

# The Battle of Bunker Hill 10

*TIMELINE - 2017, Compiled, Edited, and as told to, Don Poss*

## The Battle of Biên Hòa, Tết 1968

### TIMELINE and EVENTS

*are based on accounts and notes of*

#### SSgt William Pete Piazza (SMSgt, Ret. - Silver Star)

*Defense-5 Sergeant, 3rd Security Police Squadron Biên Hòa Air Base, 1967 - 1968*

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*Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Combat "V" Device: 31 Jan-5 Mar 1968*



Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V" Device

#### The Battle of Biên Hòa—Bunker Hill-10

# TET

*"The enemy could not neutralize Biên Hòa without capturing Blockhouse [Bunker Hill] 10. Saigon could not be held without neutralizing Biên Hòa. The blockhouse held, Biên Hòa [Air Base] remained operational, and the Tết attack on Saigon failed."*  
Courtesy of The Virtual Wall.

#### BUNKER HILL-10, Tết 1968

##### Don Poss, VSPA Webmaster:

VSPA's Bunker Hill-10 project resulted after a conversation with Pete Piazza. I realized that many of us know *of* but little about Bunker Hill-10, and the Battle of Biên Hòa. The stories of Tết 1968 and Bunker Hill-10, at Biên Hòa Air Base, RVN, became known as *The Battle of Biên Hòa*, and are worthy of being told; some are posted at VSPA.com, and some have never been told. Many Vietnam War veterans who were there are still trying to forget, or cope with, what happened those decades ago. Some veterans are willing, even compelled, to tell their stories of witnessed valor, honor, death, and sacrifice. It is their collective words, otherwise lost, that flesh out the tale inscribed in our SPS heritage called, *Bunker Hill-10*.

The Timeline hours are not all encompassing, and should be considered as *best-estimates*. All combatants in The Battle of Biên Hòa have personal points of view, and estimates for the hour an event likely occurred. *Decades have dimmed memories*, and frankly, it is not necessary to list exact times. To relate the story, it is enough to present it sequentially, as it unfolded, and in the words of the authors. All accounts are authors' personal points of view, and may vary from other views of the same incident. *Don Poss*.

**DEDICATED TO**

*Those who served during Tết 1968, as Security Police and Augmentees of the 3rd Security Police Squadron, and those Killed In Action Defending the Fortress of Biên Hòa Air Base, RVN.*

Distinguished Service Cross, Purple Heart

**Capt Reginald V. Maisey,**  
Operations Officer  
**3rd SPS, Biên Hòa Air Base, RVN**

Purple Heart

**A1C Edward Grady Muse,**  
Augmentee, 3rd SPS  
*(3rd TAC FTR Wg, 7th Air Force)*  
Biên Hòa Air Base, RVN

**DEDICATED TO**

**United States Air Force Security Police and Augmentee Airmen Killed In Action during Tết 1968, as Defenders of the Fort at Biên Hòa Air Base, and to Security Police and Augmentees of the 3rd Security Police Squadron**

Bunker Hill - No. 10  
Biên Hòa AB, Viet Nam.  
This bunker here has a  
great story to be told of  
a SP. who saved ten men's  
lives in the Tet offensive  
of Feb. '68. [John Dunham]

## **AUTHORS \* PUBLICATIONS \* ARTICLES \* MAPS \* NEWS \* PHOTOS**

*A special thank you and recognition is due the contributing authors, writers of articles and newspapers referenced, and photographers known and unknown. VSPA's Project Battle of Biên Hòa would not have been possible without their contributions and courteous permissions for quotes and reprints.*

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Parks, David, SP5, US Army, Radio Intelligence Team, 856th Radio Research Det., billeted w/ 3rd SPS.

Schmidt, Lonnie G., WO/2LT, US Army pilot (Thunderbird One), 118th AHC.

#### **ARTICLES:**

Deets, Robert M., LTC, Battalion Commander, 145th Combat Aviation Battalion (report).

Frisbee, John, Roger P. Fox, LTC.

Seventh Air Force News - March 20, 1968: U.S. Ambulance Drivers Respond to Attack.

Shultis, Col, USAF DIR SP TIG James Conrad Jerry Bullock Mike Campbell.



## **Battle of Biên Hòa, Bunker Hill-10**

### **Battle of Biên Hòa, Tết 1968, *Courtesy off the Virtual Wall:***

During the early morning hours of 31 Jan 1968, Biên Hòa Air Base, South Vietnam, was assaulted by two North Vietnamese battalions, *and* the 274th Viet Cong Regiment's eight companies of about 500-600 men, supported by sappers and a barrage of mortars and 122mm rocket fire. Although the Air Base's ten miles perimeter was breached in four places, the 3rd Security Police Squadron's 325 USAF Security Police, and 75 Airmen Augmentees, repelled an overall force of 1400-1500 NVA and VC [during a nine (9) hours battle], and defended the interior of the Base from ground attack until US Army Infantry reinforcements arrived at sun-up. More than 60 NVA and VC bodies, of the 160 KIA, and 25 captured on base, were found in the fields of fire of Bunker Hill-10.

This Timeline account consists of several combined stories, articles, official documents, and points of views describing numerous acts of valor and courage, as they occurred during the Battle of Biên Hòa, at Bunker Hill-10. The story cannot be told without acknowledging the fighting spirit of the 3rd Security Police Squadron, the support and raw courage of the US Army 145th Combat Aviation Battalion (and other CAB units), and the brutal power of US Army ground and armored forces. Victory or defeat would be determined by the sustained coordinated Air Base Defense efforts of these U.S. forces.

# T I M E L I N E

## The Battle of Biên Hòa

Battle of Biên Hòa, Bunker Hill-10—*They're coming....*

### Pre-Tet, Background

*(Events preceding Tet, 31 January 1968)*

**October 1967:** North Vietnam announced a Tết holiday ceasefire from January 27 to February 3, 1968. *Office of the Historian, United States Department of State.*

#### **2 December 1967,**

**LTC Robert M. Deets**, Battalion Commander, 145th Combat Aviation Battalion,  
*Courtesy of the 145th Combat Aviation Battalion (Vietnam) Association:*

As early as the 2nd of December, a warning order [from the 68th Regiment of the 9th Viet Cong Division] had been given to the residents of Biên Hòa City that they had better stop cooperating with the U.S. Forces or face annihilation.

#### **After Christmas, 1967,**

**Robert (Bob) Vitray, Engineering Entomology Specialist**, 3rd SPS Augmentee:

I think that we started our initial augmentee-assignments just after Christmas 1967. During this time, we were either delivered to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Security Police Squadron at Guardmount or, more often, parceled out to various Security Police (SP) positions as directed by one of the shift NCOs. Once I actually wound up in the back of a jeep watching the real SPs pull on doors in the work and storage area and answer calls while a can of beanie-weenies was cooking on the manifold. This was just routine police work. Or, a couple of us might wind up assigned to one of the French forts, or one of us might join an SP in his "foxhole"—that's what we *Red Horse* types called them, although they were just a little circle of sandbags laid on the ground. I wondered how effective they would be against a round from an AK.

#### **About 2100 hours, January 17, 1968,**

**Chaplain (Capt.) Donald J. Sheehan's** report (Tết 1968):

Captain Reginald V. Maisey, of our 3rd SPS here at Biên Hòa Air Base, stopped by the chapel in his jeep and picked me up. Earlier in the day I had asked if I might join him that night on his inspection round of the perimeter guard. "Love to have you, Father" he said. "The men are a bit jumpy. They'll appreciate seeing a chaplain." While accompanying Captain Maisey on his security inspection trip that night, I noted that the men were much more reassured by seeing Captain Maisey than by seeing an unarmed chaplain. I know why now.

#### **About January 27, 1968,**

**Jon Hayes, A2C**, 3rd Security Police Squadron, Bomb Dump Tower Able-7:

A few days before Tết 1968, I rode a moped downtown Biên Hòa City to see my Vietnamese girlfriend and have tea Traffic was always insane. My moped ride had unnerved me. You may know how packed city streets in Vietnam always were with people, bicycles, scooters and cyclo-rickshaws. No one was walking around shopping, or on the streets—at all. It was



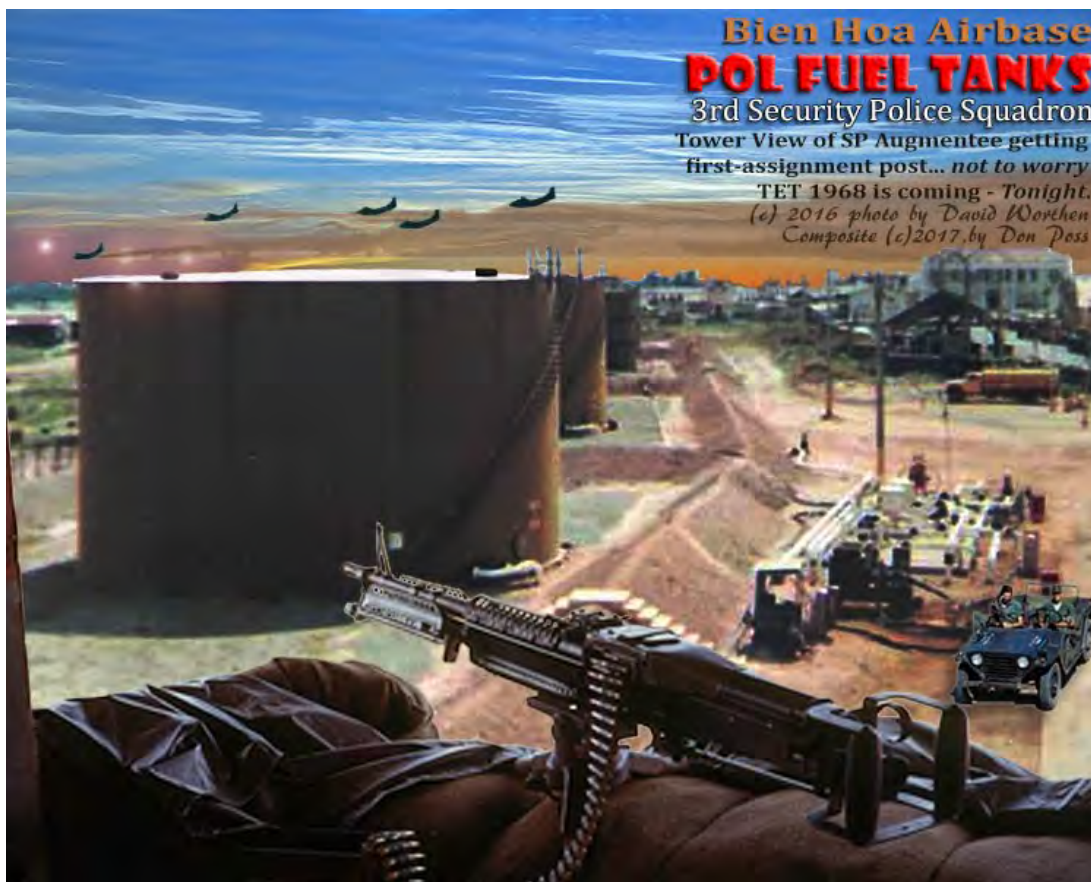
an eerie ride. That day, the streets were almost totally clear...where was everybody? It was definitely a what the heck was that...ride through town. I arrived and felt very uneasy, but did not understand why. She poured SAIGON tea we both liked, but seemed uneasy when saying everything was alright. It wasn't. I sensed something was very wrong, and told her I couldn't stay and had to go back to base early. She didn't try to convince me to stay, nor did she warn me of anything amiss happening. Really...spooky...vibes.

Spooky. Once I got back to base I felt very relieved, and told some guys about that empty city and there was almost no one walking around. Today, it still sends chills down my spine. Then, I didn't know thousands of VC and NVA were staging for Tết's planned nationwide attack, and the local Biên Hòa Air Base attack; I didn't know the Viet Cong had warned the city and threatened with annihilation for any cooperation with U.S. Forces; and I didn't know why my neck hairs were bristling, nor fully recognize I was in serious danger.

**0200-0300 hours, 28 January 1968,**

**Robert (Bob) Vitray, Engineering Entomology Specialist, 3rd SPS Augmentee:**

The night of January 28th was not quite as routine as my previous assignments. We were informed that Intelligence had "good information" that something was up and we might be hit. I was assigned to the end of a ramp (delta?) down by the POL dump.



*Biên Hòa Air Base: View from, POL Tower. 1969-1970. Augmentee arrives for his first-assignment. Photo by A1C David Worthen, Biên Hòa Air Base, 3rd SPS. 1969-1970. Note the yellow POL tanker truck, top/right.*

I think there were one or two other Augmentees and a couple or three SPs as well. I thought I was very military at the time (Red Horse could do that to you), so I asked what our assignment was and where we were to take positions [cover] if we were attacked.

"Take positions? Crap! I'll tell you what to do—pray!" said the SP three-striper who was evidently in charge. "You see those POL tanks?" He gestured in the direction of the massive fuel storage tanks. "That one is full. If it gets hit it'll burn, but the dike should hold it. Now this one over here is about 2/3 to 3/4 full and you pray it might burn too—I don't know. Now this one," the POL guys told me about, it's empty—and you better pray like hell that it don't take a 122mm Rocket, cause if it does we are all going to be greased." "Oh," I said..."I never thought of that."

"But don't worry." He continued, "Charlie's not really after us. He wants to hit the planes. We only get fried by accident. Why, one time when they killed an Airman in a rocket attack, Hanoi Hannah apologized and said they were truly sorry because the brave freedom fighters of the South Vietnamese People's Army and their brave volunteer comrades from the Army of the Peoples Republic of Vietnam had only meant to hit the planes." I had no way of knowing if this was true, but it sure sounded impressive.

The area supervisor, a tech sergeant, came around in his jeep with a coffee urn wired to the back. He said things were pretty quiet around the base then continued on his rounds. We smoked, and talked, and walked around, and stared at the distant horizon looking for trouble. Somewhere between two and three AM (my time may be a little off) the coffee jeep came back. I filled my canteen cup from the tank. The area "supe" said if nothing happened soon they were going to call it a night and send the Augmentees home. That sounded good to me.

### **2200 hours, 29 January 1968,**

**Charles Haugen, Sgt,** 3rd Security Police Squadron, Biên Hòa Air Base:

I was assigned to a post located at the entry to the F-100 Super Sabre revetment area. It was considered a sort of gate and as such included a radio for communication with CSC (Central Security Control). I remember that the intelligence reports were somewhat scary, but I don't think we were very concerned, because it was Tết and there was a ceasefire in place. There had been a ceasefire during the Christmas holidays and it had been observed by both sides, for the most part. We tended to take the intelligence reports with a grain of salt.

### **29-30 January 1968,**

*Courtesy of [Tết Counteroffensive - History](#):*

In violation of the Tết Truce, Phù Mỹ [gateway port to Saigon] District Hqs receives mortar fire and limited ground probes, as does the 41st ARVN Regimental HQ at *LZ Crystal*.

### **30 January 1968:**

The Tết Offensive began on January 30, 1968, by forces of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese People's Army of Vietnam advancing against South Vietnam.

**0945 hours, 30 January 1968:**

**General Westmoreland** cancelled the Tết Ceasefire [at 0945], after the truce was violated by North Vietnam.

**1045 hours, 30 January 1968,**

*Courtesy of the 145th Combat Aviation Battalion (Vietnam) Association:*

The 1/50 (M) Infantry Battalion was notified that due to enemy action, the Tết Truce was terminated effective 0945.

**1500 hours, 30 January 1968,**

**Barry Lyons, A1C** (Major, Ret.), 3rd TAC FW, AMS (Electronics), Augmentee, 3rd SPS:

By mid-afternoon of January 30, 1968 the SPs and Augmentees were ordered to report for duty at the SP area. We were issued helmets, flak jackets, M-16s and ammo. Some of the SPs also got M60 machine guns, grenade launchers, and more ammo—this was starting to sound serious! The SP leadership gathered up everyone and told us there were rumors that the VC (Viet Cong) were going to launch a series of attacks across the country sometime during the Vietnamese New Year—Tết. That meant possibly tonight!

**About 1500 hours, 30 January 1968,**

**Howard G. Yates, Augmentee** (12th Air Commando Squadron/3rd SPS:

Condition Red —As we walked past the guard shack, the sentry yelled, “Hey—aren’t you guys Augmentees?”

I thought his recognizing us was so cool that I blurted out, “Yeah, we are.”

“Well, you better get your gear and report to the SP armory ASAP!” the SP said.

“Why ... what’s up?” Larry Wasserman inquired. The Security Policeman just glanced up with this *We’re in a world of hurt* expression on his face and pointed to the security placard over the door—it was red. Now, we knew darn well what that meant. “Condition Red” means attack is imminent. Even so, we convinced ourselves that this was probably just a readiness-drill.

**1500-1600 hours, 30 January 1968,**

**Charles Haugen, Sgt**, 3rd Security Police Squadron, Biên Hòa Air Base:

Sometime in the afternoon, we were told to report for guardmount early. When we showed up I was impressed and concerned due to the number of Augmentees that were present. When we formed up, I think LTC Miller addressed the reinforced “C” Flight. We were told that an attack was expected sometime that night, and the base was on full alert.

At guardmount, I was assigned to a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) (Defense-31?) and provided with an M60 machinegun. Two Augmentees served as ammunition carriers. We were posted between the runway and the taxiway about halfway between the east perimeter and the control tower, and deployed in an open field and on the ground. We were led by SSgt Sawyer (Silver Star), and I’m guessing there were about 12 or 15 men in the QRF. In addition to the M60, we had M-16s, 40mm grenade launchers, hand-grenades



and slap-flares. For the life of me I can't remember the names of any other members of the team, except SSgt Sawyer.

