John Mort:

I am Don Poss. Our mutual friend, Jon Hayes, told me your story of meeting on a bus at our Reunion a couple years ago, and I’ve read your story which I like and hope it will be posted at VSPA.com and War-Stories.com.

I’ve also verbally shared the jest of it with Pete Piazza (Silver Star; past president of VSPA), and Bob Connors who works with the US and Vietnam teams recovering remains of casualties of the Vietnam War. Bob Connors and then Capt. Martin Strone (Silver Star; 3rd SPS, Bien Hoa Air Base), are in Vietnam now, and together have helped locate mass-graves and recover well over 5,000 Vietnamese remains. They also, helped locate the mass-grave at Bien Hoa AB within 150 yards off the runway, and 159 remains were recovered.

Both Bob Connors and Martin Strone like your story and are interesting in reading it. The story was shared with the Vietnamese Officer who led the attack on Bien Hoa AB, Tet 1968, and is part of the Remains Recovery project. He commented on the ironies of war.

I would like your story to be a part of the Bien Hoa Bunker Hill-10 Project. It will show the dedication of Augmentees, and emphasize they too carry the loss and scars of the war, including the two who were KIA that TET 1968 night. As webmaster and host for VSPA.com (and War-Stories.com) for over 25 years, I have posted over a thousand stories, and literally 10,000+ images. The point is that most stories are submitted in more or less of a sequential and factual telling of events relevant to that author’s point of view, and are posted pretty much as written.

Now and then, a story like yours comes in that helps tie together a Project in that it fills in the blanks and unknown gaps, or adds to the human touch veterans of war experience—your story is exactly that—and merits further development. With your permission, I would like to help with that (Jon Hayes can tell you how it works). To clarify a point, you should know this is ‘your story’ and will be copywrite in your name. You have sole control of posting it at VSPA.com, removing it, and editing control. This means your story can be posted exactly as you’ve submitted, or developed further.

Generally, a story is developed in a slow but methodical manner. Right now, I do not know the questions to ask you about the story. After reading the story, I make notes on concerning questions, and in an area that can be stronger when the five senses are included. For instance, your following paragraph:

“When I arrived at Tan Son Nhut and the doors of the aircraft were opened I was greeted with the heat, humidity and the smell of my new home for the next year. When I departed the aircraft, I knew I wasn't in Texas anymore when I saw two USAF jeeps, one in front of the aircraft and one at the rear, each having an M60 mounted on them. At this point I was sure that my year in Vietnam would be an interesting one. Little did I know how much more interesting it would become.”

**What stands out to me is highlighted in red above**. Saying it is humid “Humidity” and “smells” are just words. Consider what that meant to you, and if you could explain those words in context, the reader veteran would be shaking his head in agreement. So, perhaps while flying from Tan Son Nhut AB to Bien Hoa AB, you flew up to about 2K-5K feet where it is a little cooler. If humidity impacted you as it did me, you might say something like, “…greeted (assaulted really) with a blast furnace heat, and my uniform (fatigues, tans, blues?) blossomed with a plague of sweat stains—my face glistened…and the smell—stench—was like sour vomit and urine.”

Another example:

“When I departed the aircraft, I knew I wasn't in Texas anymore when I saw two USAF jeeps, one in front of the aircraft and one at the rear, each having an M60 mounted on them.”

This is a good point to distinguish stateside vs. war zone: “…when I saw two USAF Security Police jeeps with M60s mounted on them. Unlike stateside SP Jeeps painted dark blue and highly waxed, these two jeeps looked as if the only time they were ever washed was when it rained; wax was never a part of their service, and the paint was a much faded AF blue with worn-off patches on the jeep leading us that clearly revealed Army Green and part of an Army Star. The M60 on the jeep escorting to the rear, was well worn with a pristine brass ammo belt feeding out of an ammo box. One jeep pull up close enough to check deplaning personnel closer…and I checked them out to: the driver rested his left boon on the jeep frame near the steering wheel, and I’m positive the boot never saw a can of black polish, ever. Stateside standards definitely were not in effect at Bien Hoa AB.”

