



**THOMAS C. BOWER  
SERVICE HISTORY AND AWARDS  
1964 - 1976**

**"This is the Rambo you never heard about.....  
Why or Why Not?"**

August 1964 - Enlisted in US Army in August and within 7 months this remarkable 17 year old dropped out of high school was given Secret Clearance as an OPERATIONS CLERK TYPIST with division headquarters.

August 1966 - Re-Enlisted as ACTIVE DUTY COMMITMENT for 4 years.

1968 - Received the BASIC MISSILEMAN AWARD and first GOOD CONDUCT AWARD.

July 1968 - Received a LETTER OF APPRECIATION

As a member of the 97th Civil Affairs Group ..."you have devoted for your personal time and effort to provide better opportunities for the development of our community. Accept our heartiest thanks"

Mayor of Iheya-son (I hay a son)

July 1968 - Certificate of Training -

This is to certify that SPECIALIST FOURTH CLASS, THOMAS C. BOWER HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THE PREVENTATIVE MEDICINE SPECIALIST COURSE.

Nov. 1968- Awarded Parachutist Badge.

This is to certify that SP5, THOMAS C. BOWER has successfully completed the Basic Airborne Course at Ft. Buchner, Okinawa, Japan.

Jan. 1969- Headquarters 1st Special Forces (Airborne)

THOMAS C. BOWER SP5, 156th Detachment awarded EXPERT BADGE WITH RIFLE, (the only person in a group of 18 to receive Expert badge).

Oct. 1969- Headquarters, US Army, Ryukyu Islands

THOMAS C. BOWER SP5, 156th Med. Detachment  
PROMOTED TO STAFF SERGEANT

Feb. 1970 Re-Enlisted as ACTIVE DUTY COMMITMENT for 6 years.

1970 - Received a certificate from SPECIAL ACTION FORCE ASIA for OUTSTANDING SERVICE.

Certificate of Achievement presented to Staff Sergeant THOMAS C. BOWER for MERITORIUS SERVICE during the period of July 1968 to April 1970 while serving as A MEDICAL TEAM LEADER, 156 Med. Detachment, U.S. Army, Ryukyu Island.

During that time his team was involved in several rural development and civic action projects helping the people on some of the Ryukyu Islands. He and the officers of the 1st Special Forces group received countless letters of appreciation and commendations from the citizens. SSG Bower's outstanding performance of duty at every level reflected great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army throughout his time serving there.

Sept. 1970 - Awarded his second GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL and received a DIPOLMA from  
Noncommissioned Officer Academy for successful completion of the  
NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER ACADEMY COURSE.

Dec. 1971- 82nd Airborne Division - CERTIFICATE OF COMPETION  
SSG THOMAS C. BOWER HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED JUMPMASER  
COURSE, Ft. Bragg, NC

1973 - Awarded the Bronze Star Medal for MERITORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT IN GROUND  
OPERATIONS AGAINST HOSTILE FORCES IN THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM  
(June 1972 - March 1973)

Sept. 1973- Awarded his 3rd GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL for service period  
August 1970- August 1973.

After leaving Vietnam he continued to take various courses dealing with preventative medicine and  
public health. Considering his professional ability, sound judgment and leadership, it was felt that  
SSG Bower is qualified to assume the duties of a 1st Sergeant and was recommended for  
PROMOTION TO 1st SERGEANT.

Feb. 1976 - Honorable discharge from duty.

## Eulogy of Thomas Bower

War creates a band of brothers or sisters no matter the fight or the cause for which they unite. As our brothers, fathers and sons returned home from their battle, few spoke about the horrors they experienced or unwittingly participated in to survive and return home. They kept these things inside because they are trained to put feelings aside and do the job at hand. These things change the person that left home to experience what society deemed their duty to God and country. No one could have ever prepared them for the aftermath of returning to the life they left behind to fulfill their duty. After living a life on high alert as a matter of survival, how can you return to life as it was, when just doing so could send even the strongest into spirals of survivors guilt, feelings of pain, unending anxiety and sometimes even self loathing despite medals and honors for their valor?