**About 1600 hours, 30 January 1968,**

**LTC Robert M. Deets, USA, Battalion Commander, 145th Combat Aviation Battalion,**

*Courtesy of the 145th Combat Aviation Battalion (Vietnam) Association:*

Approximately 1600 hours, 30 January, Lt. Col. Robert M. Deets' secretary reported to the 145th Battalion Operations Office that her home was taken over by the Viet Cong and was to be used for the operational headquarters within the city of Biên Hòa. While a silent Biên Hòa Air Base slept, Colonel Nick Psaki and LTC Deets set up their Operational Plan Charlie-Charlie, knowing the enemy forces would unleash a devastating attack.

**About 1600 hours, 30 January 1968,**

**Howard G. Yates, Augmentee (12th Air  
Commando Squadron/3rd SPS:**

We had hustled to our hooch, grabbed our web belts, helmets and whatever else we thought we might need and made-tracks to the SP squadron armory. By the time we arrived, preparations for the defense of Biên Hòa Air Base were well underway.

Weapons and ammunition were being issued at the supply window in a hurried but very orderly manner. Security Police and Augmentees, already equipped, gathered in small groups talking amongst themselves. Some were busy checking and rechecking their weapons while others were draping ammo bandoleers and stuffing every available pocket with extra ammo magazines.

The air was filled with an undertone of anxious chatter and an occasional plume of cigarette smoke. When it came my turn at the armory window, I was handed an M-16 and told to grab some ammunition. I asked, "How much can I take?" Now, I don't recall this guy's rank or what he looked like, for that matter, but I do remember his overly accommodating reply: "Partner, you can take as much as you think you'll need." That comment dashed any thought I had of this exercise being a drill. I stuffed every pocket so full that I clanked when I walked.

At Guardmount, no sooner did we get our ammo, when someone yelled, "Ten-hut!" An officer, later identified to me as Lt. Colonel Kent Miller, Squadron Commander of the 3rd Security Police Squadron, walked hastily into our midst and began, "We don't have time for that," (meaning the proper protocol) and immediately told all present to sit down and

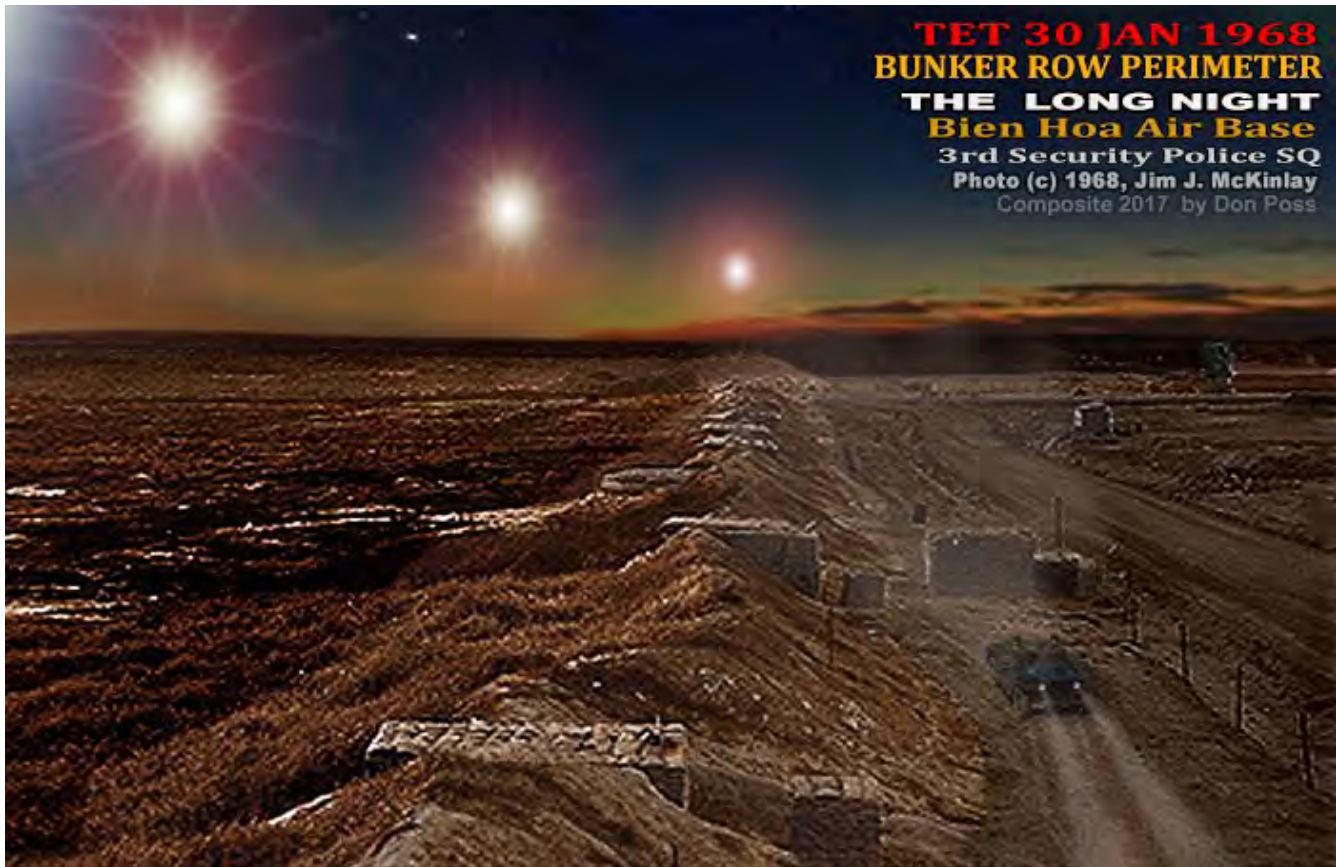


*LTC Kenton Miller, Squadron Commander,  
3rd Security Police Squadron.*

listen up. LTC Miller began his briefing by pointing to an aerial infrared photo map that had just been rolled out, and made particular reference to the area shaded in red. *(I will paraphrase for you)* “That big red blob you see to the east of Biên Hòa Air Base is what military intelligence believes to be a battalion-size concentration of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong soldiers.”

When I heard the word “battalion” I had no inkling of what that meant in terms of numbers (The Air Force had squadrons, not battalions), but having seen most of John Wayne’s war movies, I figured that a battalion was more folks than we wanted to try and get on base uninvited.

I was assigned with Larry Wasserman and a young fellow named Terry, whose last name escapes me, to ride with SP Sergeant Richard Lee and Airman First Class Simmons. Our call sign was “Defense-6” and our duties that night consisted of traveling the entire circumference of Biên Hòa Air Base, along what was appropriately called “Perimeter Road,” delivering hot coffee, sandwiches, and ammunition to the various guard posts.



***Above/Below Photos: Biên Hòa Air Base, Perimeter Road: 30 Jan 1968...the Long Night Begins.*** The 3rd Security Police Squadron was manning every post. The 30<sup>th</sup> of January began without enemy activity on the 10-mile perimeter, nor around the area of the bomb dump. At 0300 hours, that would all change—the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse were riding our way...and hundreds would surely die before dawn of 31 January 1968.





### Hours passed....

#### 1600 hours, 30 January 1968

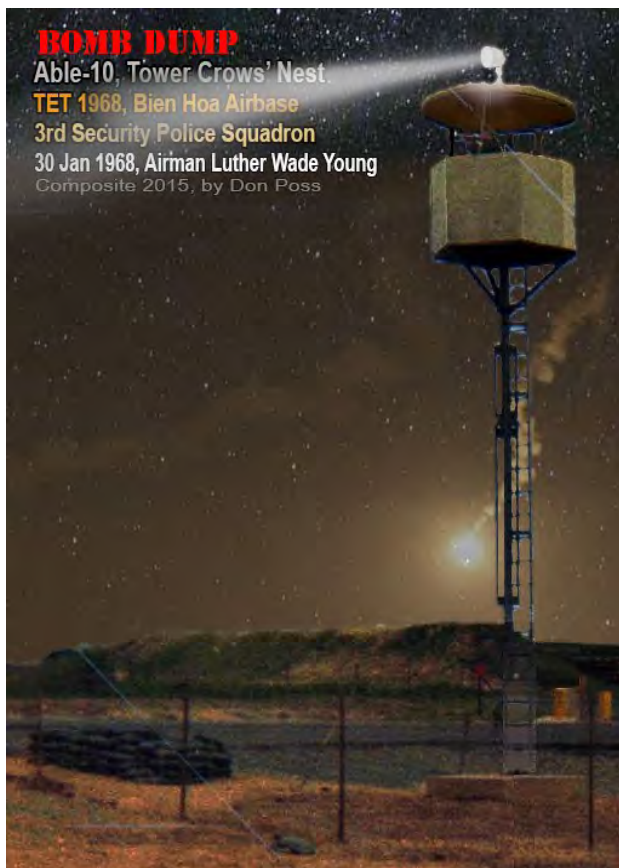
**Barry Lyons, A1C** (Major, Ret.), 3rd TAC FW, AMS (Electronics), Augmentee, 3rd SPS:  
I was directed to join a group of about fifteen Augmentees and five SPs, and we were taken out for posting to one of those sandbag barriers between the runway and taxiway, [located about a one quarter of the distance from the east-end, between the 7-8 thousand-foot markers]. We were in positions prior to dark, with nothing to do but speculate on what might happen, eat some C-rations and drink coffee.

#### Before midnight, 2359 hours, 30 January 1968,

**Luther Wade Young, Sgt**, 3rd SPS, Biên Hòa Air Base, Bomb Dump, Tower Able-10:

The night started out normal enough, as guardmount was over and we departed for our posts. And I departed for the bomb dump and my tower post, *Able-10*. When the bomb dump had opened, I took over *Able-10* as my Tower post for the balance of my tour.

*Biên Hòa Air Base, Bomb Dump, SPS Tower, Able-10: Sgt Luther Wade Young. Tết 31 January 1968.*





**About Midnight, 2359 hours, 30 January 1968, David Parks, SP5, USA Radio Intelligence Team, 856th Radio Research Det., billeted with 3rd SPS:** Do I ever remember Tết! A fellow by the name of Carpenter and I were billeted with the 3rd Security Police Squadron, on Biên Hòa Air Base, the night of Tết 1968. We had been with them for only a few days and had set up our Radio Intel unit to monitor VC (Viet Cong) and NVA (North Vietnamese Army) radio traffic for their locations.

The evening of Tết, my partner Carpenter and I were on top of the sand *pile*, in the little sandbag bunker we had built, and were manning our position as usual. About midnight, every VC and NVA radio in the county went silent, "*Nil More Heard*" for sure! We could not raise a *ditty-bop* [VC/ NVA radio] for love nor money. It was the damnedest thing I ever didn't-hear—complete radio silence. We knew from intelligence there was a truce in reports that the NVA/VC had something in mind for their Tết celebration.



*David Parks, SP5. USA Radio Intelligence Team, 856th Radio Research Det., billeted with 3rd SPS.*

Remember effect! There had been many warnings issued by various Intel agency's in the weeks preceding Tết. There were 87 separate Intelligence agencies' in country! Of course, you learn to take those reports with a large grain of salt.

Carpenter was on his second tour, and had far more experienced than me. His remark after the radios went silent, and I have never forgot this, was, "If anything is going to happen—it will start at three o'clock—we should go and get some sleep." Here I was with this dread loaded into my heart due to the VC radio's going off the air, and his suggestion is that we go and sleep! We went back to the Security Police barracks, had a C-Rat snack, and went to bed.

### **0200 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Howard G. Yates, Augmentee** (12<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Squadron/3rd SPS):

**Defense-6:** It was somewhere around 0200 hours (2 a.m. for you civilians) that we pulled up next to Bunker Hill-10 (an old French concrete fortification that was somewhat modified with sandbags and lumber to meet Air Force Base defense needs) for the first time. A1C Simmons and Sgt Richard Lee chatted briefly with a couple of the occupants, and the exchange of several one-liners meant to fend off the anxious tension we all felt. As we pulled away, A1C Simmons told them we would see them on our next trip around.

We drove north along Perimeter Road and passed some 8 to 10 Augmentees, who had taken up a defensive-position, just south of the Army's Military Police Check Point. We exchanged some rather earthy salutations with them, also meant to ease the tension, and drove on to the MP Check Point. Even though the MPs at the check point were Army we did the Air Force thing and offered them some coffee. They told us they were good to go, so we moved on, making rounds.

### **0230 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Barry Lyons, A1C** (Major, Ret.), 3rd TAC FW, AMS (Electronics), Augmentee, 3rd SPS:

Most of us Augmentees came from different units or shops so we didn't know each other. The SP truck came around again about 2:30am to check on us and brought something to munch on and more coffee. *(Until now, I had yet to make contact with anyone sharing this same experience, or even more of what came next.)*

### **0250 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Gary K. Hille, SSgt**, SAT Leader, 3rd SPS, east-end of Biên Hòa Air Base:

At approximately 0250 hours, we were told to "stand down" from our alert, and proceeded on our normal routine. We had run out of coffee and requested permission from CSC to go for coffee resupply. I was assigned as SAT leader east-end of Biên Hòa Air Base. My responsibilities included the care and feeding of the "Windy" units (Sentry Dogs), and Bunker Hill-10. My team consisted of (1) M60 gunner, (1) grenade launcher, (1) 40mm rifleman, and (1) rifleman. Our patrol area was the East perimeter from Bunker Hill-10, to the Airborne Base entrance, where the perimeter turned back to the west.



## Tet, 31 January 1968 Battle of Bien Hoa, Bunker Hill-10, Begins

**0300 hours, 31 January 1968,**

*Courtesy of Tết Counteroffensive - History:*

84,000 Viet Cong guerrillas aided by NVA troops launch the Tết Offensive attacking a hundred cities and towns throughout South Vietnam. The surprise offensive is closely observed by American TV news crews in Vietnam which film the U.S. embassy in Saigon being attacked by 17 Viet Cong commandos, along with bloody scenes from battle areas showing American soldiers under fire, dead and wounded. The graphic color film footage is then quickly relayed back to the states for broadcast on nightly news programs. Americans at home thus have a front row seat in their living rooms to the Viet Cong/NVA assaults against their fathers, sons and brothers, ten thousand miles away.

**0300 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**William Pete Piazza, SSgt** (SMSgt Ret., Silver Star), Biên Hòa Air Base, 3rd SPS:

As NCOIC (non-commissioned officer in charge) of four resupply teams, I was on the perimeter road in my SP truck when the first Chinese Communist 122mm Rocket attack began to hit Biên Hòa Air Base. I noticed flashes coming from the flightline area of the base—then someone [Able-10?] called over the radio that we were under rocket attack.



*Tết 31 January 1968, Biên Hòa Air Base: The attack began with a massive Chinese Communist 122mm Rocket Assault. Graphic Composite (c) 2017 by Don Poss.*



I stopped the vehicle and told the three SPs with me to take cover. We could hear the rockets go over, and see them exploding on base. It was a sudden ferocious rocket attack, growing in intensity by the second.

**0300 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Howard G. Yates, Augmentee** (12th Air Commando Squadron/3rd SPS):  
Defense-6 drove around to the west side of the MP Check Point and A1C Simmons parked the truck. He told us we might want to grab a bite from our box lunches while we had the chance. In statement was perfect; eerie, but perfect. I ate my sandwich and drank some coffee but saved my apple for later. I lit my C-Rat cigarette and pushed my helmet back on my head.



*Biên Hòa Air Base, Rocket Attack, Tết 31 January 1968.*

Almost immediately I heard this “crackling and whooshing” noise tracking right over my head. My first thought was, “*What the hell was that?*” Within seconds, I found out: It was the first of many 122mm rockets to slam into Biên Hòa Air Base in those early morning hours. Rockets hit southwest of our position with a gut-wrenching explosion that plumed into a bright orange and red mushroom cloud. From our vantage point it looked as if our own squadron area (the 12th Air Commandos) had just been blown to bits. I remember thinking—*Oh, God*—they’re all dead.

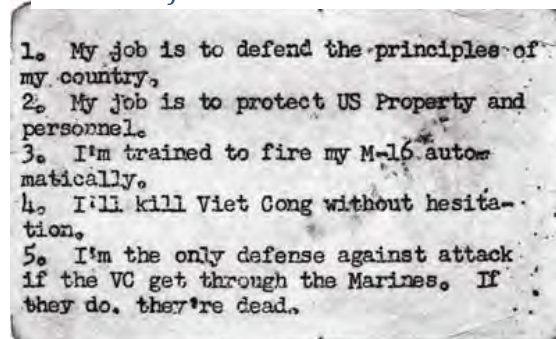
I’m not sure if it was Sgt Lee or A1C Simmons but somebody yelled, “Get out!” I didn’t have to think about it, I just reacted. We all hit the ditch alongside the road about the time the second or third rocket hit the ground. For a moment, I thought I had swallowed an earthquake. My insides shook uncontrollably from the explosion’s concussion-shockwave. I kept telling myself, “*You’re okay man ... settle down,*” but my stomach said, “*Screw you, I’m scared.*” Rockets cratered-in for what seemed like fifteen or twenty minutes, and then all fell quiet.

*This reprieve was to be short-lived.*

**0300-0310 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**William Pete Piazza, SSgt** (SMSgt Ret., Silver Star), Biên Hòa Air Base, 3rd SPS:  
K-9 handler Bill Press radioed *first-alarm* (perimeter penetration) when his Sentry Dog Diablo alerted. Airman Press's handheld pop-flare lit up the east perimeter and he radioed, “*My God, they are everywhere*” then released his dog and fired on the attacking VC and NVA.

*Security Police Squadrons:  
Air Base Defense Card. Vietnam.*



Within seconds, Airman Press was WIA and down, and USAF K-9 Diablo shot dead.



