioned officers, so they let me out early," he explains.

At home, he suffered from nightmares at first, but overall it didn't affect his life. Thomas was on the Sioux City Fire Department for 30 years. He's been married almost the same amount of time.

"I worked my way through it," Thomas, who now lives in McCook

Lake, says of the war. "I know a lot of vets that came back and got on with their lives. ... Everyone learns something about life, I put it away (the war) and moved on."

Upon returning to the United States, Thomas recalled, "I felt some resentment from the young people who didn't know anything but what the news media was telling them."

He went on to say that not everyone was resentful that he served time in Vietnam.

When speaking of today's vets, Thomas said, "I'm happy the way vets are treated today when they return from war."

Students

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Bucklin uses his film class to mainly tackle Vietnam War stereotypes created by the Hollywood film industry. After spending the first two weeks of the class lecturing and making sure the students have an understanding of the fundamental issues the war represented, they delve into a series of Vietnam films chronologically: "The Green Berets," "The Deer Hunter," two Rambo films, "Full Metal Jacket," "Platoon" and a few others. The films are then examined to see if they reflect public sentiments of that time. For example, at the time the Rambo films came out, President Reagan was saying that Vietnam involvement was an honorable affair; thus, the Rambo films promoted a resurgence of pride in America for their involvement.

There were other films, like "The Deer Hunter," that promoted the idea that returning Vietnam vets were disassociated from society and were prone to conditions like alcoholism and PTSD.

"Yet the vast majority came back

and fit right in. Look at John Kerry and Bob Kerry," said Bucklin.

As with Lofthus, students in Bucklin's film class are also required to read "America's Longest War," which gives them a background to assess the movies to see if they're historically accurate. For example, they view the Rambo film "First Blood: Part 2" and see how the movie exaggerated the role of Soviet involvement, and made the Vietnamese army look like "Keystone cops," he said.

For each film, the students are required to write a three-to-five page review in which they judge it based on historical accuracy.

"I want them to understand that Hollywood films are made to make money and not necessarily reflect historical truths or accuracy," explained Bucklin.

In the traditional "Vietnam War" class, Bucklin has his students read several books, including "When Heaven and Earth Changed Places" by a Vietnamese author named Le Ly Hayslip and George Herring's book again.

Bucklin's goal is to have his students read about multiple perspectives of the war.

The students are required to

research reviews of the books they're reading for class, and then writing their own reviews on whether the book is accurate in its portrayal of its subject matter.

Bucklin finds that it is difficult now for students to feel a connection to war vets. He believes it is mostly due to there no longer being a military draft.

"The volunteer army makes students less susceptible to serve," he said.

Despite this, Bucklin hopes students learn about the true reality of war.

"There's very little honorable about any war. War is an admission of failure by society," he said.

However, Bucklin wants students to know that they should support veterans, both old and new.

"I think they're proud of the veterans' service, but they also question whether or not the war was just and worth the sacrifice," he said. "I hope they leave my class having thought about the war and what it meant."

DOUG HAAR, YANKTON HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY TEACHER

Haar teaches about Vietnam as part of his Advanced Placement (AP)

History class. The subject doesn't come into play until the end of the semester, but Haar strives to make sure students understand the impact the Vietnam War had on the country by comparing it to recent examples.

"Remember when President George W. Bush was explaining why it was necessary to send troops to the Persian Gulf and said it wasn't going to be another Vietnam?" he said. "When troops came back, Bush made another reference to Vietnam saying that the Gulf War helped us 'get over' that war."

Haar uses books like "Rumor of War" by Philip Caputo and "Why Nations Go to War" by John G. Stoessinger as reading material to educate the students on the war.

Despite the limited time spent on the subject, Haar lets the students know who and what was involved, from the presidential administrations of Truman through Nixon to the different perspectives of the conflict.

"Americans thought it was about communism while from the Vietnamese standpoint, it was about nationalism and wanting independence," said Haar.

In addition to literature, Haar utilizes music and art that reflects the

feelings of that time. For example, he will play the song "Eve of Destruction" by Barry McGuire and go over the lyrics with the class to figure out why it became so popular.

Haar tries to incorporate different avenues of approach. Textbooks are used as primary sources along with newspapers, magazines and the TV news reports by Walter Cronkite.

He also explains how the Vietnamese differed from past enemies the U.S. soldiers had fought against.

"They didn't wear uniforms, and it was confusing about what the war's objective was," Haar said.

An interesting fact Haar teaches his students is that the U.S. never officially declared war on Vietnam, but instead fought under the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which passed by Congress in 1964 over President Johnson's veto.

All this information and more is used by Haar to try to have students understand why the Vietnam War is looked at in such a complex light.

"Sometimes, a part of American history is not immediately understood as it happens, but has a huge impact afterwards," he said.

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