Although PTSD played a huge role in reshaping T's life, he refused to surrender and let it swallow him into an abyss of misery & despair. He remained a proud soldier in life as he continued to persevere and defy the odds, attempting to destigmatize the label of PTSD. Much of his "recipe" to success in his personal fight to overcome the landmines lying dormant in his life's journey, involved learning that you can't accept love without first learning to love oneself. Once that acceptance happens, then self love and care can begin. By making the choice to surround oneself with positives in life rather than negative, he was able to open new doors to a road of success. He chose to add the

healing power of food, self care, & accepted the help of a higher power to guide him. Together with the grace of God and his loved ones, he was able to celebrate the peaceful victory of embracing his life with wisdom and love.

After many years of silent suffering, today PTSD is recognized as not just a soldier's burden to bear. Many of us in our everyday battle of life experience it as well. PTSD, whether brought on by the trauma of a war, the loss of a loved one, abuse or a life changing tragedy, is a wound to the core of ones being. There is no "one size fits all" approach to a quick cure. We as a community need to acknowledge this ever growing problem with compassion. We need to encourage people to have the dialogue and remove preconceived judgments and the stigma associated with it. PTSD is not about what is wrong with someone but what has happened to them. It's time to hear their story, to listen not judge, to offer a shoulder on which to lean on and begin the long journey of healing with understanding and love.

## **Eulogy for Thomas C. Bower**

As we gather here today to honor Thomas's life and legacy, I stand here before you all to fulfill a mission.

After a chance meeting in December 2017 our paths crossed for different reasons. It was then after getting to know some of the story behind the couple reaching out to the Legion for assistance that our friendship began. As I got to know both T and his wife, it became clear to me that I needed to help them tell Tom's story.

I have spent the better part of the last 3 years researching, listening and preparing his story but only for military personnel to hear, but as fate would have it, I am here today to share it with all of you as a tribute and honor to a remarkable man so many never really knew. Here unfolds the complicated story of the man who proudly wore the Green Beret for a lifetime.

Thomas "T", was born July 14, 1947 to parents Loraina & Charles Bower. T's childhood was not typical filled with Midwest 1950's nostalgia. His dad suffered PTSD from his time as a Korean War Vet which made family life for T dysfunctional and which left him feeling unloved by those unable to give.

In 1964, T got his dad to sign for him to enlist into the U.S. Army just 28 days prior to him turning 17.

T's journey began at Ft. Leonard Wood where he began Basic Training, which came easy to him. From there he went on to AIT (Advanced Individual Training) as a Clerk Typist, which he mastered easily. From there he then spent time at Ft. Sill and Ft. Benning until his orders for Vietnam came through.

On his last leave before facing the unknown and going to Vietnam the mood was "Party Hardy", with the unsaid fear that it may be their last. Upon his return from 30 day leave he boarded the USS Upshire to land in Vietnam on his 18th birthday.

On his second day, his buddy Walt was shot randomly while walking beside T. Suddenly the war went from training exercises to *Very Real* with life & death consequences. From there, all the training was kick-started and a combat soldier was born.

Later he then went to Quin Yan & choppered to Don Kai with Division Hdqtrs. It was there, after hanging around with Medics and hearing their experiences with casualties in the jungle, that he realized being a Clerk Typist wasn't get him to the combat zone. From thereon he decided he was going to do whatever was needed to get shipped to a combat zone as a "grunt" in Combat Infantry.

By 1968 he had completed his Medic Certificates and went on to further advanced military training and promotions until his final discharge in 1976.

Over the course of many years, T volunteered 4 times for duty as Combat Infantryman. The more experience he gained with each tour, the more he was driven to take out "the enemy" and survive. Another underlying force that led him to re-enlist was it was his hope that by his being there instead, might spare some other soul from going there and coming back in a body bag.