*Battle of Biên Hòa, Bunker Hill-10: AF Sentry Dog Handler, A1C Bill Press, and K-9 MWD Diablo X313, Alert on Viet Cong and NVA in the perimeter wire, and pop a hand parachute flare. A1C Bill Press fires on enemy, is wounded and plays dead. Diablo is KIA.*

Along the east perimeter of the base, K-9 handlers, Bunker Hill-10, and Listening Posts confirmed penetrations and engaging in intense small arms fire with about 1,500 aggressively attacking enemy troops. Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army troops were in the wire and swarming all around Bunker Hill-10. It was like getting tsunami'd by the 274th Viet Cong Regiment's eight companies of about 500-600 men, who were attacking and trying to overrun or bypass the bunker, and hit the flightline and aircraft. The call for ammo-and-flares-resupply echoed around the 10 miles in length perimeter fence, as sniper fire was received.

Later, LTC Miller estimated there were approximately 1,400-1,500 enemy troops attacking the Air Base, and to meet them were about 350 USAF Security Police, and 75 Augmentees. *[10% of the attackers would be killed or captured at or near Bunker Hill-10; 60% of the attackers were NVA].*

### **About 0300-0320 hours, 31 January 1968**

**LTC Kent Miller, Squadron Commander, 3rd Security Police Squadron:**

At approximately 0320 hours, the K-9 handler transmitted that a penetration was being made near his post. Immediately, Bunker Hill-10, the Listening Posts, and another K-9 handler, confirmed the report and were exchanging small arms fire with the enemy.

Biên Hòa Air Base was under heavy attack by 1,400 - 1,500 Viet Cong and NVA troops penetrating the perimeter at four areas (A-B-C-D) and assaulting another (E). The 274th Viet Cong Regiment's eight companies of about 500-600 men were aggressively attacking, determined to destroy or bypass Bunker Hill-10. Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army troops were in the wire and swarming all around Bunker Hill-10.

SPs on duty at Bunker Hill-10: Two (2) security policemen and one augmentee on duty in Bunker Hill-10 (Armed with one (1) M60 machinegun, a grenade launcher).

SPs dispatched or responding in support and defense of Bunker Hill-10: Two K-9 supervisors and a Security Police Officer in the vicinity of Bunker Hill-10 on a post-check proceeded to Bunker Hill-10.

A three men SAT patrolling the east perimeter advanced to Bunker Hill-10 (The SAT was armed with one (1) M60 machinegun and a grenade launcher). All other personnel were armed with an M16 rifles.

**0300-0310 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**USAF Police Alumni Association,** (Excerpt Courtesy of: [USAF Police Alumni Association](#), *The Battle for Biên Hòa Air Base: Tết 1968*):

The NVA and VC "... having surrounded Bunker Hill-10 ... were on the way to other objectives. By bypassing Bunker Hill-10, the enemy subjected themselves to an intense crossfire from the bunker and other defenders. Even so, they managed to penetrate as far west as the *engine test stand* which was within 50 yards of the aircraft parking area. A counterattack against the [engine] test stand, launched from Bunker Hill-9, managed to retake the position, but it had to be abandoned after helicopter gunships mistakenly strafed the recaptured position."

**0300 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Sgt Jim Lebowitz,** 3rd Security Police Squadron, Law Enforcement Desk Sgt:

On 31 January 1968, at 0300 hours, we were hit by rockets and mortars and within a minute or so CSC (Central Security Control) lost all power, and I took over for CSC duties at the LED Law Enforcement Desk). Within about five to ten minutes, and while still under rocket attack, LTC Kent Miller, 3rd SPS Squadron Commander, came running in the back door of the LED building.



*Jim Lebowitz, Sgt, 3rd Security Police Squadron,  
Law Enforcement Desk Sergeant.*

LTC Kenton Miller was still in the process of getting dressed and took over the radio and told me to continue with the plotting and maps updates, and also to keep in

contact with the Army on the HT 200 radio we had. LTC Miller first went to CSC but because they were off line he went to the LED and took over the radio. He did not come into the field to direct the fight as he knew he had good officers and NCOs out there that could do the job.

When LTC Miller got on the radio, he calmed everyone down by talking to them as if sitting across from each SP and Augmentee one on one! He did his radio thing and let his LED/CSC folks do all the controlling and posting of info which helped a lot. His presence on the radio definitely had a calming effect.

At first, I was concerned about a possible sapper attack, but this concern abated within an hour into the attack. About two hours into the attack I felt confident that we were winning. The LED was relatively close to the flightline and I could clearly hear rockets impacting. During Tết 1968's VC/NVA attack on Biên Hòa Air Base, there were no SP guards outside of CSC/LED. From inside LED, I could clearly hear weapons fire and rocket-mortars impacting.

Also, quite a few rockets hit in the barracks area not far from the LED. Sounds of weapons fire and other explosions were very clear, over the radio, when receiving radio transmissions. Radio traffic was very light in areas not under direct attack, although without any urging, radio discipline was great.

I was concerned with the LED safety throughout the attack. My main concern was a direct hit by a rocket, as several rockets hit close to the LED. Keep in mind that the LED was no more than a large hooch and not a hardened structure. We had no realistic plans for defending the LED if attacked by enemy penetrators, and I was only armed with a .38 Cal revolver. There was no plan I was knowledgeable of for another location to take over base defense, if the LED was taken out.

During Tết 1968, there was only sporadic fire at the Main Gate and VNAF Gate, which were manned jointly by USAF Security Police and VNAF QC. However, about two weeks after Tết, the Main Gate began to receive heavy fire from nearby Biên Hòa City. I contacted the US Liaison officer at Đông Nai which was adjacent to the base and he had Vietnamese Army sweep in from the town itself.

Throughout the attack and into the next morning I was using the HT 200 Radio and in contact with the Tactical Operations Centers (TOC) or the 101st ABN and the Army Liaison at Đông Nai. About 30 minutes into the ground attack I was called by the US Army Artillery Battery at Đông Nai; also in our province N/E of Saigon and just east of the Biên Hòa Air Base.



Some LT wanted to know the coordinates of Bunker Hill-10 so they could lie in artillery. I knew that Reserve SAT was helping to man Bunker Hill-10, with Sgt Marshall Gott, so I told him that everyone was too close in for that and it would not be practical. He screamed, "is running that show? and asked to speak to the officer in charge.

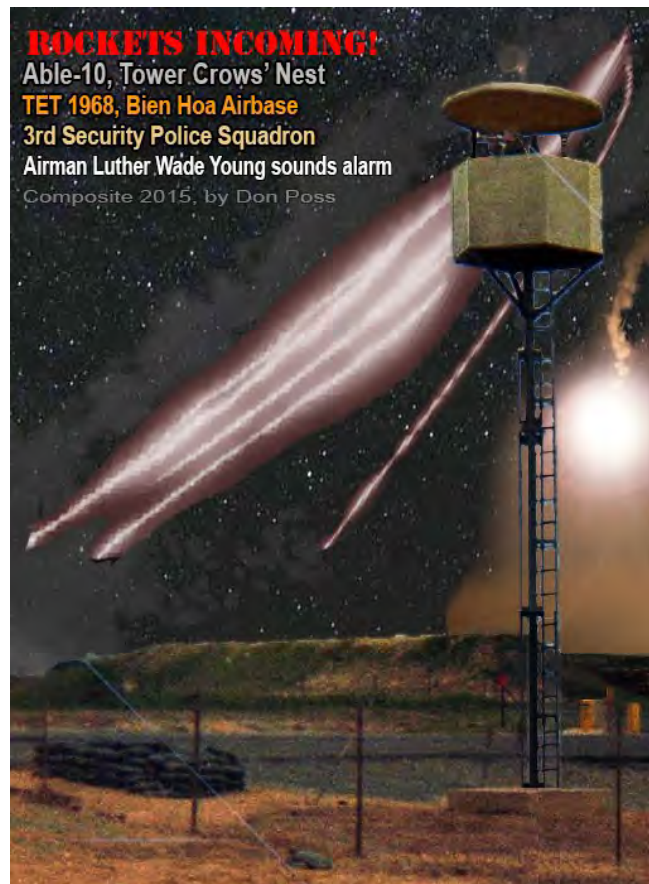
I told LTC Miller what was going on and gave him the handset. He listened for a minute or so and his succinct response was, "Bullshit." He shook his head and handed the mic back to me and said, "Screw him, Buddha." They never mentioned artillery again.

*Bunker Hill-10,  
Tết 31 January 1968.  
LTC Kenton Miller. CO 3rd SPS.*



Before dawn, all firing stopped. I don't know if the snipers were killed, or just blended into the town. No bodies were found. Also, there were no USAF or VNAF injuries there.

*Biên Hòa Air Base, Bomb Dump Tower Able-10, Sgt Young sounds base alarm: Incoming Rockets*





**Bien Hoa AB: Michael Pollock, View from Bomb Dump Tower Able-10, toward Airbase. Brng back any memories? 1966-1967.**

*Photo (1966-1967) by Michael Pollock. View from Bomb Dump, Tower Able-10, toward the Air Base.*

**0300 hours, 31 January 1968,**

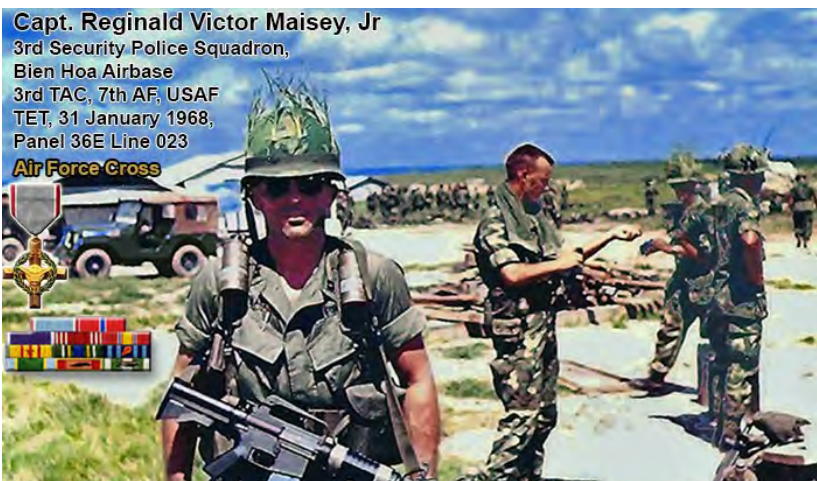
**Chaplain (Capt.) Donald J. Sheehan's report (Tết 1968):** Reginald V. Maisey, Capt,

Operations Officer, 3rd SPS:

“When the enemy attack started, Capt. Maisey was at the western end of the base. He immediately sped in his jeep to the Central Security Command post. Realizing how critical holding Bunker Hill-10 was, Capt. Maisey volunteered to go there to direct the defense of that area.

Shortly thereafter, he arrived at the bunker and took charge of the men from the 3rd SPS

in the vicinity of Bunker Hill-10. During one attack, I was able to sound the alarm and a squadron from Operation Ranch Hand was able to get into their bunker before a rocket hit their living quarters, which were destroyed, but there were no casualties or injuries. This was a joint effort



*Bien Hoa Air Base, Capt. Reginald V. Maisey, KIA 31 Jan 1968.*



with all members of the 3rd Security Police Squadron. I did my part as did they theirs. It really did take a team effort from enlisted men to officers to protect Biên Hòa Air Base.

The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army attacked Bunker Hill-10 with a vengeance. They knew



*Biên Hòa Air Base, Rocket Attack, Tết 31 January 1968.  
Note Tower, bottom center. Photo by Coco.*

it was the key to over-running the east-end of the field and the maintenance hangers, and other vital areas of the Air Base. The enemy hit the bunker with everything they had; about 12 direct rocket-hits at point-blank range were recorded from the enemy. On top of the bunker, one rocket put Sergeant Tuggle's machinegun out of action. He went below, grabbed another weapon, and continued to fight from within the bunker. At that time, Sgt Marshall A. Gott remained on top of the bunker for a time, and continued to fire his M16 at the enemy trying

to destroy the bunker. Capt Maisey and the other men continued firing and kept the enemy pinned down not too far from their original point of penetration.

No one knows how many enemies were killed by the men defending Bunker Hill-10, but after the battle more than 60 dead VC were found nearby.”

### **0300 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Charles Haugen, Sgt,** 3rd Security Police Squadron, Biên Hòa Air Base:

At 0300 hours, I remember the sound of something flying overhead and then the sound of Rocket explosions in the F-100 Super Sabre parking area. The aircraft were parked in revetments, and a few were in maintenance hangers. The sound of exploding rocket impacts must have been directed upwards, because I didn't hear loud explosions, just a kind of “buff ... buff” sound. I could see the impacts and there were reports coming over the radio that we were under attack.

Suddenly, the rocket attack ended and SSgt Sawyer called for all of us to board the SP QRT vehicle. He said Bunker Hill-10 was taking fire and we were going to support it. We all piled into our vehicle, a crew-cab Dodge pickup truck, with no doors. I got into the bed of the truck because it was too cumbersome to get into the interior while carrying the M60 and my M16. After we were all aboard we headed for the east perimeter.

### **0300 hours, 31 January 1968**

**Barry Lyons, A1C** (Major, Ret.), 3rd TAC FW, AMS (Electronics), Augmentee, 3rd SPS:

Time passed, and the coffee was not the best but helped dull the chill, when suddenly over toward the control tower there was an extremely bright flash of light and sharp crack of vibration in the air— it was 3:00am! I threw my canteen's tin coffee cup, I know not where, and jumped into the bunker with at least one other guy right on top of me. I wiggled around to get my “partner's

shoe” out of my face, and so I could see a little bit as there were more explosions impacting—some were mortars. and some more larger rockets (records vary, but unfortunately for us, the VC’s aim was for the base buildings and aircraft and not at us, out in the middle of the taxi-way, and seemed to have tapered off. We could hear small arms fire everywhere. We were ordered to load back in the truck, then started heading over toward the F-102 area, and ENE toward the perimeter fence.

When the truck stopped, we were told to get off and establish a line to guard the perimeter fence. Easier said than done because I couldn’t see anything, as the grass was three feet or so high, and there was gunfire supported by tracers everywhere. I remember remarking to the guy next to me that this wasn’t like the movies where you could see everything going on. We moved to our left until we came to the road that ran down east from the F-102 area, past a 6-8-foot high old French cement bunker. Later, I learned it was designated Bunker Hill-10 and was where Capt. Masie was killed by a RPG. I do not know at what point he was KIA”.

The VC were trying to capture Bunker Hill-10 and were firing mortars, rockets, RPGs, and small arms at it. There were three or four guys in the bunker, so the rest of us (15 or so) were directed across the road to the west bank of a drainage ditch that ran north from our position. Two SPs, myself and another augmentee, were directed to move forward (east) across the then dry drainage ditch such that we could cover that side of the ditch. This made us nearly parallel to Bunker Hill-10. The SPs had a M60 and were shooting east with lots of red-tracer fire. I was facing more north, down along the drainage ditch and toward, but short of, the 101st Air Base area.

### **0300 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**David Parks, SP5, USA** Radio Intelligence Team, 856th Radio Research Det., billeted with 3rd SPS:

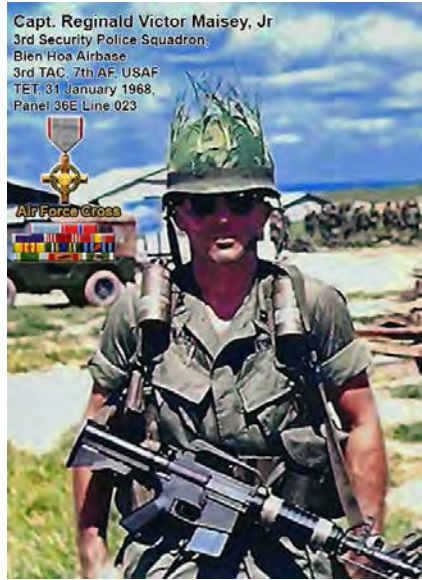
At 0300 hours, sharp, KA-BOOM! 122mm rockets were walking fast toward our area. Those rockets made the most god-awful sound, a roar with ever increasing volume, and then BOOM—a very large explosion. A terror weapon for sure. Those things could and did blow a barracks to toothpicks.

I leaped off the top bunk and ran like hell for a bunker; unlike our Air Force cohorts, Carpenter and I slept -in with our boots and fatigues on. I was the second one to the bunker and dove in head first, others piled in on top of me. The rockets walked through our area. Soon after arriving in the bunker, I noted that I had failed to grab my weapon (I carried a M-79 for the most part, had a .38 pistol, and for good measure, kept an M16 in the jeep or leaned against the PRD-1). Not one soul in that bunker had a weapon, I believe the Air Force fellows were made to lock theirs up at night.

### **About 0300 hours, 31 January 1968**

**Gary K. Hille, SSgt, SAT** Leader, east-end of Biên Hòa Air Base:

About 0300 hours, as we left the chow hall after stocking up on coffee, we saw 122mm rockets start to impact on the perimeter, and at the same time the base siren sounded. As we were already adjacent to the motor pool, we took refuge in their bunker. My fire team was first back on the air after the rockets walked-past us.



*Capt Reginald V. Maisey, 3<sup>rd</sup> SPS Ops Officer,  
Biên Hòa Air Base, Tết 31 January 1968.*

We were dispatched to a point 30 yards to the North of Bunker Hill-10. Upon arrival, we left the Jeep, went across the drainage ditch, and set up our defense line: Gunner and Riflemen together, 40mm to the right, and myself to the left.

Capt Maisey continued directing and amassing the fire power of the 30 or so Security Policemen, in the general area of Bunker Hill-10, onto the enemy who were within five yards of the bunker. Capt Maisey had to leave the bunker, exposing himself to enemy fire, to communicate by radio with Central Security Command (CSC). He did this throughout the battle while yelling orders and directions to his SP Airmen around him, even when they were at times surrounded by Viet Cong.