Okay, the above is a little long. Considering all, it would convey the message that it really did “smell” and it was definitely “humid” and you really weren’t in Texas anymore. Nevertheless, you might not agree the revision, or want to temper it in any way. And unless you agree it would never be added.

**QUESTIONS** (and food for thought): These questions are very important to your story. There are no wrong answers; only your answers matter and can make your story a memorable one for the readers.

1. **Your Ran**k:
2. **Your MOS**:
3. Your Squadron at Bien Hoa AB (Accounting):
Did you ever get to work in your MOS at BH?
Seems that you may have been on a very long chain when running errands or going to another base…Did you do any countryside exploring, or have individual contact, or find an interest such as an orphanage, or one kid in particular that always got your attention?
4. **What type aircraft** did you arrive/depart on:
5. **Claiming Bag**s: What bags? Duffle?
6. “…**some of us boarded a bus**…” Were their SPs onboard? If so, did the SPs arrange any special transportation for them?
7. **Bus color: “Blue”?**
Did you know the wire mesh over the windows were to keep out Molotov cocktails, grenades, satchel charges…etc.?
8. Jeep: “a wild ride”. Speed, potholes, kids begging, shaky look potential VC in area, flares starting to appear in the coming night sky? Red or Green Tracers arcing across near or distant sky?
9. From your post “Buddha Hill” or with that escort, how many miles to BH approximately?
10. US traffic…compared to Vietnam “…crazy driving but I was wrong…? How and Why wrong? Pedestrians, Kids, pedal cycles, bicycles, scooters, taxis, civilian cars, military vehicles? What did they do: Driving against traffic? Ignoring lanes of traffic? Swerving suddenly? Cut off the bus (and if so, were you surprised the bus driver didn’t slow down? …or maybe you could have sworn he nudged a little closer to the offender as if he were ready to mark his own territory with roadkill? 😊
11. When first assigned as an SP Augmentee, did you realize the potential danger on perimeter or other assignments? “…that is where the real adventure began…” If so, was that part of the draw? Other Augmentees have variously commented that they want to experience that part of war and feel they did their part. (There’s no right or wrong answer for any of these questions)
12. “…receiving the gear that I needed to do my job I began training at the range”
What gear? Did you feel that gear adequate?
13. “Most of my time was spent at night in the bomb dump but other events took place in the daytime….” What “events” were daytime?
14. Tell me something about the bomb dump post: Access Point? Roving foot patrol? Perimeter? What interested you there? 105 Howitzers’ firing around base; strings of flares drifting about base; distant sky flashes or bombs dropped where you could see something was happening, but couldn’t hear the report; Unexplained ground vibrations, such as a B-52 bomb drop somewhere?
15. “I had to drive on finance runs to Cholon, on the outskirts of Saigon…”
What were the differences on a Cholon run vs. a Buddha Hill post or run to TSN? Any hairy or funny experiences doing runs? And…what did you do that you might not’a should’a ought’a done on a run? 😊
16. **Armor Plated Army jeeps esc**ort: Did they take time to BS or exchange war stories? Or were they all business and serious about getting you back behind the wire?
17. **Buddha Hill post**: What did you “observe”? Did you get to check out the giant statue? If so, what did you think of it?
18. **C-123 spraying over your post:** “… got wet…” What does that mean? Unusual feeling such as oily, like that insect liquid that gave in bottles, or what? Did you get any in your eyes? Have you filed your Agent Orange form with the VA?
19. **Do you currently have a VA award** rating? If so, what is it for? (mine is 100% PTSD, hearing loss, and AO registered)
20. **Ocelot?** This is a great one to elaborate on. It will definitely connect with the SP and other Augmentee veterans. Was there a “stare down”? If so…who blinked first? Did he mosey-off like the bunker was his anytime he wanted it…and considered you an on the shelf snack for a later?
21. **“The worst attack while I was there** is one that seems to come back at night much more often than I would like. On May 12,1967…” You cannot lightly pass over this very major attack on Bien Hoa—those who experienced it up close and personal will be taken-aback if it is not covered right.
So, from your point view (off duty) what did you experience?

Were you ever called up?

Were you supposed to report for duty anywhere?

The next day, were you surprised by the damage, KIAs, aircraft destroyed?