When T began his First Tour in Vietnam back in 1964, he remarked that it was "The Worst", 2 man tents & no showers! Sadly, as tours progressed these things seemed pretty trivial to an outsider looking in.

Asked about his 2nd Tour, he rated it as "better". He was with Medics, knew more and had gotten better at killing.

Between his 2nd & 3rd Tours in Nam, T taught parachuting and combat skills to Green Berets, Navy Seals and others. He was with the First Group Airborne as a Green Beret, going out of the Philippines to search & destroy missions in Vietnam as well.

Tour 3, with Special Forces as a Green Beret around Da Nang was as he said, almost fun. It was there that he was able to teach the little kids English and also get to know some of

the women villagers. It was during that time he fell in love with one of them and they had a little boy. He had plans to marry her and bring his little family back to the states, but sadly he bore witness to the unthinkable murder and torture of his beloved at the hands of the Viet Cong.

By Tour 4, his description in a word was Fun. During this tour he became aware of his increasing feeling of discomfort about observing the horrors of war and watching so many of his buddies being killed and mangled before his eyes. He sought out drugs, alcohol and sex in an effort to block out & escape these horrible experiences and simply Not Feel. Feeling has the potential of putting a chink in the heavy armor needed to survive in mortal combat. A dilemma of internal conflicts had slowly built up between the soul & soldier of this wounded man.

How much trauma can one person bare? There isn't time in combat for "do-overs", just do and move on to the next life or death confrontation.

Every life lesson and belief ingrained in this young man who went off to war was challenged and beaten down with every battle as feelings began to creep up from deep inside. He knew that taking another person's life was unacceptable, yet his training and expertise told him otherwise. Somehow he was able to fight his inner self & convince himself that it was "Fun". To become like a machine, there becomes the need for all the enemy to have one faceless identity, to push them forward to kill and not be killed.

These feelings of anger, terror & guilt for you getting to come home & not them just don't fit nicely in a box. Instead they fester like a mortal wound.

After leaving Nam in '73, and doing what he thought was the patriotic thing, he was not greeted like soldiers of past to a hero's welcome. He & his fellow soldiers arrived to crowds of protesters condemning their actions, not appreciating any of their efforts to keep them and democracy safe. Instead society had turned their back on their sacrifice. This made T and many other vets bitter and resentful of a society that devalued their service and sacrifice. Again, yet another dagger was given to each of them to put in that collection box of conflicted feelings battling inside their heads.



It is here where I would like to take the time to mention Thomas's record of service and just some of his many accomplishments he made during seemly insurmountable challenges throughout his career. The rewards reflect the spirit, growth & integrity of the man behind the badges and medals.

*-- Jack's separate insert read here--*

In the 20 yrs to follow leaving Vietnam, T tried to return to some sort of normal, at least what he perceived he should be.

Over those 20 years, memories of war continued to torment him & began to leave a path of turbulent destruction in his wake. Relationships suffered as his inability to keep all those ever present internal conflicts at bay grew.

In 1992 he applied for compensation due to his disability. By this time he had finally had enough trying to fight the battle alone & reached out to the VA. For 20+ years T had struggled had struggled trying to control the deadly grip of war with drugs & alcohol. He realized he had been severely wounded by his experience. He had given everything he had short of life and limb. His war was not yet over as he continued to battle on suffering the challenges of a chronic severe PTSD diagnosis as well.

As I reviewed so many documents regarding his PTSD diagnosis from 1992 to the present, there was evidence at the time that some doctors felt T was the worst case they had seen in over 24 years of practice. To look at old photos of the man riding his Harley & flashing a smile or laugh in those photos, you'd never know that beneath the rough and tuff exterior self image lies the heart of a very loving and gentle caring man.