**0300 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**John E. Gross, 1st LT (LTC, Ret.) 2nd Battalion (Mechanized), 47th Infantry (2-47),  
the Panthers, 1967-1968:**

At 0300 hours, I received a call from Major Bill Jones ... stating that Biên Hòa Air Base, the Long Bình facility, the II Field Force headquarters and the 199th Light Infantry Brigade (LIB) base camp were under heavy mortar and rocket attack. This was no surprise to us, since we could plainly hear the enemy rounds slamming into Long Bình.

**0300 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**3rd Tactical Dispensary, Ambulance** (*Excerpt from 7th AF News, Page: 5, 20 Mar 1968, Ambulance Drivers Respond to Attack*):

"From the start of the 3 a.m., Jan. 31 attack on Biên Hòa Air Base, until later in the day when remnants of the main force of enemy were disposed of, the combat centered around the outpost of Bunker Hill-10, on the east side of the base, and the Jet Engine [Run-Up Pad] test facility, about 100 yards away. Right in the middle of the struggle were the men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Dispensary. Teams of dispensary personnel manned the four ambulances that brought in the wounded."

**0300 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Robert (Bob) Vitray, Engineering Entomology Specialist, 3rd SPS Augmentee:**

I was standing facing the flight line, though I couldn't see it because of the buildings in the way. My back was to the POL storage tanks. The army "black hats" had a big chopper parking area to my right. We had seen army sentries and outfitters over there from time to time. Suddenly there was a loud "BANG!" from that direction. I thought and maybe said, "Those army guys really screwed up this time." I thought they had managed to blow up a chopper while repairing it.



**Biên Hoa Air Base, POL tanks, and POL refueling truck (top/rt). 31 Jan 1968, TET, 45 rockets were received on base. A POL refueling truck, parked about where the truck is, received shrapnel punches, and gushed JP4 gas on to ground, which flood down side road toward a burning F-100 Super Sabre, hit by a rocket.**

*Photo left by David Worthen, 3rd SPS, 1969.*

*Photo Right, 2017 satellite image, courtesy of: Google Maps.*

Then there was another "**BANG!**" also from the direction of the chopper pad. I had never heard a 122mm rocket before, except from a mile or more away and inside a bunker. I now think that these were the impacts on the perimeter road which was hundreds of yards on the other side of the choppers. We began a frantic scramble for cover. There was only room in the foxhole for two guys. I ran a couple of paces up the road that ran to the ramp and dropped into the ditch on my left.

There was a bright light and I looked up toward the repair sheds. An F-100 had been hit and was burning fiercely. At the entrance to the POL dump a fuel truck had been holed by a piece of shrapnel. For some reason known but to God, it was not burning. I wouldn't have noticed it except I smelled kerosene. Now the warning siren started up.

I saw the fuel flowing down the road into the POL Dump, and looked back up the stream to see a yellow fuel POL truck with a hole in it and beyond that the burning F-100. We had to stay down a long time. As the F-100 burned it began to cook off ammo. No real force of course, it wasn't going through a barrel. We heard a lot of BANGS, and every once in a while, the sound of a slug bouncing off the siding of a hangar or skipping down the ramp.

The base seemed to be moaning as if it were a wounded animal—"BANG, BANG, BANG". Some of the reports were distant. Some were pretty near. Then—"BANG", one that was real close. I heard something go over my head with a sort of wavering hiss or tremolo shriek, my nose itched. I brushed off some of the weeds the shrapnel had cut and dumped on my face. I tried to get deeper into that ditch. Tried to wriggle my way down. We had pissed in that ditch earlier. God knew what else was in there. I didn't care. I wanted to dig back to the world. Occasionally we heard small arms fire.

### **0300 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Jon Hayes, A2C, 3rd Security Police Squadron, QRT:**

Just before Tết, I got temporarily kicked off my bomb dump tower post, and I wasn't in the tower when Tết hit. I should have been in my tower, but when Tết hit I was in a useless Quonset hut as the rockets started slamming in—and scared, big-time—seemed like incoming rockets would never stop exploding. When the rockets started, things were



happening so fast there was only react—no time to think about anything. One of the scariest part of Tết was definitely the 122mm Rocket attack! When it all started, with incoming, the VC and NVA Rocketeers, artillery, or whatever they called them, caught our QRT in the Reserve Hooch; there was no place to go for cover and we were just so vulnerable with no place to go at all. Scary. It was just so crazy and fast happening, and when it slowed or stopped it was playing catch-up with whatever had just happened— Later, I couldn't believe I was still alive when the sun came up.

We had a QRT truck on standby, and were told to arm up, fall outside, and get in to the back of the truck—Bunker Hill-10 was under heavy attack. We piled into the QRT truck... I was away from my brother Don and my buddies, and didn't know anybody in the QRT. I knew Don was in a tower in the bomb dump, but when I actually was able to think about anything, other than what was happening in real-time, I looked toward the bomb dump not knowing whether to expect a tremendous fire and explosions, or continued darkness off in that direction. As long as there was no blast and concussion, I knew the bomb dump was relatively safe, and so was my brother. If there were a blast—nothing likely would have survived in the bomb dump.

All those QRT guys in the truck with me were from different Flights and didn't know each other. Even though there were only 12-15 of us, we formed up as one of the responding teams with a good solid armed-team Quick Reaction Team, armed with an M-60, M-16s, a ton of ammo, and grenade launchers on the M-16s. The truck was probably a duce and a half, and when we quickly loaded up, we headed out east toward Bunker Hill-10.

In the bomb dump towers, we used radios checked out from the armory. They were the HT200 radios [photo right], but we called them bag-phones because they were issued in a carry bag. However, in the QRT, we didn't have individual radios assigned, so things happening anywhere else at the time. All I knew was we were under Sarge's command and I didn't hear a thing over his radio. That was enough then, as he took care of the big picture and we focused on whatever was before us.

*HT200 Radio,  
used in Vietnam.*





**Biên Hoa Air Base**  
**POL Fuel Dump, TET 1968**  
**3rd Security Police Squadron**  
F-100 Burns on the Flightline as  
45 Rockets are received, and  
stray shrapnel has found a POL  
Truck's tank, flooding the field with  
thousands of gallons of JP4  
that flows down the road toward the burning  
Super Sabre...stopping just short. An Augmentee  
radios CSC, but 1,400 VC and NVA are battling  
with the 3rd SPS for Bunker Hill-10 ...

*Biên Hòa Air Base, POL Fuel Dump, Tết 31 Jan 1968. F-100 burns on the flightline as 45 rockets are received, and stray shrapnel has found a POL truck's tank, flooding the field with thousands of gallons of JP4 fuel that flows down the road toward the burning Super Sabre ... stopping just short. An Augmentee radios Central Security Control, but 1,400 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese are battling with the 3rd Security Police Squadron for Bunker Hill-10, and attempting perimeter penetration in four locations. Composite Photo (c) 2017 by Don Poss.*

**About 0310 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**SSgt Piazza** (SMSgt Ret., Silver Star), Defense-5, Biên Hòa Air Base, 3rd SPS:

When the rocket attack momentarily ceased, after about 10 minutes, we had received about 45 rockets and mortars by then. I got my men together and started back to the main part of base, but only got as far as Q-4 and heard Central Security Control (CSC) radio call for Defense-6, an east Resupply Team, to go to Bunker Hill-10 for resupply.

The radio then reported that Defense-6, just dispatched to Bunker Hill-10, was pinned



down by sniper fire at the 101st MP Checkpoint and unable to advance. Speeding to the checkpoint, I stopped and picked up SSgt. James Lee, Defense-6 leader, and left his three Augmentees with Airman 1st Class Simmons. I then took a case of flares from Sgt Lee's truck and headed for Bunker Hill-10, still in need of flares and ammo.

There were about 25-30 SP's and Augmentees all total around Bunker Hill-10, but I never came up with all the names, sad to say, for some reason. Inside Bunker Hill-10 were two SP Sgts, Sgt Neal Tuggle and Sgt Marshall Gott, and Augmentee A1C Neil Behnke. They had one M60 machinegun and three M16 rifles all total, that I remember.

At that time, we had one NCOIC of a Sector, Capt. Maisey and a Lieutenant from the army's 145th Combat Aviation Battalion (who was to help us with chopper-support requests from CSC), a resupply team, and one base fire department team with a fire pumper truck. We also had available Response Teams that included SATs (Sabotage Alert Teams, each with three SPs, one QC, and an M-151 jeep); Also, a QRT (Quick Reaction Team) with a duce'n-a-half ton truck and fifteen SP's and Augmentees. I would say about forty Airmen available in all.



*Biên Hòa Air Base, Bunker Hill-10, ditch. Tết 31 January 1968.*

The SAT and QRT teams each had an M60 machinegun, their M-16s, a couple of M79s and XM-148 grenade launchers. We also had one M113 track sitting over in the MAC Terminal the Army did not want, as it was an older gas engine model. It did not get into the fight that I remember. We did not have any V-100s at that time.

Meanwhile, after several VC RPG rounds and near-misses, the fire truck parked near Bunker

Hill-10 drove back towards the main base area, and I took cover behind the bunker.

Once more, *things were about to heat up.*

### **About 0310 hours, 31 January 1968**

**David Parks, SP5**, USA Radio Intelligence Team, 856th Radio Research Det., billeted with 3rd SPS:

After the rockets stopped, AK's started (*or maybe they were there all the time*). That's when we found out that there were sappers on the base. I felt like a damned fool for having left my weapon hanging on my bunk. By now I was wide awake, scared and really starting to miss my weapon. I was sure the sappers could hear my heart pounding. The folks in the bunker held a brief debate, in their skivvies, on whether to leave the bunker, or not. Carpenter and I just up and unassed the bunker, heading for our weapons. Along the way, we decided the best place for us was our sand pile, going there seemed a good idea for some reason.

Doing short rushes, we finally made it to the barracks, going in presented another problem: what if there were sappers inside? What if our own troops were inside and armed? If we went in unannounced we could get zapped. We decided and rushed through the door, running for our bunks and grabbing our stuff. We loaded our jeep and headed for the sand pile.

Carpenter was driving and I was on shotgun duty. We were going fast as that seemed the best way to avoid getting hit if we were fired-on. We knew by now there were sappers on the base. There was a crashed Spooky gunship about half way down the runway to our right, we could see other damaged aircraft too.

### **0300-0310 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**USAF Police Alumni Association** (*Excerpt Courtesy of: USAF Police Alumni Association*):

**Capt Maisey**, Operations Officer, was dispatched and sped to Bunker Hill-10 to assume command. Almost immediately upon reaching Bunker Hill-10, Capt Maisey reported receiving direct hits from RPG2 and RPG7 rockets fired directly across the road. Subsequent investigation showed that Bunker Hill-10 received five (5) direct hits and about 10 to 15 indirect rocket hits.

Capt Maisey seemed to be everywhere. To direct and concentrate the fire power of the twenty or so Security Policemen in the general area on the enemy that was within 200 feet of the bunker, he constantly exposed himself to danger. To communicate by radio with the Security Command Post, Capt. Maisey had to leave the relative security of the bunker and expose himself to enemy fire. He did this throughout the battle. Above the noise of the battle, he yelled orders and directions to the men around him. His voice instilled confidence and bolstered the morale of the beleaguered defenders of the bunker.

CSC was out of action (rockets caused a power failure), and the LED assumed both duties. CSC/LED was not in direct contact with the gunships because the helicopter liaison officer was wounded at Bunker Hill-10 when he proceeded to the bunker with the Ops Officer.

**Chaplain Sheehan later wrote in his VSPA com article:**

“The bravery of the men in Bunker Hill-10 was matched by the incredible valor of other men of the 3rd SPS. SSgts William Piazza and James Lee did the impossible and through a withering field of enemy fire drove a truck ... across what would seem an impassable field—a field alive with VC. The men dauntlessly drove right up to the besieged Bunker Hill-10, and under constant enemy fire resupplied the defenders of the bunker with enough ammunition to enable them to continue the fight. When one knows the terrain these men passed through, and remembers the confusion at the time, and the danger of their cargo, he stands in awe at their courageous feat. It seems impossible. But brave men made the impossible, possible. “

**About 0315 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Jon Hayes, A2C,** 3rd Security Police Squadron, QRT:

A short distance from Bunker Hill-10, our QRT truck was driving with its lights off and stopped. I think Sarge just said, Follow Me (and meant it) and he'd give us our orders when

we got there. So, we just bailed out and hustled, following the Sarge at a fast pace, trying to keep up with him (I wish I could remember his name).

We moved forward with weapons at the ready...I don't think it was very far, but all the while you could hear weapons fire growing in intensity and volume, in and outbound. Our QRT team were all SPs; I don't think we had augmentees with us at that time. Other QRT teams were arriving and our overall numbers seemed to be growing—so were the numbers of enemy penetrating the perimeter wire. I could see the enemy's crazed muzzle flashes, like fire-flies gone nova; and green tracers fired wildly and gliding deceptively-slow into the heavens like fading molten-string necklaces. We were very nervous (okay...scared stuff-less) being our first time in combat and all.

When we all arrived at Bunker Hill-10, Sarge was talking to Capt Maisey. It was VERY dark. Then Sarge came over and told us what we were to do and where we were to go, and moved us a little north of the bunker where we would defend Bunker Hill-10's left and right flanks. I thought, this is the real deal.

Our QRT group stayed together and spread out in a long line on the back side of Bunker Hill-10, and we concealed in the tall grass and clumpy terrain as best as possible. I never had been to Bunker Hill-10 before, and could see the bunker was on my right side, facing sort of NE, and I was watching the left flank, toward the 145th Aviation Battalion area for any penetrators. We relied on each other. Other than some of the NCO's, I don't think any of us had ever been in combat before. None of us started firing until told to.

We were immediately taken under fire and in a fire-fight right away. A few trip flares had gone off and you could see the flare-lights winking rapidly, but I didn't see any mines exploding in the minefield zone beyond the wire. Viet Cong and NVA were definitely crossing through the wire.

### **About 0320 hours, 31 January 1968**

**Marshall A. Gott, Sgt (BSM/v), 3rd SPS, Biên Hòa Air Base:**

I never had occasion before to go below Bunker Hill-10 until Tết 1968, and it was so dark inside you could not see your hand in front of you. Inside Bunker Hill-10 were SP Sgt Neal Tuggle and Augmentee A1C Neil Behnke, with M-16s, and there was very little room inside. As I recall, no one manned the M60 mounted on the bunker's concrete flat-roof, ringed with sandbagged rows, like staggered-bricks. Once Sgt Tuggle and A1C Behnke began firing through the portholes [embrasure firing slits], I left Bunker Hill-10 due to the crowded inside, and extremely painful-hearing noise, and took up a bunker defensive-position under an old fire truck parked to the rear of the bunker.

I never, to my recollection, ever saw any other fire truck, other than the one that was parked within 30 feet of the back side (west side) of Bunker Hill-10. Although it was an antique-like old French-made fire truck, it was an USAF, not a Vietnamese, truck and was supposedly there to possibly do burn-control for weed abatement or removal. All I recall about the old fire truck is it sat so low to the ground, possibly with running boards. I took I leaped off the top bunk and ran like hell for a bunker; unlike our Air Force cohorts, Carpenter and I slept-in with our boots and fatigues on. I was the second one to the



*Sgt Marshall Gott takes cover beneath an old French Fire Truck, as 145<sup>th</sup> CAB gunships take on attacking NVA/VC.*

bunker and dove in head first, others piled in on top of me. The rockets walked through I

really hoped the chopper pilots would be alerted to the VC's position threatening us, and also, that at least I was still alive. The 145th gunship opened fire on the VC and shell-casings were dropping all around my position like rain—that, I will never forget as long as I live!

At that time, I was not sure if the men in the bunker were either dead or alive. From under the fire truck, I fired several rounds and tracers at the Viet Cong's position closest to me, which was on top of the berm S/E of our position; I could see their heads sticking up. The berm, left from ditching around the end of the base, ran for a long distance. In places, it was as high if not higher than the bunker. On the backside of the berm was Biên Hòa City and a bar we could hear music playing from.

I saw heads of VC looking over the berm at us, and they were very close, perhaps only half a football field, if that, and realized if I could see them due to the flares dropped, then we were lit up too. It was from the berm position the Viet Cong RPG team did the most damage with their Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs). To my knowledge, that was the closest they ever got to Bunker Hill-10, but they were able to hit the bunker 12-13 times, so I was told. At that time, I was not sure if the men in the bunker were either dead or alive. From under the fire truck, I fired several rounds and tracers at the Viet Cong's position closest to me, which was on top of the berm S/E of our position; I could see their heads sticking up.

The berm, left over from ditching around the end of the base, ran for a long distance. In places, it was as high if not higher than the bunker. On the backside of the berm was Biên Hòa City and a bar we could hear music playing from. I saw heads of VC still looking over the berm at us, and they were very close, perhaps only half a football field, if that, and realized if I could see them by flares dropped, then we were lit up too.

It was from the berm position the Viet Cong RPG team did the most damage with their Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs). To my knowledge, that was the closest they ever got to Bunker Hill-10, but they were able to hit the bunker 12-13 times, so I was told. Days later, I believe the berm was bulldozed so the enemy couldn't sneak up behind it again for cover. I don't recall if I ever went back to Bunker Hill-10 after that, and I shipped home in April 1968.





*Biên Hòa Air Base: Perimeter grass fire. Tết 31 January 1968.*

**Excerpt from “Defenders Security Forces 1947-2006”, by James Lee Conrad and Jerry Bullock:** “Because of his uncertainty as to where the main attack would fall, LTC Miller initially sent only a three-men SAT and a nine-man QRT to bolster Bunker Hill-10. Over time, 30-40 men, including a base fire department pumper truck and crew to douse any fires that might start in the elephant grass around the bunker, were drawn into the fighting.”

