

Horacio Aceves Jr.

U.S. Army, Sergeant

1947 - 2010

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Instructed by Richard Zukowski

Horacio Aceves Jr. was born in El Paso, Texas, October 20, 1947, to Horacio Aceves Sr. and Francisca Maria Aceves, nee Ruiz. He had two brothers, Daniel and Mike, and two sisters, Sueike and Martha. Horacio's first few years were spent in El Paso, but sometime around 1961 the family relocated to La Puente, California, a short distance east of Los Angeles. La Puente was a booming city following World War II. Thousands of people moved into the agriculturally rich valley, which helped fuel rapid suburban development. The elder Horacio, a World War II Army cavalryman, worked 48-hour weeks as a painter and had probably moved the family for the employment opportunities afforded by the southern California housing boom.



Horacio Aceves Jr. in his 1967 senior portrait from the La Puente High School Imagaga yearbook.
Ancestry.com

Young Horacio, who went by “Junior,” attended La Puente High School for all four years and graduated in 1967. Growing up during the tumultuous 1960s, Aceves was immersed in the ideological clashes of the Cold War and its simmering tensions between the capitalist West and the communist East. By the time he entered high school, thousands of American troops were beginning to deploy in Vietnam to halt the spread of communism. Perhaps inspired by his father's World War II stories—and patriotic films such as *The Green Berets*, which was released a month before his enlistment—Junior was soon to find himself engaged in the Vietnam War.

Horacio volunteered for the United States Army on August 6, 1968, at the age of 20. After basic combat training, he arrived in Vietnam on January 10, 1969. He served in Company B (Bravo) of the 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment (nicknamed “Garry Owen”), 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). Air mobility was a new concept the military had developed after the Korean War. Helicopters were developed into larger, faster and more reliable methods of transport—and attack. The goal of “airmobile” tactics was to rapidly deliver troops and supplies over difficult terrain to surprise enemy forces.

Serving in an airmobile unit, Aceves was frequently a passenger on the Army's UH-1 Iroquois (Huey) helicopter, which has come to be seen as a symbol of the Vietnam War. These helicopters, over 7,000

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The looming presence of the Cold War surrounded American youth. Even yearbooks extolled virtues like “free enterprise” to contrast the West with its communist enemies. Here, La Puente High School students participate in military-style drills as part of the California Cadet Corps. 1960 La Puente High School yearbook

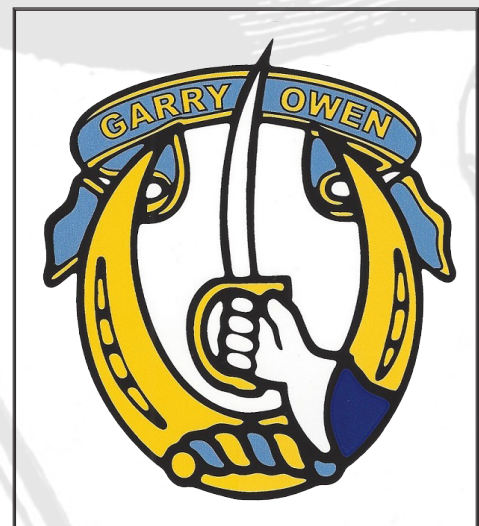
of which participated in the conflict, served as transports, medical evacuations, scout aircraft, and attack support. Aceves served as a light weapons infantryman. During his last month in Vietnam, he was promoted to sergeant. This would have put him in command of a fire team comprising three to four other soldiers.

Throughout Aceves’s yearlong tour in Vietnam, he and his unit regularly fought enemy forces. The Garry Owen Regiment’s battles began in February during Operation CHEYENNE SABRE, where his battalion fought to clear out enemy bunkers in what was then South Vietnam’s Bien Hoa province. After that operation concluded in March 1969, Aceves and his unit returned to Tay Ninh Province where they rotated around Landing Zones Jamie, Jill, and Green near the Cambodian border. Their mission was to stop North Vietnamese infiltration and break up Viet Cong supply routes.