1. **“We didn't know if it was fuel or what was leaking**….”
Did you notice if the wind was blowing the wrong direction, or were you too far from it?
2. “**Put out all Smoking Materials**” What were the “other materials”?
Cigars? Pipes? Roll-Your-Own…etc.?
3. **“Fix bayonets”**. Any photos of this?
Did bayonets remain on during the attack, or were they remove later?
4. “**Very large ditch”.** Did you approach it? Was that what you were guarding?
How large/wide? Was it dry or contained water?
5. “**…assigned with a team that took care of each other**…”
The 3rd SPS in general? Or do you remember any, or a specific, names?
6. “**It wasn't until I attended a reunion last year…”**
What was the year?
7. “**The event that haunts me the most is…**”
Okay…now that you told the reader about such a momentous ‘event’, you must tell what that means.
*Disturbing Dreams…that wake you or your wife?*

*Intrusive uncontrolled thoughts?
Sudden triggers that, without warning, smack you in the face?*

*Depression and anxiety?
All the above, at or parts of some of them?*

Look at each of the above. It is likely you may have experienced them all. What will distinguish your story from another that just states the ‘event’ as a fact and moves on, is that you will write an example for each…or lump them into the bigger-picture-event’ and paint the general ‘event’ by encompassing all of the above points.

1. “…I had requested permission to stay with them for another year. **My request was denied**. “
Did he offer a reason it was denied? or was it the obvious relationship that he is King Kong officer, and you are a bug-enlisted man? Or did he just deny extending and offer the Jan 27, 1968 Freedom Bird home? All three are acceptable answers…or another if there is one.
2. “…to short to protect anyone**. tol** …”
‘tol’ or ‘lol’? No ‘lol’s. If tempted to add one, it is better to expand the thought as to why the circle of sandbags were funny: *“I wondered how it were possible for a single-row of sandbags to realistically protect anyone or anything…it gave me a new meaning to CYA.”*

31. **“…I know if I had still been there, he would not have replaced me. Therefore**, he would still be alive today…”

This is a good point, and one common to most all PTSD veterans of any war (including me). The old brain-bucket doesn’t care a wit about truth (or *your truth*) in the least; or that you were or were-not in control of events that set Ed’s death in motion. Logic is not necessarily a stumbling block for the mind, and it is content to run with illogical-truth—until discovering the answers for the-why-and-how the event as you experienced ended.

Here’s the deal per my 2-cents (putting on my fake shrink hat): If Ed Muse had survived the war, Tet 1968, as related to him, would have likely faded through the years and remained a vague curiosity for you. However, because you knew Ed was your augmentee-replacement, the potential for him (or anyone) getting KIA was far too real for your mind to shrug it off without a conclusion. You didn’t know the answer for 51 years …and neither did your mind. That was too disturbing a fact to be accept without being challenged from time-to-time trying to discover if Ed survived. And, the mind kept demanding an answer until it was suddenly revealed on the bus that Ed was KIA…dead (as confirmed by the LTC). The mind believed that answer but wanted someone or something to blame. And there you were with a box full of memories and 51 years of ‘what could have been and whose fault it was’…and at that point, the old mind wanted you to nail it down (logic played no part in any answer). It just keeps playing that mind-*video* over and over and over…looping until you figure that something that satisfies the mind as to what happened. The real point is, there are too many ‘ifs’ to determine Ed Muse’s destiny in this event, for which you had zero control over.

The mind may continue plaguing you forever. But it can be controlled if the mind’s concerns can be derailed. That may happen when you review the mind’s-concerns (triggers, intrusive-thoughts, dreams, etc.), and know your real understanding of events and that you really had zip control over all or any of the events; then as the mind pops up a “what-happened or it’s your fault’ scenario, you can answer with something like, “That is not what actually happened and there’s no way I am responsible for any of those events or outcome.” For me, that would be the successful outcome allowing you to remember Ed Muse, and honor his service.

Feel free to think about the above. Toss the whole thing, consider if that might help (it worked for me).

This is a good thing for you to write about, acknowledging that you logically know that is true, but nevertheless… it is remains a reoccurring event and belief (on some level) that will not go away. We make choices: Handle Vietnam, or it will handle you.