**0320 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Jon Hayes, A2C, 3rd Security Police Squadron, QRT:**

Incoming rockets suddenly tapered off and stopped. I remember Spooky had arrived and started dropping the big-stuff flares—those million-candle parachute flares lit up the NE area like high-noon. It was as if the field was alive and a moving carpet of invading fire ants. I don’t recall seeing the enemy freeze in the light, dropping for cover or getting hit just then. But it looked like some of the enemy were trying to flank us, and some were running West toward the base flight line and aprons—although the runway lights were dialed way down and softly glowing steadily, but not winking.

When those choppers showed up, VC and NVA were firing all around us—that was when we were literally surrounded and fighting for our lives. Those Spooky flares and the 145th gunships really took the VC and NVA under heavy fire and literally saved our butts. The



choppers were all exposed, taking fire, and flying so low we felt their rotor wash. The VC fired a storm toward them and continued pounding Bunker Hill-10 and us, and fought very hard attempting a break-through.

I recall vividly where we were at, just beyond the shallow little stagnant creek that was behind the bunker. We had rapidly formed a defensive perimeter, right after the rockets stopped. Fighting was getting serious, with constant shooting. The choppers were raging around, then came flying in just yards above our heads, and we could hear their bullets going over us, saw the expended brass raining down and felt the rotor wash rake over us. The Sarge yelled that we were taking-off away from there—he meant run—from that area as the choppers were way too close. Well, you know how your body can run faster than your big-feet, well mine did, and I fell in the swampy bug-skating creek, which was about a foot deep in that area, and when I climbed out my M16 was a mud-clotted scuzzy mess, and I a mud-streak playing catch-up to the QRT. No one said anything or made mud-jokes, but I know what better you than me looks like when I see them.

We went a little north of Bunker Hill-10 and regrouped, and that was where we would make our defensive stand...again...then scooted a little bit more because the choppers were still psycho-ing and buzzing around real close and looking for something to kill. The VC were really close and not hunkering down, but shooting like crazy at the bunker, the choppers, and us—all at once. Bunker Hill-10 was absolutely getting hammered by VC RPGs.

***About 0320 hours, 31 January 1968,***

**LTC Robert M. Deets**, USA, Battalion Commander, 145th Combat Aviation Battalion: Capt Rubin and his "Firefly" [stopping Charlie at night] team had just returned from a mission near Duc Hoa, when they were told to engage the enemy on the east side of the Air Base. They spotted the Viet Cong off the eastern end of the runway and awaited clearance to fire. An emergency standby fire team from the 118th Assault Helicopter Company was soon airborne and on station.

The C-47's flares were really sun-bright and still lighting up the area with bad-news amber glare, as only flares can do. We fired on the VC and NVA as they kept trying to out flank us, and I noticed both our right and left flanks had the same problems. The VC and mostly NVA were like a tsunami...avalanche...flash-flood...and stuff-storm, all rolled in to one, and beginning to encompass and overwhelm our flanks by sheer-numbers and determination. I felt like the British in the film Zulu, during the major battle scene, that I saw at a stateside base theatre. Thank God many of the newly uniform NVA seemed focused on passing us by and absorbing our fire—they were about to enter their own up close and personal stuff-storm...courtesy of the 3rd Security Police, waiting for their entry in to a solid line of sustained fire.

Capt Rubin was then given permission to engage the enemy. After approximately 30 minutes, his team needed to refuel and the mission was given to the 118th Gunship team. Capt Rubin and his Australian co-pilot were both wounded and their helicopter shot-up so bad it was rendered non-flyable. Capt Rubin was given another helicopter and then formed

another "Firefly Team" and later returned for further action.

Lt. Col. Anderson and Major Jarrett requested and were given permission to insert their Cobra "NETT" [New Equipment Transition Team] Team into the action. Their flying was outstanding and was a major factor in winning the Battle of Biên Hòa. Contact with the Viet Cong lasted until late in the morning. By that time almost every helicopter fire team in the battalion had participated in the effort to destroy the firmly emplaced enemy in this action.

**0320 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Charles Haugen, Sgt, 3rd Security Police Squadron, Biên Hòa Air Base:**

We traveled along the flight line, headed toward the east perimeter. It was very eerie as there were no other vehicles moving. There were some fires burning in the revetment area and I remember a radio message came through that an F-100 Super Sabre was on fire and about to explode. I don't recall if it actually did explode, as we were well past the area by then. We traveled past Bunker Hill-7 and out onto a road that would take us to Bunker Hill-10.



*Biên Hòa Air Base, RVN, Rocket Attack strikes F-100 Super Sabre Revetments. Tết 1968. [Click to Animate.](#)*

When we got to within about 100 yards or so from Bunker Hill-10, SSgt Sawyer pulled off the road into a field. We all jumped out of the truck and sort of half-ass deployed in a defensive-manner. SSgt Sawyer told us that he wanted us to crawl across the road, and I mean crawl! Then we were to proceed along the western side of the road, using the road

for cover, until we reached a sort of earth berm where we would take up a position. At this time, I made the most bone-headed mistake I have ever made. Rather than carry both my M16 and the M60, I placed the M16 under a seat in the truck and left it there. What in hell was I thinking?

***About 0320 hours (Twilight/Dawn hours), 31 January 1968,***

**Gary K. Hille, SSgt, SAT Leader, 3rd SPS, east-end of Biên Hòa Air Base:**

We were near the SP with a radio but could hear nothing but chatter—a lot of “break 6” calls and scared Airmen. CSC radioed and said they had a wounded Airman at a Listening Post south of Bunker Hill-10, and dispatched my team to pick him up. We returned to the Jeep, only to discover the clutch pedal was lying flat on the floor. I informed CSC of the Situation and they dispatched the S/E SAT Team to transport the wounded man.

What had happened was that one of our LP Airman thought he saw some movement on the other side of Bunker Hill-10. He went after the VC, neglecting to ask for covering fire from us, and was wounded—I think he took one in the chest. He had to be dragged back behind us, where the S/E SAT Team got him in an ambulance, and he was taken back to the base medical facility. As far as I know this Airman survived okay. (I don’t recall his name, but he was not Capt Maisey).



*Photo: Biên Hòa Air Base: VC/NVA set off multi trip-flares crossing the East Perimeter wire.*

We went back across the ditch and set up positions again. Just as we got set up, a trip-flare went off on the perimeter and I saw Viet Cong and NVA running from the perimeter fence, and across the field, from where we had set up before going for coffee-resupply. I opened fire immediately and informed CSC that I was doing, so—we really unloaded on the area of the trip-flare.

At that time, I was the ranking NCO (SSgt) on the East perimeter. I therefore took it on myself to pull back all Windy (K-9) units, so they would not get caught in a crossfire, and coordinated our fire with the North perimeter patrol, who kept Charlie from going too far North, and helped funnel them toward the M60 bunker at the revetment.

After they pulled back I coordinated the East perimeter defense until Capt. Maisey arrived, and the other men continued firing and kept the enemy pinned down not too far from their original point of perimeter-penetration.

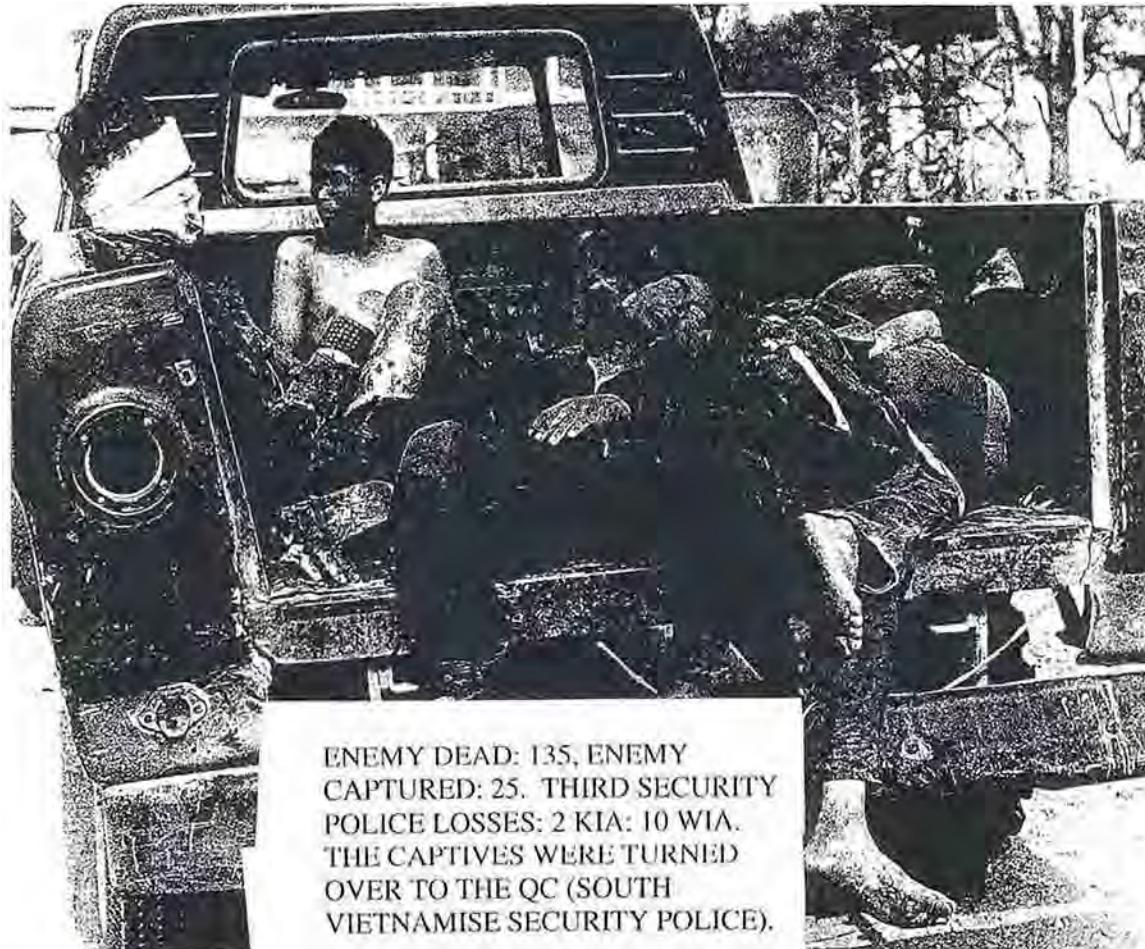
No one knows how many enemies were killed by the men defending Bunker Hill-10, but after the battle more than 60 dead VC and NVA were found nearby the bunker. The VC attacking forces were making their way from the perimeter toward the interior of the base, in a westerly direction. Their path was to our south and took them directly into the unrelenting hail of fire from various Security Police positions, including Bunker Hill-10.

Fighting was intense on both sides. We listened to the Defense-6 radio to keep track of what was going on. The radio voices from the midst of battle were those of determination, and courage, but we could tell they were having a tough time of it.

Weapons' firing was intense and deafening. As I lay there peering over the top of the knoll, with my M16 poised for the inevitable, I suddenly felt the gravity of our situation. Desperate. Our lives, or theirs, were at stake. I was pretty sure that I wasn't going to make it home. I made my peace with the Almighty, asking Him for courage in the face of the enemy and to take care of my loved ones back home.



Our direction from A1C Simmons (Defense-6 rider) was fairly-straight forward and simple—we were to hold this position because, “When they try to get out of here, they’ll be coming right this way!” I dropped my head down and thought, “Damn, he had to say that.”



**About 0330 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Howard G. Yates, Augmentee** (12th Air Commando Squadron/3rd SPS).

During the heaviest fighting, we could see silhouettes running around the Aircraft Engine Run-up pad, but due to darkness we were uncertain if they were enemy infiltrators or Security Police defenders. Not wanting to hit any Americans, we held our fire until we were absolutely certain about our targets.

We could also see and hear the blistering fire power coming from Bunker Hill-10—the Little Alamo—as it would come to be known. We could see and feel explosions after explosions as VC and NVA hand-held RPG rockets blasted the bunker, but Bunker Hill-10’s defensive punishing-fire never stopped! I remember thinking, “Those poor guys are taking a pounding. I hope they can hold on.”

Puff the Magic Dragon, an old C-47 aircraft left over from WWII and capable of turning the jungle into tossed salad with its 7.62 mm Gatling guns, droned overhead and began kicking- flares— what a welcome sight.” As the first couple of million-candle parachute flares drifted toward earth we were suddenly confronted by staggering dark figures, arms outstretched, looming out of the darkness. Three of us opened fire but the bullets ricocheted.

A1C Simmons looked at us and calmly and said—Grave markers. It seemed we had parked ourselves right on the edge of an old French cemetery. Man, did I feel relieved—stupid—but relieved.

About that time, A1C Simmons left to retrieve some hand-flares from the truck, but he must have gotten pinned down. It seemed like forever before we saw him again. Tracers had been zipping all around but for some reason the fighting seemed to subside momentarily. Having been out there for what seemed lifetime (for some it was), but in actuality was only three or four hours, I had a



*Biên Hòa Air Base, Tết 1968, Cemetery shoot out.*

hankering for a smoke. By this time our ears were ringing, and talking in a normal voice just wouldn't cut it.

I got Larry's attention and motion that I wanted a cigarette. He mouthed— "I don't have any."

“You don’t have any—what happened to them?” I shouted; smoking a cigarette was now a greater necessity than noise-discipline, and I had smoked the pack that came with each C-rat.

“I dropped the pack—if you want one, they’re out there somewhere,” and with that he pointed to the open field where the tracers had once again begun to fly. I considered the field with a bug-storm of red (ours) and green (VC/NVA) tracers and thought, “Nah ... nevermind.” So, I took out my two cigars and tossed him one. I motioned that I needed a light by mimicking the use of a cigarette lighter. Larry looked at me, grinned and pointed to the open field. It was probably a bad time to light up anyway. We knew from the radio-chatter that Tân Sơn Nhứt Air Base was also under heavy rocket and ground attack. What we didn’t know was—so was every other major US installation in South Vietnam.

Sometime before dawn I heard that familiar whoop, whup, whup of Hueys’ and Cobra gunships’ rotors overhead. It was an Army Huey gunship. I don’t remember if I just thought, “Hot damn. We got ‘em now!” or if I actually yelled it out. The Huey’s dared a pass at the Aircraft Engine Run-Up Pad and drainage ditch area and cut loose with a couple of rockets. Oh, that was so awesome!

Then he circled around and hit ‘em again.

On about his third pass he came way too close to us, so Larry grabbed the radio and called Defense-6, yelling, “BREAK, BREAK, BREAK!” He had to yell to clear the channel. “Defense-6 to Defense Control.”

“Go ahead Defense-6,” came the reply.

“Defense-6, we are in an unmarked position, on the east perimeter near the old graveyard and the gunship is firing almost on top of us.”

Control came back with an answer that we really didn’t want to hear. “We don’t have direct communications with the Army choppers—just try to let them know your friendlies.”

Oh great! I’m gonna die here, I thought.

As the gunship made another pass overhead, Larry, in an attempt to signal the pilot, just to let him know we’re friendlies, waved his hands and accidentally shot him a bird. The door gunner, observing Larry Wasserman’s from the heart gesture, returned his salute, and the pilot redirected his fury in the other direction.

### **0330 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**William Pete Piazza, SSgt** (SMSgt Ret., Silver Star), Biên Hòa Air Base, 3rd SPS:

After we got to Bunker Hill-10, with critical resupply of ammo, I told Capt. Maisey that we had a truck full of ammo and other equipment nearby. At that time, Capt Maisey, 3rd SPS Operations Officer, had with him an Army Liaison Lieutenant, me (*Defense-5*) and Sgt James Lee from my *Defense-6* resupply teams. About three or four minutes later, I started back



toward the truck, which was about 200 yards behind Bunker Hill-10. I then drove it to a point just behind Bunker Hill-10 to resupply the bunker faster.

*Biên Hòa Air Base, Bunker Hill-10: C-47 Flare-Kicker lights up ditch as Viet Cong cross over.*



**The first RPG struck the bunker's upper sandbags just below the M60, and the explosion caused the M60 machinegun, placed on top of the sandbags, to fly off and onto the road way below, and was not used until we could pick it up later as it was under heavy enemy fire.**

Fortunately, the M60 was not damaged.

Arriving back at Bunker Hill-10 with ammo and the slap flares requested, Capt. Maisey had gathered several of the Bunker Hill-10, SRT Team and QRT Leaders on the west side of the bunker to make his plan for what was going on. While we were standing there, a loud BOOM was heard from in front of Bunker Hill-10, and everyone was looking around to see what hit the bunker. We later guessed that was the first of thirteen RPG rounds to hit Bunker Hill-10.

**0330 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Charles Hagens, Sgt., 3rd SPS, Biên Hòa Air Base:**



Well, we started to cross the road. The sound of heavy machinegun fire was coming from Bunker Hill-10, as well as rifle fire and an occasional out-going 40mm grenade. As I approached the road I decided there was no way I was going to crawl across while trying to carry a loaded M60. I gathered up as much fortitude as I could and ran in as low a crouch as possible. Now I will say that I was not as much afraid of being hit, as I was for not following SSgt Sawyer's orders to crawl. I had and still have much respect for the man and to disappoint him would have been unthinkable.



*Biên Hòa Air Base: Bunker Hill-10 - First RPG by VC/NVA RPG just below sandbag rim.*

I made it across and we began to move toward our position. When we reached the berm, I took up a position in the center of the team with my M60 pointed across the perimeter road. We were ordered not to fire. SSgt Sawyer ran across to Bunker Hill-10 to check on the situation.