As his PTSD progressed over time he began to reveal the slightest noise could send him into "combat mode" of hyper-vigilance and high alert. A backfire from someone's car or auto accident put him right back to the battlefield in the moment. Sleeping brought fire-fights, lack of sleep among other things & medications brought hallucinations and paranoia. An

innocent child's cry could trigger & unleash the horror of losing his baby boy, hurling him into the moment of pain & despair.

So many every day sounds & events that seem benign to us can be a trip-wire to an explosion of emotions that they are trying to control every day. Every day is a battle, some easier than others, but all the same a battle, disabling him from functioning to his full potential in life according to societal norms.

So, after taking some of this journey with me today, my question to all of you is, how would you judge this man?

In combat mode he excelled as a "1 man army", a trained killing machine. He was fearless in battle confronting the enemy. He put his life on the line time after time as he watched the Viet Cong inflict destruction & pain on the Vietnamese people, his fellow soldiers and people he loved.

There was another side to this complicated gentleman hidden under the exterior bravado. This was the man who became a Medic to help others, who volunteered his own time & effort to teach kids English and helped to improve the lives of the citizens where he was stationed. This was a man who had known love in the throes of war.

My answer would be, Who Are We To Judge?

Throughout this story, you will see that despite what many saw on the surface, there was a good & caring man inside searching to be understood & loved. This is the man who wore the Green Beret as he vowed to give his life for others. Thomas C. Bower was one of our last unsung heroes of the Vietnam era.

After meeting T & Cynthia in 2017, I was struck by the magical bond of love & loyalty they had for each other. Once a bond of trust began to grow between us, I began to learn the true love story of this lovely couple who married on July 13, 1996.

You might want to ask why in the world she would want to marry this man I am describing.

People seem unable to understand that a person so severely disabled with PTSD doesn't always present that way to others, they seem "normal" most of the time. When Cynthia met Tom she was in awe and saw the true heart of this man who dared to let her into his world. She soon discovered that this road wasn't going to be an easy one, yet she chose to stand tall and rise to the challenge, fueled with mutual love and understanding.

By 1997, with Cynthia's encouragement T began a sincere quest for help. As his physical health declined over the passing years, Cynthia became both wife and full-time caregiver. Despite his ever present PTSD, they continued as a team to fight his battles hand in hand. She persisted with unending methods to offer solutions to help him deal with responses to his stressors by calming, reassurance & non-confrontational structure to keep him pointed in the right direction. She often said Love was the main element in caring for someone with such a severe mental disability, something that neither the VA or society could offer.

Marriage for all of us at times can be trying but somehow despite all the challenges they have faced, Each made the other More. It's a bond some rarely find in life that will continue long beyond this time on earth. She was his fierce protector in life and his "Momma Bear" and he was her real life "Rambo".

Cynthia has dealt with caring for T's needs for over 20 years and has felt the devastation & isolation that PTSD can cause when it gets out of control. Momma Bear has relentlessly attempted to protect him and provide him with what he needed no matter the cost. She may have burned a few bridges along the way when she thought he wasn't getting what he needed or what was being done was not right, but her main mission was to keep T safe and happy.

While always keeping T's welfare and happiness in the forefront, she felt so badly for him that he had never been properly honored for his service to this country. This became her passion to achieve that goal they had shared while he was still alive.

On October 6, I received the call from Cynthia that I was dreading. She told me T wasn't doing well and that she thought he was dying. I jumped in my car to be there for them.

When I arrived, I asked him if he would like to pray to which he nodded yes. As I knelt beside his bed, we all held hands to pray. This was one of the toughest prayers I have ever prayed. We prayed for healing and ended with "Thy Will Be Done" knowing it didn't look good. As the nurse arrived we had the renewed energy of relief and hope at sight of help arriving. Within 10 minutes of her departure, the good Lord had another plan for his soldier and called him home to heaven.

As Cynthia began to sob uncontrollably she begged T to forgive her because she had failed to get him honored before he died. Time had run out, she did not fail, the mission was just redirected to the here and now.

## CONCLUSION

----Jack, do your thing here please.