

Entombe James said while some of his brothers and sisters received “Indian names”, he wasn’t sure how his parents chose his first name. He has discovered that Entombe is an African name, not Native American. He and his brothers - Hiawatha, Quanah, Quilby and Ben; and sisters Lahoma, Niconah and Pocohantas - were born to Richard and Mattie James. They are 1/8 Choctaw.

As a young adult, Entombe James, who goes by Tom, enlisted in the Army, serving in the 95<sup>th</sup> Division, K Company. He was in active service from May 5, 1961 to November 5, 1961. He then joined the Ready Reserves for five and a half years.

“I enlisted because I was fixing to get drafted. They had come out with an enlistment opportunity that offered six months active duty and then five and a half years in the reserves.” James thought this was a good deal, and he took the opportunity. The 95<sup>th</sup> had a unit in Durant, which was convenient for James, who lives in Bennington. He discharged from the service as a 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. E-7.

“Basic training was at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, then I served at Fort Ord and Camp Roberts,” said James. “My mom and dad and youngest brother came to the graduation at Fort Leonard Wood. I rode home with them and was home fourteen days. I got on a 707 in Dallas (to go to his next assignment). The 707 was the biggest plane at the time. I had never flown. We got to Arizona and were in a thunderstorm. The pilot said he was going 10,000 feet higher to go over the storm. We didn’t go over – we went through it!” James said his seat on the plane was right behind the wing and he “could see it flopping like a bird.” After reaching Los Angeles, he caught a connecting flight to San Francisco. “It was July 28 and COLD in San Francisco. During training, all the bleachers were right on the coast and everyone faced the ocean. They would let us wear our field jackets, but we couldn’t button the top button. The ocean spray would go right down our shirt,” said James. Training included rifle, machine gun and hand-to-hand combat. “We would go out in our t-shirt and fatigues. One person would have a bayonet and the other would have to take the bayonet away – while he was trying to stab! An officer up in a tower would be giving instructions and there would be 100 – 200 people on that field. When asked, ‘What is the spirit of the bayonet?’ we would have to scream, ‘To kill, to kill, to kill!’”

His job in the service was Platoon Sgt. and instructor. “All the 95<sup>th</sup> Division were instructors. All that the Army wanted taught, we were the ones to teach it. Every so often, we had to have class to prepare what we were going to talk on. Each class lasted an hour. The last class I taught was on the M-14 Rifles. We would go to Fort Polk, Louisiana every year for two weeks to teach classes. The regular Army would leave and we would just take over. We had the entire post for two weeks for training purposes,” said James.

James said he made close friends with some guys who were, “not from around here.” He said, “I had a good friend from Chickasha, Earl Gibbons, and a friend from McAlester, Cordell Henry, who was a Sioux Indian. Since we have been out of the reserves, we hardly see each other. Another friend, Danny Lipson, from Horatio, Arkansas, came to a Trail of Tears Walk. We had contacted him to tell him we would be at Horatio for the beginning of the walk. When we were waiting to start the walk, I saw this guy with a sign that said, ‘Hello Tom James’. It was Danny.” Another friend he remembered was a Spaniard from Los Angeles area. His name was Steve Hernandez. “You meet some good people in the military.”

Recreation opportunities included a day room with pool tables, places with bowling alleys and television. “At Fort Ord, we weren’t allowed to watch television because of John F. Kennedy

encouraging people to drink more milk. There was a surplus of milk, but Fort Ord was telling us they didn't have any milk. It was discovered later that the Company Commander was getting the milk and selling it. The Sergeant over the supply room was stealing ammunition and sending it to Cuba." These two were caught because of a visiting VIP – Harold Johnson, the General of the Army. James said, "We had been told we couldn't get seconds at mealtime because they were overdrawing in food. We were sent to another company and the guy over all the cooking, all the kitchen, told us if we were still hungry we could get more to eat – they still had plenty of food. General Johnson noticed some of the soldiers had practically ran to the line to get seconds. The General asked, 'What is going on? These people are starving.'" The General's investigation led to the discovery of the thefts.

James married his wife, Charlotte, soon after active service. "June 15, 2023, we will be married 61 years." The couple has known each other since their youth. "When she was 18 and graduated, I was almost 24 and we got married," said James. They have a son in Montana, Richard Scott James, and a daughter, Tommie, who lives in the same county. Their oldest daughter passed away because of cancer.

"We generally make a trip to Montana each year. We missed the year when Covid was prevalent."

James said he had a lot of memories of his time in service. Good memories included training with a Sergeant who enjoyed teasing him because of his red hair and black eyebrows. "Every morning he would say, 'Private James, come up here,' and he would take his white handkerchief and rub my eyebrows, to see if they were real." The worst part of training? "I guess the infiltration course at Fort Leonard Wood. It was rocky and looked like they had ground rocks up and put on the course. You had to crawl under wire while under machine gun fire. The wire was a foot and half or so over us. We scooted on hands and knees. I still had scars months later!"

James' most appreciated memories are time at home and with family.

Growing up, James said there were fun times at church. "There were all types of religions in our area, but we all went to church together at a little Baptist church. A lot of people didn't have cars to go anywhere else."

James went to elementary and middle school at Cade, then High School in Bennington. Talking about his siblings, he said, "There were eight of us and we were the only Indians who lived out there. They called us 'the tribe' We fished and hunted, but it was sport! We went to get something to eat! We also had a big garden. We always ate good."

He and Charlotte have big hearts and have helped neighbors in need. "I guess I try to be good to people, no matter what. I never thought I was better than anyone. I am always for the underdog!" said James.