SSgt Sawyer called to me to bring my M60 over to the bunker because the gun that Sgt Tuggle was using was malfunctioning. I ran with my M60 over to Bunker Hill-10 and climbed up onto the top of the bunker. There was a sandbag wall around the top of the bunker, with a turret in the center where Sgt Tuggle was located. I gave my M60 to Sgt Tuggle and he let me use his M16. Sgt Gott and I took up positions behind the sandbags and started to fire at movement outside the perimeter. At this point, things turned serious—we

*began receiving incoming RPG fire—and some rounds hit the lower portion of the bunker.*

To our surprise, a vehicle began to approach the bunker from the direction of where we had been firing. It was a ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam, South Vietnam) pickup truck racing down the road in reverse! It took us a few seconds to realize what must be happening. The ARVN troops had a post located about 100 yards outside the wire from Bunker Hill-10. They had abandoned their position and were backing the truck toward us, using the front of the vehicle as cover. We couldn't be sure if the people in the truck were friendly, so we trained our weapons on them until we felt reasonably safe.



*Biên Hòa Air Base, Perimeter Road, ARVN truck hit with VC/NVA RPG.*

As the ARVN truck got closer, an RPG hit it head-on lifting it into the air and dropping it like a stone on the road. Surprisingly, all of the ARVN soldiers in the truck were okay. Then an RPG round impacted directly in front of the turret of Bunker Hill-10, exploding and spraying shrapnel all over, and I got some in my left arm and left butt cheek. I didn't see Sgt Tuggle and thought he was certainly dead. I forced myself to consider the turret and there was no sign of the man. Now Sgt Neal Tuggle was a rather large man—tall, and wide. I don't mean that he was overweight, just big. I shouted his name several times and finally he answered me! It seems he had the trap door open in the bottom of the turret and when the RPG hit he just jumped into the lower-level of the bunker.

At some time, SSGt Piazza and Capt Maisey arrived at the Bunker Hill-10. The Capt was in

his own jeep and Sergeant Piazza came in his Resupply truck with more ammunition and other supplies. Sgt Marshall Gott and I were ordered to get down off the bunker, as it was too dangerous to remain in that position.

Capt Maisey was coordinating the firing and trying to get flare and helicopter support. As I lay on my belly watching the right flank, there was still incoming RPG fire. The bunker was taking a real pounding! I think Sgt Gott went into the bunker with Sgt Tuggle. I stayed outside the crowded bunker and found a depression in the ground where I took up a prone position. I couldn't do much from there, except try to guard our right-flank and watch to make sure no enemy came through a large culvert under the road, or tried to sap the bunker's open entrance in the back.



*Bunker Hill-10: Perimeter Road. Ditch and culvert under road where VC crossed through.*

**0330 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**William Pete Piazza, SSgt** (SMSgt Ret., Silver Star), Biên Hòa Air Base, 3rd SPS:

The VC and NVA hit Bunker Hill-10 with RPGs and small arms fire from the east, south, and some from the north. As I began to return fire, an Army Lieutenant (liaison with the 145th CAB), with Capt. Maisey, had a XM-148 on his army issued M16 weapon. The LT said he did not know how to fire a 40mm (grenade launcher), so I asked if he would mind trading weapons. I gave him my M16 and took his weapon from him along with its ten rounds of ammo (40mm). I then started firing the 40mm at Charlie, who was about 75 yards to the east of Bunker Hill-10, covering in a QC sandbag bunker they had along the MLR (mainline of resistance). It was surreal and like playing in a western movie scene from the classic High Noon, or a war movie: VC would fire the first round and once I heard it hit I would step out and fire my 40mm round at them.



***In short order:*** Central Security Control (CSC) was out of action (rockets took out generators causing a power failure); the Army LT helicopter liaison officer was wounded proceeding in to Bunker Hill-10 with Ops Officer Capt Maisey, who was on the radio with LED/CSC) appraising of the battle situation and called out, "I'm hit", then continued talking; the VC would fire 13 RPG rounds at Bunker Hill-10, and one would kill Captain Maisey inside the bunker. At that time, no one knew Capt Maisey was KIA, as they were engaged in a heavy firefight defending Bunker Hill-10; the Quick Response Team was in danger of being surrounded (*and soon would be*). The LED/CSC Sergeant was not in direct contact with the 145th CAB gunships.

During the firefight, Sgt Neal Tuggle, inside Bunker Hill-10, and I were yelling to each other every time a RPG hit the bunker, to see if things were okay inside and outside. We both got horse-voices from all the yelling. It was cover and concealment during the exchange of fire and lasted until someone was knocked off, like sudden-death in a sports game; except it wasn't a game and it would be deadly for someone; I was lucky that it was the VC, and not me that morning. I continued firing from the south-side of Bunker Hill-10, and at the time I had exactly one 40mm round left.



*Biên Hòa Air Base, Tết 1968: SSgt Pete Piazza fires 40mm grenade and takes out VC/NVA RPG team.  
© 2015 by Don Poss*

The grenades were the only thing holding the VC at bay, for the moment. I fired my 10th round and final grenade, which hit Charlie, who was firing from a sandbag-bunker, and we



heard a terrific explosion. I looked out and I could see three bodies flying up in the air, so I must have hit their ammo as there was a large secondary-explosion. After I had knocked out the VC RPG crew firing at Bunker Hill-10, I went to get the pickup truck full of ammo, still parked about 50 or so yards to the rear of the bunker. As I drove up to Bunker Hill-10, I saw some troops (about a platoon size) moving rapidly outside the wire next to Bunker Hill-10. If they saw me, I was ignored—they were focused on their mission. I called LED/CSC and reported this, and asked if they knew of any of our troops moving up near Bunker Hill-10, as nothing was reported on the radio at that time. LED/CSC came back and said that no friendly forces were coming toward Bunker Hill-10.

I did not fire upon those enemy troops at that time, since I was all alone, and did not have any other SP or Augmentees covering my backside. The enemy had also moved thru the fence advancing toward the Aircraft Engine Run-Up Pad nearer the flightline. That group of NVA seemed to have ignored Bunker Hill-10, and in the flare-light looked as if they were wearing brand new NVA uniforms. I reported this info to LED/CSC and told them we were now surrounded, and then moved some of our SPs and Augmentees around to cover our rear.

For a while, I was the only man outside the bunker and could see the enemy all around us. As choppers were firing overhead at the enemy, I kept shouting to the men inside the bunker and asking if they were okay. It was a miracle they could hear me, as their firing full-auto in such a tight-closed space had to be literally deafening.

### **0330 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Jon Hayes, A2C,** 3rd Security Police Squadron, QRT:

Some of the 145th Aviation Battalion gunships seemed to leave the area (to refuel or arm up?) but others [the 118th Assault Helicopter Company emergency standby fire team] showed up and began strafing with glee. When they arrived, the VC and NVA were firing all around us—that was when we were literally surrounded. Those Spooky flares and gunships really took the VC and NVA under heavy fire and literally saved our butts. The choppers were all exposed and flying really low. The VC fired a storm toward the choppers while continuing to pound Bunker Hill-10, and firing at us while attempting a break-through.

The VC and NVA's firing at us seemed to waver like the wind, as they were in motion. Our M-60s were really firing up the VC and NVA in the wire and area as fast as they could. I saw one of our guys get hit, in the chest I think, and go down. Sarge yelled, "Hey they're going around us—trying to flank us", and we turned and could see VC/NVA running, but they didn't seem to be paying any attention to us—we paid attention to them. The flares were really bright and still lighting up the area like daylight, as only flares can do, so we fired on them as they kept trying to out flank us.

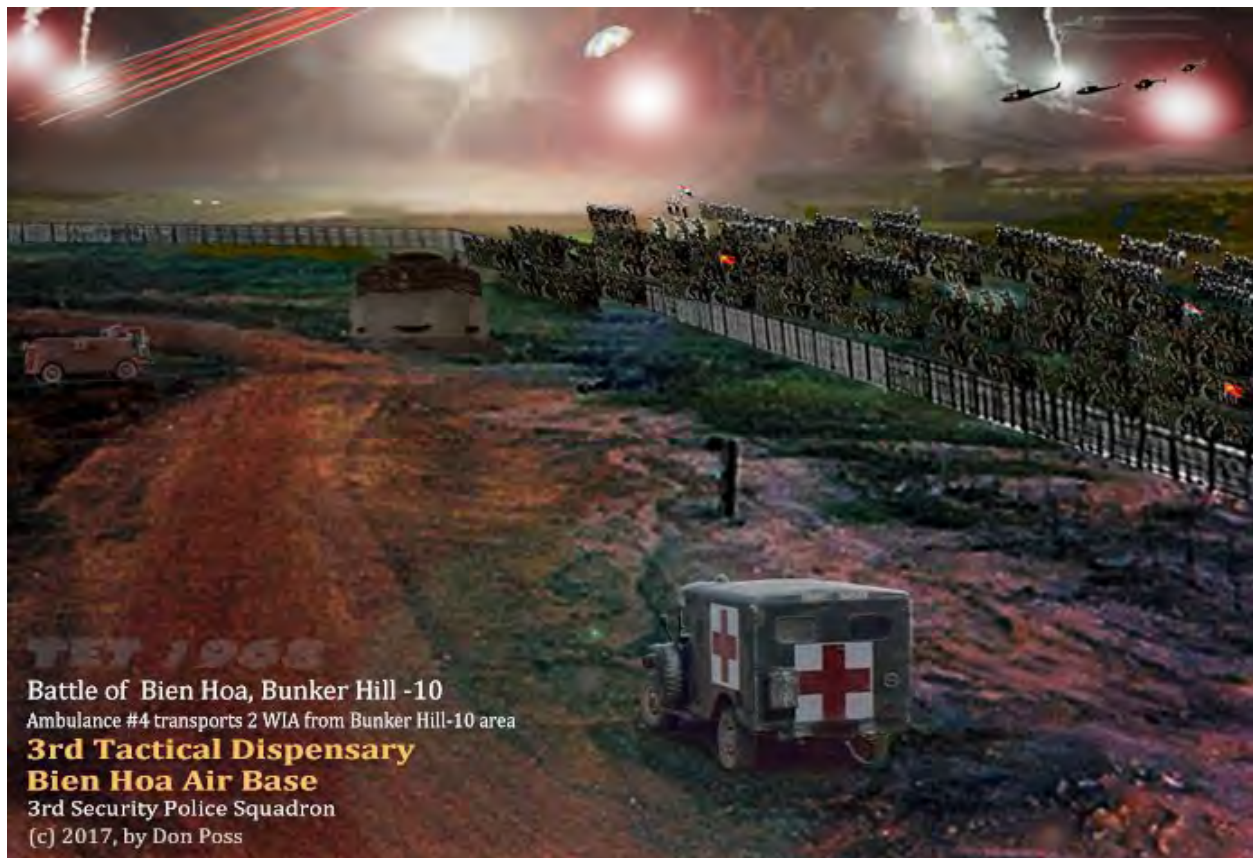
We were firing at a hellacious rate but you know how sometimes there's a momentary break and firing stopped for a few seconds, and a SP in front of us a little way suddenly stood up—right in front of our weapons. It was a very close call, because our triggers had

pressure being applied and he came so close to dying right there in front of us, by our friendly fire. I don't know if he ever knew that, but I sure as heck did. I also looked around and worried about whether ammo resupply could get to us now. I don't remember anyone bringing water or food around, but things were so intense it wasn't big on my mind at the time.

I don't think we had any augmentees with us at that point, but there may have been some with the other QRTs. Things just went on and on with tremendous firing, in and out, and choppers' mini's chewing up and destroying planet earth—they were the top of the food chain, and knew it, although it looked like they were also taking some hits from the NVA and VC below. Everywhere you looked was fierce firing, and incredibly loud. The choppers ...bless their hearts...if it wasn't for them the VC and NVA would have overrun us and things might have turned out differently. I remember it all as really being surreal with constant firing of weapons and machineguns, choppers whizzing around overhead, bodies littering the grounds, the sounds of sizzling flares dripping trails of nova like phosphorous globs.

About then I thought I had seen a fire truck get blown up near Bunker Hill-10's area, but maybe it was just another RPG hitting the bunker.

*Biên Hòa Air Base, Bunker Hill-10 is under attack! An 3rd Dispensary ambulance responds to medevac wounded. Graphic Art, (c) 2017 by Don Poss.*



Battle of Bien Hoa, Bunker Hill -10  
Ambulance #4 transports 2 WIA from Bunker Hill-10 area  
**3rd Tactical Dispensary**  
**Bien Hoa Air Base**  
3rd Security Police Squadron  
(c) 2017, by Don Poss

We were firing at the advancing VC NVA, and I remember two SP M-60s were firing hot and

heavy about then. The VC NVA quickly took our new defensive line under fire. There were so many of them they were doing everything at once—some were shooting up our line, enemy troops running and firing or just running and not firing, and others were taking on Bunker Hill-10. I didn't know how long we could hold out, because for a while they seemed to surround us, and I thought massacre or even try and capture us. But some started bypassing us while others, I think, wanted to overrun or at least tried to block us so the sappers and others could penetrate W/B toward the aircraft; if they had made it through, there was little or nothing at that moment to stop them—nothing— and the whole thing could have gone south and turned in to a real stuff-storm at that point. I worried about what if they got into the hut areas. I think every hut had only one guy armed with a weapon, and that was it. All the SPs knew that, and no one acted like they wouldn't do their duty, even when we were virtually surrounded. But as long as we kept up our defense they didn't turn on us in force. It was like we were on a small island and they were the river water roiling at, around and past us, only to encounter heavier fire power from the 40 or so SPs nearby.

Spooky's flares were constant, but then there was a break as the string of flares winked out. It was really, really dark. I don't know what the flare-kickers actually do, but even though the darkness lasted a minute or so it seemed forever. The firing didn't slack up at all, but there were so many attackers I couldn't tell if we were having any effect on the enemy's numbers. The only time I actually saw them close up was when they were trying to flank us and flares were dropping. We kept firing on them, but didn't stop them...I saw just a few clearly...and there were a whole lot more than a few.

### **0330 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**William Pete Piazza, SSgt** (SMSgt Ret., Silver Star), Biên Hòa Air Base, 3rd SPS:

I joined Capt Maisey, Sgts Tuggle, Gott, and Behneke inside the bunker and joined in firing at the enemy through the firing slits in the concrete wall. After firing for a while, I noticed through gun ports there were fewer drifting flares and the sky wasn't lite up as much as before.

I went outside the bunker again and could see drifting hazy-smoke columns from burnt out flares, drifting like retreating soldiers. Stars were actually visible again in some places, so I started popping the rest of the parachute hand-flares we had, while talking on the Motorola Handie-Talkie HT200 radio (two channels: Security and LE to CSC) and trying to direct firepower around Bunker Hill-10. I really did not use my radio until after I heard LED/CSC calling Capt. Maisey repeatedly and getting no response. That point is when I started giving info to them, and they were feeding info back to us as to the movement of (Silver Star) Capt. Marty Strones' defense-line, so if we had to fire we would not shoot friendly-fire at them.

Although I was initially running ammo resupply, I ended up assuming command at Bunker Hill-10. LED/CSC called me at one point and asked me to use the XM-148 to fire on the Aircraft Engine Run-Up Pad area, because that was where VC and NVA were forming up. I had several additional rounds from the truck by then.

After the battle and during the debrief, I learned there had been Air Force personnel in



*Biên Hòa Air Base: Aircraft Run-up Arming de-arming Pad shack. Tết 1968.*

the arming-shack hiding on the floor, and this was near the Aircraft Engine Run-Up Pad area.

Now here is one of those unexplainable parts to this story! I had tried to fire two grenades from the XM-148 grenade launcher, and neither would fire a 40mm round at the Run-Up Pad. I double checked each weapon, and both seemed to be in good working order, but neither would fire a 40mm round--and yes, the firing-pins did put a very small dent in the rounds, but not hard enough to fire them. I told this to LED/CSC, and wondered why this happened and would not fire 40mm weapons. My thought was someone was really watching over these folks [two Airman on duty came out of the bunker rear of shack, unscathed] and did not want me to fire on that area for fear of hitting the shack and killing them! Later, I also talked to our armories and they had never heard of that happening to either of the weapons. We also fired them during the day and they worked okay, when firing off base, for some reason....

### **0330 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Barry Lyons, A1C** (Major, Ret.), 3rd TAC FW, AMS (Electronics), Augmentee, 3rd SPS:

My thoughts were interrupted by the head SP who told me to go back west across the ditch, and get some more M60 ammo from someone who managed to drive down in a truck, or something. So, I went down the four-foot face of the ditch, climbed up the other side and over to where they were passing out the ammo. I was told to kneel while someone put several heavy belts of ammo around my neck till it was all I could carry.





### **0340 hours, 31 Jan 1968**

**David Parks, SP5. USA Radio Intelligence, Team, 856<sup>th</sup> Radio Research Det., billeted w/3rd SPS:**

*We were driving down a taxi way when suddenly spotlights blared and someone on a bullhorn ordered us to HALT in no uncertain terms! It was the Air Force Security Police people—and they meant business. Carpenter did a great job of locking up the brakes and got us stopped before running over the roadblock—I did a great job of throwing up my hands! I felt for sure that these guys would shoot first and ask questions never—both sides in this encounter were heavily armed and scared, not a great combination.*

The jeep slid to a stop, and we followed commands to get out, and assume the prone position on the flightline! Fortunately, one the Air Force fellows ID'd us to the others, and we were allowed to proceed to our sand pile. It was pitch black out near the sand pile, and there were firefights going on in any direction you wanted to look. Near us however, all was calm. We made it up to our little bunker and proceeded to work. From our vantage point we watched one hell of a firefight going on down at the other [east] end of the runway. The VC were trying to overrun that [east] end of the base. Stray rounds from that fight caused us to keep our heads down.