A North Vietnamese Army (NVA) attack on Landing Zone (LZ) Jamie is indicative of the dangers Aceves and his comrades constantly faced. Located about 20 miles north of Tay Ninh, LZ Jamie was “five or six clicks [kilometers] from the Cambodian border near the Ho Chi Minh Trail,” according to fellow 1st Cavalry Division soldier Corporal Mick Johnson. The Ho Chi Minh Trail was a crucial supply route for NVA troops. Around an area cleared by Army bulldozers, “The bamboo was so thick you could be 10 feet from someone and not see him.” On the night of May 12-13, 1969, a large NVA force attacked the LZ with small arms, mortar fire, and human wave attacks lasting until dawn. American positions were nearly overrun, surviving only through dogged close-range fighting and heavy air support from helicopters, Air Force jets, and “Puff the Magic Dragon,” an AC-130 gunship aircraft. The NVA renewed the battle the following night, but were repulsed with heavy losses. “Those couple of days felt like a month,” 7th Cavalryman Raymond Russell said later.

The rest of Horacio Aceves’s tour was hardly any easier. The men of the battalion conducted constant base defense, “search and clear” operations, and day and night ambushes. They swept the jungle for hidden enemy bunkers. Aceves was in the thick of the action with Bravo Company around LZ Jamie until January 9, 1970, when his tour officially ended and he returned to the United States.

The 7th Cavalry Regiment’s crest. The unit’s official nickname, “Garryowen” has become a common greeting among Vietnam veterans.



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On June 12, 1970, Aceves transferred to the Army Reserve and served in Company D, 41st Infantry, Combat Developments Command Experimentation Command (CDCEC) based at Fort Ord, California, near Monterey Bay. The CDCEC tested military systems such as night vision goggles and thermal rifle scopes by using them in small unit maneuvers and live-fire demonstrations. Aceves would have conducted these experiments and reported on their effectiveness in the field. Horacio stayed in the Reserves for almost four years until August 5, 1974, when the Army honorably discharged him. Throughout his service, Aceves earned the Air Medal, Army Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Combat Infantryman Badge, and Marksman (Rifle) Badge.

By the time of his discharge, Horacio looked forward to a family. In November 1973 he married Rosario Quinones in Los Angeles, California. Four years later the couple had a daughter, Sienna, whom they raised in Los Angeles. They divorced in 1982. Horacio married Janet Newland of Granville, West Virginia, in 1986. The couple had two more children, Justin and Ashley, whom they raised in Corona, California, not far from where Horacio had grown up. Janet's mother still resided in West Virginia, so the family made frequent trips back and forth until they moved permanently to Granville during the 1990s. Aceves found work at West Virginia University's Health Sciences Center where he worked as a painter between 2000 and 2008. Aceves enjoyed the fine arts, listening to music, and being around people in his free time.

On April 6, 2010, Horacio passed away at his home in Granville due to an extended illness. He was buried on April 12 at West Virginia National Cemetery in Pruntytown.



25th Infantry soldiers land via Huey helicopter on Black Virgin Mountain, whose summit overlooked the Garry Owen Regiment's area of operations near Tay Ninh in 1969. Courtesy of Flickr user Manhhai

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Resting Place

West Virginia National Cemetery
42 Veterans Memorial Lane, Grafton, WV 26354
(304) 265-2044

Section 5

Site 728

Date of interment: April 12, 2010

About the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project

The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Program of the Department of Veteran Affairs and initiated in 2021. All biographies produced as part of this program are composed by West Virginia high school students, who conduct original research on veterans interred at the Grafton National Cemetery or the West Virginia National Cemetery, both of which are located in Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's first National Cemeteries—founded shortly after the Civil War—the community of Grafton has longstanding traditions of honoring America's veterans, including the longest continuously celebrated Memorial Day parade in the United States. The Grafton National Cemetery, located in the heart of the city and founded in 1867, is typically the endpoint of each year's parade. Since the Grafton National Cemetery began to run short of space during the 1960s, the West Virginia National Cemetery was dedicated in 1987, just a few miles outside of Grafton.

The West Virginia Humanities Council is proud to thank the following organizations for their participation in the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project: West Virginia Archives and History, the West Virginia University history department, Taylor County Historical and Genealogical Society, Taylor County Public Library, and Grafton High School.

Please refer comments or questions to the West Virginia Humanities Council
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