The fight went on darn near all night, until a gunship nosed in and began whaling on Charlie. As quiet as the enemy radios had been earlier, they were making up for now, with radio chatter everywhere. We looked for "ducks," the loud ones, and RDF'd (Radio Direction Finder: device for finding direction and bearing to enemy radio source) them to the net. We worked the rest of the night in relative peace, keeping a sharp lookout for sappers. I noted the ARVN compound across the river was NOT getting the crap kicked out of them like other areas of Biên Hòa Air Base.

### **0400 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**3rd Tactical Dispensary, Ambulance** (*Excerpt from 7th AF News, Page: 5, 20 Mar 1968, Ambulance Drivers Respond to Attack*):

TSgt. Charles E. Edwards, Birmingham, AL noncommissioned officer in charge of the dental clinic, drove the ambulance which made the first trip, 4 a.m., to Bunker Hill-10. With him were A1C Dennis W. Fisher, a dental specialist From Houston, and Sgt Randall W. Brook, Honolulu, an aeromedical specialist. [TSgt.] Edwards drove with the lights out through the intense ground fire. A bullet hit the windshield but no one was hurt. Mortar and rocket shells were exploding in the area. A friendly helicopter gunship strafed enemy positions nearby with its miniguns.

### **After 0430 hours, 31 January 1968**

**SSgt Piazza, Defense-5 (SMSgt, Ret.).**

The 145th AVB (145th Combat Aviation Battalion, UH-1 Huey and AH-1 Cobra helicopters) were flying around like rabid-hornets, shooting danger-close near and around Bunker Hill-10, firing at Charlie. The 145th's miniguns were feverishly chewing up everything—indiscriminately—and were headed my way—and as enemy firing came close to me, I jumped inside Bunker Hill-10 for cover, moving quickly down the five-steps and through a

heavy metal door that was opened inward—I do not think it was ever closed during the battle—and entered into the bottom part of the bunker where I quickly tripped over a body.

That is the sad part, in that is when I tripped over the body of Capt. Maisey. I didn't know who was dead on the bunker's floor at that time so I yelled, hoping someone may have seen the body in flare-light or muzzle-flash, but neither SP inside responded, their training by long forgotten sergeants had kicked in and their focus was totally upon killing whatever appeared in their gun ports—it simply was too dark to see your hand in front of your face, and at that moment my ears felt like they would burst. Despite the carnage, someone paused shooting and shouted that one man was dead—he bellowed out the phrase a few times, probably uncertain who had asked ...or even if anyone had actually asked. There was no time for me to consider the body's ID any further—nor mourn a fallen brother—and it was quite possible, even probably, we would all join whomever it was within minutes, if not sooner. We were killing the enemy in growing numbers—just not fast enough to include their comrades still piling-on.

We could not see what was going on around us. Adding to the everchanging-reality, it was as if your eyes each looked through separate kaleidoscopes of white-amber light strobing through gun ports, as someone jackhammer cup-slapped your ears. Muzzle-flashes danced a plague of insane shadows within, and our movement for ammo was like a Halloween movie flickering from a stuttering projector. Outside, million-candle parachute flares, kicked from an orbiting flare ship, added their macabre light patterns of confusion as enemy soldiers advanced firing, their multiple-wavering shadows in pursuit.

Bunker Hill-10 was a cramped pockmarked-matchbox at best, an eight-sided octagon-coffin at worst, being only about ten-twelve feet across from wall to wall. It was a tossup as to whether it would remain a matchbox or become a coffin for us. We were fighting a fanatic enemy for our lives and survival; firing—reloading—firing—reloading. Muscle-memory, faster than thought—involuntarily skating and sliding on .223 brass littering the concrete floor; we needed immediate room to fight the enemy from inside the bunker—and the body was in the way.

That is when another SP, who either was already in the bunker or had just entered, and I moved the body [Capt Maisey] outside and placed it on the steps leading down to the bunker.

**After 0430 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Charles Haugen, Sgt, 3rd Security Police Squadron, Biên Hòa Air Base:**

As I lay on prone on my belly outside and behind the bunker, watching the right flank, there was still incoming RPG fire--the bunker was taking a real pounding! I was on the defensive line with 30-40 other SPs who were firing like crazy. I heard someone yelling and calling out that help was needed to get an injured man out of the bunker. I got up, tracers were flying around like lightning-bugs gone crazy, and ran as low as I could without crawling to the bunker, and leapt down Bunker Hill-10's shallow stairwell and through the open metal door in about one-giant-step.

A voice shouted, "Take his legs!" Because of the harsh-light from dueling-flares outside, and the darkness inside, I couldn't see where anything was inside the bunker, so I shouted for the voice (it turned out to be SSgt Piazza) to guide my hands to where he wanted them. Hands grabbed mine and guided them to a pair of legs, and I lifted...

**After 0430 hours, 31 January 1968,  
SSgt Piazza, Defense-5 (SMSgt, Ret.):**

... I grabbed the body's arms, and I think it may have been Sgt Marshall Gott who grabbed the ankles, or whomever had entered the bunker, and we picked the body up and carried him just outside the open reinforced metal door, and placed him on the steps leading up and out of the bunker. The constant din of firing made it impossible to hear anything not shouted.

We laid him (I refused to think of him as an *it*) on the steps, with minimum cover from outside firing and explosions, his head toward the top of the stairs. The battle did not stop for this moment ... M-16s kept firing ...RPGs exploded with bone jarring compressions assaulting our eardrums, already threatening to burst...broken ammo crates lay about where they were opened and affirmed life was cheaper than ammo—firing and reloading was the only way to assure our lives could last a few precious seconds more. Hundreds of expended brasses were strewn about the floor and pooled beneath the two gunners, as additional brass rapidly bounced toward the center attempting to knit a crazy-quilt metal-carpet.



*Biên Hòa Air Base, BunkerHill-10: SSgt Pete Piazza and Sgt Charles Haugen carry the then-unknown body (Capt. Maisey) outside onto the steps.*

### **After 0430 hours, 31 January 1968**

**Charles Haugen, Sgt,** 3rd Security Police Squadron, Biên Hòa Air Base.

When flare light made it possible to see a little on the stairwell steps, SSgt Sawyer, who was now looking down over the stairs, said, "Oh God—he's dead!" I looked up from the lower steps where I had been hanging onto his legs, and could see that the man I helped carry was *Captain Maisey*. His midsection was laid open and his internal organs were exposed. He had taken the full shrapnel impact of an RPG. We left him, his body, on the stairwell steps, and went back to our previous positions.

Shooting and fighting was still fierce when I went back outside to my prone position. Numbed by what had just happened, I was also grateful that someone on either side had not shot me leaving the bunker. I think SSgt Piazza stayed in Bunker Hill-10, but maybe not. I don't know where SSgt Sawyer went...back out to the bunker's defensive line, I think.

Shortly after Captain Maisey's death, SSgt Sawyer decided he would transport me, and an augmentee, and himself to the base dispensary for treatment. Sawyer had also been wounded by shrapnel, and the augmentee had received wounds of some kind. SSgt Sawyer drove Captain Maisey's jeep.

Upon arrival at the dispensary we were directed to small rooms where we were each treated for our wounds. In order to get to the treatment rooms, we had to go through the ER. There were four or five gurneys, with severely wounded or injured men receiving treatment. I could see blood on the floor and doctors performing surgery on a couple of guys. As we walked through the ERI I was told to drop'em—your web belt—on the floor, and to go into a room, where the shrapnel was removed from my left arm. They looked at my butt and said that the wounds were not serious and the skin had not been broken there. They said I could leave.

### **About 0500 hours, 31 January 1968.**

**Charles Haugen, Sgt,** 3rd Security Police Squadron, Biên Hòa Air Base.

I went to find my gear, and it was gone! I asked a guy who was in the ER, where I had been told to drop my web belt, what had happened to my stuff. He said he didn't know.

He took me out into a small courtyard and said it was probably in one of those if I wanted to look for it, and pointed at several body bags lined up neatly on the floor, indicating I was free to check them out. I decided I didn't want the stuff that badly. I should have made a ruckus over it but I wasn't thinking right. The thing that pissed me off is that I had a M-16 bayonet that I had traded for. Bayonets were not part of our normally issued equipment. The bayonet was on my web belt along with ammo and a canteen.

A few days later I got the gear back, *minus the bayonet*.



**About 0500 hours, 31 January 1968**

**John E. Gross, 1st LT (LTC, Ret.),** 2nd Battalion (Mechanized), 47th Infantry (2-47), (Panthers), 1967-1968:

There were three important bases 21km to the north-east of Saigon: ARVN III Corps headquarters in Biên Hòa; the United States Air Base [Biên Hòa Air Base] on the outskirts of Biên Hòa; and the huge ammunition dump at Long Bình. Following General Westmoreland's cancellation of the ceasefire, 9th Divisions 2/47th Infantry (Mechanized) had set up blocking positions around all three bases.

**By 0500 hours, 31 January 1968,** all three bases reported they were under attack by units of the 5th VC Division. Company C fought its way past the 275th Viet Cong Regiment, astride Highway 1, before stopping the 274th Viet Cong Regiment's attack on Biên Hòa Air Base. The Viet Cong had wanted to halt planes and helicopters taking off from the airfield [and from] providing fire support to units around Saigon. The Viet Cong tried to storm the bunkers [at Biên Hòa Air Base], aiming to turn their heavy machine-guns on the runways.

Lieutenant Colonel John B. Tower deployed his three mechanized companies to relieve the garrisons in ...the Biên Hòa...Long Bình area. Instead, helicopter gunships helped the troops on the ground to clear the east end of the base by nightfall. The battle continued the following day, but the Viet Cong finally disengaged when 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment arrived at dusk.

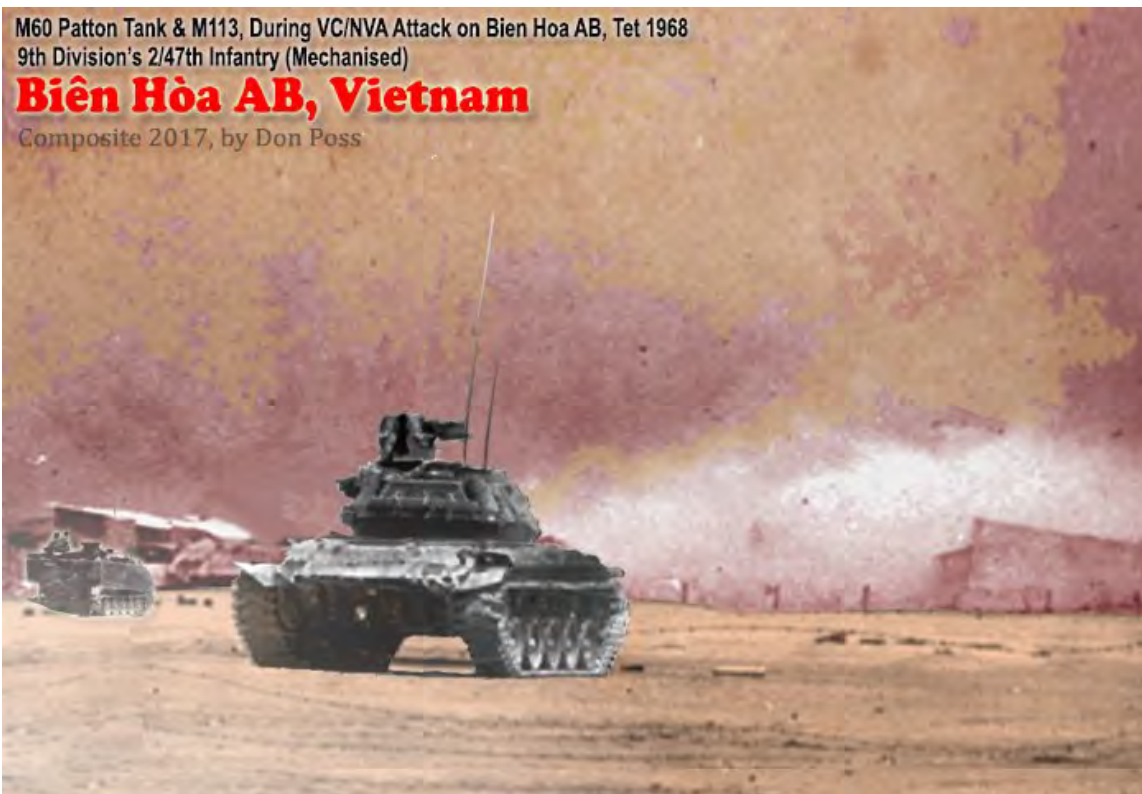
"At first light on 1 February 1st Infantry Division assembled reaction forces at its bases north of Saigon and were soon heading south along Route 1. The Big Red One was expecting trouble and, when Major General John H. Hay's infantry ran into 273rd VC Regiment's roadblocks, they surrounded Phu Loi while their artillery deployed. For once, the Viet Cong were not going to escape into the jungle and after the howitzers had fired 3,500 rounds at the village, the GIs moved in to mop up the survivors. There were not many; 273rd Regiment had been decimated, leaving the main road to Saigon open."

*Operation Coburg*

After thirty-six hours, Biên Hòa Air Base would be fully operational again.



*Above & Below: Army Tank and M113, during VC/NVA attack on Biên Hòa, Tết, 31 January 1968.*



## 0530 hours, 31 January 1968

**Jon Hayes, A2C, 3rd Security Police Squadron, QRT:**

*Biên Hòa Air Base, Tết t 1968: POW. Wounded Viet Cong prisoner, from Battle of Bien Hoa, at Bunker Hill-10. Tet, 31 January 1968.*

Then dawn started glowing on the horizon, and the sun started creeping up and the flares stopped dropping. I remember thinking, we made it man. It was so great seeing that sun rise, but as good as it was, the killing wasn't over yet. I've been thinking about this a lot, for years. Looking back, I can't believe I went all through that and survived. The Viet Cong and NVA's numbers, against the 3rd SPS, were just incredible odds stacked against us.

After the battle, I remember we stayed around Bunker Hill-10 a while, before the perimeter-sweep began. Viet Cong and NVA prisoners, wounded and non, were laying around the area of Bunker Hill-10, awaiting their fate. There was a captured Viet Cong whose injuries were so gruesome it held my gaze. I thought—this guy is really screwed up. He was like most of the twenty-five prisoners, wounded and really bad off with multiple wounds.

Anyway, this POW was sitting partially in the shade and smoking while leaning against Bunker Hill-10. His foot was nearly blown off and seemed to be hanging by a tendon or muscle. I was taken aback noting he was looking at me looking at him, and smiling... like he had made it through the battle alive.

Ugly wounds were plentiful, but his wounds caused him to be pointed out by and to other SPs. I don't know if someone had given the dangling-foot prisoner some meds by then, but I am sure he was in hurt-city later, with or without meds. That was the first time I came eye to eye with a VC or NVA, and it was surreal. Here I was all armed up and all. It was amazing. The prisoners didn't seem mad at us either, not that we cared—they were scared and no doubt concerned about their immediate future, but mostly just defeated... some broken, and some not. A lot of their comrades had died, with many still laying in plain view in nearby blooded fields. If your eyes were open, you couldn't help but see them.

We were getting ready to move out again. I glanced at the foot-guy; he never really acknowledged me personally, one way or another...except for that crazed grin. I wondered what was worth that perpetual expression to him. To me his worried VC reaper's eyes



betrayed inner grief, and the liar's forced smile said he still feared he could die, even today. And then it seemed to make sense: his comedy/tragedy theatre mask spoke perfect English, and boiled down to: my war is over...my life is not over—how about yours? And I realized my life had the same warranty as his: “even today” ... or not. Even with his mangled foot dangling by a sun-dried tendon, he was still breathing.

I was glad to move on knowing full well the pathetically-happy and pain-racked grin he wore could become the lasting lingering memory of this day...for the rest of my life. I wondered if that is what he saw in my expression, as he had stared at me, and if so, did he see that I could have as easily said a prayer for him, or killed him outright?

Moving by dozens of prisoners, I saw that many were brooding, heads bowed but eyes furtively tracking those who might yet kill them. Some played the stare-down game, they were scared, yet seemingly ready to face and endure danger or pain as karma presented. Frankly, I don't remember feeling hatred for them either. It was almost like...feeling sorry for them...all wounded and shot up...holes in them and all...pieces missing on some. And the bodies ... just scattered everywhere you looked across the fields (I know I've repeated this, but you just had to see it to understand its impact): tall grass—bodies. Dry creeks—bodies and parts. Almost all of the prisoners were really messed up—torn up—and here and there a wounded prisoner had died amongst them; some wearing an ugly scowl or blissful expression frozen on their faces. But all of their misery and loss was necessary—I knew it could have gone the other way and been American bodies strewn about.

I know I've compared it to movies, but it was not really like any Hollywood movie I ever saw, and will never make that comparison again—these guys were not just dead, they were war-dead and there is no comparison to the brutality of that. Globes of human messes caked here and there...some pieces not even near a body for whomever to try and match with a gruesome puzzle.

### ***About 0530 hours, 31 January 1968***

**LTC Robert M. Deets, Battalion Commander, 145th Combat Aviation Battalion.** *Water Tower Snipers (Courtesy Jim Bodkin, National Director/Coordinator, 145th Combat Aviation Battalion (Vietnam) Association.):*

“All night long personnel had received sporadic small arms fire from the water tower near the entrance to the Air Base. The 12th Combat Aviation Group Commander, Colonel Nick Psaki and elements of the 68th Combat Aviation Company, personally eliminated the enemy while men on the ground observed the battle only 100 meters away and by noon the tower was under control and the enemy guerillas were dead, but they were hard to beat in their well-fortified positions.”





*Biên Hòa Air Base, Main Gate and Water Tower just outside the gate. Early morning hours of Tết 1968, a Viet Cong "Spotter" concealed in tower's structure, was taken out by gunships, and not likely to have survived. Composites 2017 by Don Poss.*

**About 0530 hours, 31 January 1968**

**Lonnie G. Schmidt, WO/2LT, Pilot (Thunderbird One), 118th AHC, 1967-1968:** [\[Water Tower Snipers\]](#): *The following excerpt and narrative is reprinted with permission and from the pages of the "145th Combat Aviation Battalion".]*

"After an eventful night on alert at the Birdcage [AHC gunship apron], I was awakened (trying to sleep in bunker) at first light to the sound of a M-60 chattering away. The weapon was aimed at the newly built and painted (orange-white checkered) water tower by the main gate. I asked one of the men "What are you firing at?" and the gunner replied, "VC on the water tower". After telling them to stop shooting unless they could see someone, I went to our Operations shack to check-in and see what was going on, and found myself the only officer around. About the time I arrived, a jeep pulled up with an Army MP Major May who asked me if we could get up to the top of the water tower. He said that there were VC snipers and had shot two of his MPs at the front gate. He said they couldn't get up from the ground, as there was an unfinished small opening in the bottom, and the VC opened up whenever they approached. He asked, "Could we get some CS gas up there?" I sent an NCO to get some CS, and called the CO (MAJ. Bill Bradner) on the radio, as he was on short final, and asked him to keep his ship running, we needed a lift to the water tower.

I had four fragmentation grenades on my flak jacket and traded them for six CS, and gave six to the Major. I had an M-16 and six clips loaded with straight tracers, two .38's, and Major May (in Khakis) had an M-14 with one clip.

Major Bradner picked us up and headed for the water tower. I told the Crew Chief to keep his M60 trained on the tower as there were VC snipers up there. As we approached, I could see no VC, but spotted a metal hatch covering approximately a 3'x 5' opening on the top and gate side of the tower. I realized dropping gas on top wouldn't work. As we approached, I asked the CO to get us closer, and he hovered about 6' over the tower. I got out on the skid and jumped onto the tower, looked up and motioned for the Major to follow. He was shaking his head in the negative, so the Crew Chief "helped" him out with a gentle shove. Guess he didn't want to leave me there alone.

The Major and I took cover behind a slight bubble in the tower's center, an 18" rise. Then MAJ Brander left and it got real quiet. The Major said, "Crawl over there and put some gas down inside." He had the rank (I went over a WO1 and had received a direct to 2nd Lt in November 67'). Soooo, I said, "Cover me", laid my AR down, and low crawled over to the hatch cover. As I came along side, I found a small number of brass casings, so knew there had to be someone inside. I rolled on my back, took a CS grenade, held the handle down and pulled the pin. With my left hand, I eased up the lid far enough to slip the grenade inside. Pulled the pin on a second grenade, and repeated the motion, hearing the handle "pop" on the first one as I let go of the second. I then scurried back to the Major and "shelter". I began to smell the CS gas, and my eyes started to smart. No gasmask! As I looked around the surface of the tower, I could see small fissures and small chunks of concrete missing, evidence of the Bandits and other guns attacking the tower. The Major said, "Go put some more gas in there." I replied, "It's your turn." So, he crawled over, and flipped in two of his grenades. Still no sound was heard from inside. Getting bolder, I moved over and put in my remaining four grenades, two of the Major's, and retreated to our shelter. Now, with all that gas in there, it was coming up through the cracks in volume!

I moved back to the shelter and told the Major that there was a steel ladder going down into the tower at a 45-degree angle, and suggested he try to fire inside while I covered him with my .38. He moved over, stood up and "click"—the M-14 didn't fire. I think the sear must have broken when the weapon fell to the tower when we "landed". Soooo, had we been greeted by VC when we first arrived, we would have had one shot, thinking we had one full auto and a semi-auto!

I set the selector at single shot and moved over to the opening and proceeded to empty my AR, as fast as I could pull the trigger. Interesting to see tracers zipping around in the dark in a round enclosure! I emptied the first clip, and pulled a second from my left jacket pocket, reloaded and emptied it. 60 rounds inside. No sound from inside. Pulled the second clip from my left jacket pocket, reloaded and emptied that clip. 90 rounds were fired and still, no sound from inside. I'd been using my right hand to pull the clips and load the weapon, while cradling it in my left arm. Now with having to change hands to get at the clips in my right flak jacket pocket, it was awkward, and so for the first time, shifting the

weapon to my right arm, I stepped back from the edge of the opening. As I did, an automatic weapon opened up from inside, knocking concrete from the lip of the opening. Had I remained where I was while changing clips, probably wouldn't be writing this now. Now I'm mad! I reloaded, moved to the narrow side between the hatch and the edge of the tower, and proceeded to pump two more clips down inside, expending all my AR ammo. Pulled one .38 and fired all five rounds. Decided to keep my other .38 "just in case". Now there was only silence, and a lot of gas!

After about 30 minutes, we tried to get the attention of someone to come and get us off, but no luck. After a short while, we decided to climb down a small, thin, shaky, built for 110 lb. Vietnamese, bamboo and vine ladder left from the construction. I had no sling on my AR, so slid it up under my flak jacket. Ouch! The barrel was still hot! As I started down the ladder, I was probably as scared as any time during my tour! I don't mind flying, but am not fond of tall ladders and high places, and this was about three stories off the ground! I'd just gotten down about three rungs, repeating the Lord's prayer quite fervently, when the Major started down. I yelled "NO! Not two on this ladder! Wait!" No dice, here he came! The ladder held and we managed to get down. The Major's MP's on the ground had a jeep and two six packs of cold orange soda waiting for us. We both finished off at least four of the sodas. CS will really dry you out!

After returning to the Villa, the CO called me into his office and proceeded to let me know that I was an aviator, not a grunt, and the Army had a lot of money invested in me, and the idea was NOT to get off ON the tower, only DROP the CS gas, that I was due to rotate home



in a couple of weeks, was going to get myself killed, etc., etc., and to get my gear and hop a

R&R flight anywhere! I think he said all that in one breath! He probably did save my life! The next morning as I was being driven to the base, we passed Major May, who pulled over and I got a "after action" report. He said there were three VC inside so full of holes

they looked like "Swiss cheese". No gas masks. Must have kept their faces down in a slight depression in the bottom of the tank to breathe (most of the gas was rising to greet us!). Four weapons, an AK-47, Chinese sniper rifle, and don't remember the other two. He thanked me for my efforts and air support, and promised to save a weapon for me to take home as a souvenir. Well, never saw him again, no souvenir.

That's my recollection of the life and times of my first day of Tết 1968."  
*Thunderbird One, Lonnie G. Schmidt*

**After 0530 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**LTC Kent Miller, Squadron Commander, 3rd Security Police Squadron:**

Fighting continued until dawn when the flight commander [Capt Strones] formed a skirmish sweep line and drove the enemy, not already killed or wounded, back across the base perimeter. The perimeter fence line was 10 miles in length and although the ground attack only came from the east side, sniper fire was received from other directions, most notably from north-perimeter which was adjacent to the city of Biên Hòa.

**About 0615 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Charles Haugen, Sgt, 3rd Security Police Squadron, Biên Hòa Air Base:**

Daylight soon would arrive and I went outside and walked over to the APO (Air Police Office), that's the communication center for the law enforcement division of the squadron. I mingled around there awhile.

As the sun was coming up, I felt kind of at loose-ends with nothing to do, so I walked to the armory and stood around there. I could hear gunfire and helicopters working over the east perimeter. All of a sudden there was a flash, and a huge mushroom cloud could be seen roiling upward to the south east. Someone yelled, concussion! We all got into the bunker that was there and waited until the earth trembled and a very large explosive sound boomed over us.

After a while SSgt Sawyer showed up and said, "Let's go back out to Bunker Hill-10." I said, "Okay, but I don't have a weapon." I went to the armor and asked for whatever they could give me, and ended up with a 12-gauge shotgun and about 12 rounds of ammunition. That's when I realized what a bone-head I was for leaving my M16 in the truck when we were ordered out to the east perimeter. Well the shotgun was better than nothing and I guess if I had to defend myself it would have done the job.

We got into a jeep and headed out.





*Tết 1968, Long Bình Bomb Dump, 15 miles S/E of Biên Hòa Air Base. VC /NVA blown up the bomb dump. That night over Long Bình...the sky burned red.*



By then a few F-100s were taking off on Air Base defense missions, and at least one was really working over the enemy just outside the east perimeter in support of the 3rd Security Police Squadron S/E of Bunker Hill-10.



*Tết 1968: Biên Hòa Air Base, F-100 Super Sabres support 3rd Security Police Squadron's Air Base defense, early morning 31 Jan 1968. Grassfire flushes Viet Cong Sappers, Snipers, and NVA soldiers from concealment. (c) 2017 Don Poss.*

The fire-fights were sporadic and a search and destroy skirmish-line had been formed to sweep the areas between the runway and taxiways.

"The wing flew 52 combat sorties in defense of the base and supported four ground operations."





*Biên Hòa Air Base, F-100 Super Sabre Revetments. (c) 2017 Don Poss*

**0620 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**David Parks, SP5.** USA Radio Intelligence Team, 856th Radio Research Det., billeted w/3rd SPS:

By dawn the next morning [of the 31st], the firefight at the other end of the runway had cooled somewhat. The Air Force had managed to clear the runways and get some ordnance flying—watching a Spooky working out was a joy to behold. Loved them!

It was going to be another hot day. Carpenter and I discovered we had not brought nearly enough water and thought we should go and get some. I was elected. I stood up and began putting on my battle gear, a bullet impacted the sand bag near my leg. About four inches higher and it would have impacted me! We were under the careful eye of a sniper! That @!#\$%# did not let us show our heads for the rest of the day.

Every time you showed the sniper a target—*zing!* right over your head. He was a good shot and came close several times. The bullet would arrive first, followed a couple of seconds later by a faint pop. The guy was between us and the Army compound, and a long ways off. We could not locate him to return fire. That was very frustrating to me, I wanted to shoot that bastard in the worst way. I never got the chance.

I'll tell you one thing, I have fired most of the common weapons in the Commie arsenal—they are all pretty much crap as far as accuracy—that sniper must have had a scope and a tuned rifle to come as close as he did, as often as he did. He was a darned good shot, and remember it was a hot day and the heat waves were affecting his shooting. Today, I'd shake his hand if I had the chance, then I'd kick him in the butt for shooting at me.

Carpenter and I really were loving living with the Air Force: real beds with sheets and everything, and oh, great food! I will never forget those Air Force guys treated us *right*. The Biên Hòa Air Base mess hall was overwhelming: real eggs, fruit, steaks, and, honest to god real milk, not that powered stuff! A nice change from C-Rats three times a day! I will never forget going to the mess hall for breakfast the first morning and being asked,

*"How do you want your eggs?"* I was *astonished* and overjoyed.



**BIEN HOA AIR BASE:** Christmas, 1967 has just passed, and New Year's celebration is at hand. Vietnamese New Year, TET, is coming, and just days-away. Two 3rd Security Police Squadron A2C Airmen sit down in Bien Hoa's Enlisted Chow Hall for breakfast, unaware of the coming *Battle of Bien Hoa*, 31 January 1968. *Their lives are about to change. . . FOREVER*

I would love to hear from anyone from the 3rd Security Police Squadron.

### **0620 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**USAF Police Alumni Association**, *Excerpt Courtesy of: USAF Police Alumni Association,*  
(<http://www.usafpolice.org/the-battle-for-bien-hoa-tet-1968.html>)

*The Battle for Biên Hòa Air Base: Tết 1968* (<http://www.usafpolice.org>):

[About 0300-0310 hours, 31 January 1968] The NVA and VC "... having surrounded Bunker Hill-10 ... were on the way to other objectives. By bypassing Bunker Hill-10, the enemy subjected themselves to an intense crossfire from the bunker and other defenders. Even so, they managed to penetrate as far west as the *engine test stand* which was within 50 yards of the aircraft parking area. A counterattack against the [engine] test stand, launched from Bunker Hill-9, managed to retake the position, but it had to be abandoned after helicopter gunships mistakenly strafed the recaptured position."

[About 0620 hours, 31 January 1968] At dawn, "...Capt Martin E. "Marty" Strones, "C" Flight commander, posted Piazza and four other SPs on top of the bunker to observe the battle going on outside the base. This battle was being fought between the enemy and the Army's 101st Airborne Division's, 2nd Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, which had been brought in at dawn by helicopter, and Troop A of the 9th Infantry Division's, 3rd Squadron, 5th Cavalry, which had run the Highway 1 gauntlet. In a fight lasting most of the day, the Army cut off and ejected the attackers from the eastern end of the airfield. Troop A lost



two APCs in the fighting and its lone tank took 19 hits and lost two crews, but was still operational when the battle was over."

[Afternoon, 31 January 1968, Interior-Sweep (Second-Sweep)] "With the attackers cut off from further reinforcement, [Capt] Strones turned his attention to eliminating the now isolated enemy inside the perimeter. The deepest enemy penetration on Biên Hòa [Air Base] was to the arming/de-arming shack where the armorers would station themselves to make sure the bombs and guns on aircraft ready to depart on combat missions were armed and correctly loaded. The wooden shack and its personnel bunker [behind the shack] made for a strong position."

"Another strong enemy position was centered on the Engine Test Stand [Aircraft Run-Up Pad] which was "virtually a fortress" since it was reveted and the engines and related test equipment afforded the enemy ample cover."

The third major VC/NVA position consisted of a reinforced squad hiding in the elephant grass around the east end of the runway. The [Engine] test stand was assaulted first. [Capt] Strones and an SP sergeant led the attack and swept it clear of the enemy "in an exchange of hand grenades." Sadly, A1C Edward G. Muse, an SP augmentee, was killed in the assault.

The arming/de-arming pad was taken on next. Since the Americans did not possess any heavy weapons, the Quan Canh [QC] brought up a 57mm recoilless rifle and trained it on the [arming/de-arming] pad where one VC with a rocket launcher could be seen in the open. After a QC call to surrender over a loudspeaker went unheeded, helicopter gunships strafed the position and the recoilless rifle turned the wooden armorer's shack into splinters. As the VC fled the position, they were shot down.

After destroying the enemy positions at the [Engine] test stand and [arming/]de-arming pad, [Capt] Strones and 2nd Lt John A. Novak led sweeps through the area to flush out hidden infiltrators. The terrain provided the enemy excellent cover and often the security policemen were forced to charge pockets of resistance. As they were flushed from cover, the enemy reacted differently. "Some stood and fired," the after-action report recorded, "others ran, many attempted to hide; some of the wounded attempted to throw grenades as the security police approached, and one committed suicide rather than surrender." Some mortar and rocket rounds were fired at the SPs in a "feeble attempt" to cover the enemy withdrawal, but when the sweep ended four hours later, 139 enemy bodies were counted between the perimeter fence and the [arming/]de-arming pad.

Twenty-five prisoners were taken. Piazza and his men at the bunker did their part by lighting the elephant grass in front of the bunker on fire with slap flares and capturing two VC who popped up with their hands in the air as the blaze reached their hiding places."



*Photos: Biên Hòa Air Base: Aircraft Run-up Arming/de-arming Pad shack.*

“Some mortar and rocket rounds were fired at the SPs in a “feeble attempt” to cover the enemy withdrawal, but when the sweep ended four hours later, 139 enemy bodies were counted between the perimeter fence and the de-arming pad. Twenty-five prisoners were taken. Piazza and his men at the bunker did their part by lighting the elephant grass in front of the bunker on fire with slap flares, and capturing two VC who popped up with their hands in the air as the blaze reached their hiding places.

Although enemy stragglers were still being hunted down two days later, the battle for Biên Hòa Air Base was essentially over.”

### **About 0620 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**LTC Kent Miller, Squadron Commander, 3rd Security Police Squadron:**

Finally, after the sun came up and it was about 0620 hours or so, the 101st Air Base Division, 2nd Btl, 506th Infantry Reg., came out with one M60 Patton main battle tank (MBT) and a platoon from the MP Check Point. They started down the road toward Bunker Hill-10 [and suddenly plowed right into the middle of a large group of NVA and VC] but stopped about 30 yards from the QC house [east of BH #10, at the corner of the MLR where it turned towards the 101st ABG area along the MLR] that Charlie had taken over earlier.

Fighting was intense and they lost two APCs; the lone M60 Tank took 19 hits and lost two crew members, but remained in the battle. Then, in the confusion of Viet Cong and NVA running, darkness, smoke, QCs in the area, and explosions, the tank turned its 105mm gun toward Bunker Hill-10 as if they were going to fire at us. That did not go over well with us. I called LED/CSC to report this, and tell them to contact the Army and have them go back into their area. After what seemed like a very long time, the Army troops and tank moved back into the 101st ABN DIV base camp area, and did not come out again to support us, thank God.

*Biên Hòa Air Base: Bunker Hill-10, Tết 1968. US Army tanks arrive to join Air Base Defense with the 3rd Security Police Squadron, USAF.*



***About 0640 hours, 31 January 1968,***

**Barry Lyons, A1C (Major, Ret.), 3rd TAC FW, AMS (Electronics), Augmentee, 3rd SPS:**

All at once I got a tap on my shoulder and the M60 boys were headed back across the drainage ditch. We hadn't totally stopped, nor seen, all the VC and NVA coming along our side of the drainage ditch and toward us from the 101st ABN area. They had gotten within about 30 yards of us and in our sight!

We maneuvered into position along the top edge of the drainage ditch, hugging as close to the ground as possible, while observing the area near where we had just come from. A SP behind me was watching for movement across the dry ditch. His radio was being drowned out with constant chatter, when there was a sudden brilliant flash and very loud explosion in front of us. The VC had fired a B40 rocket, or something similar, that hit on the face of the ditch wall, right in front and just below us. Fortunately, it had hit down near the bottom of the ditch and the concussion only blew the helmet off the guy next to me, but at least temporarily left several of us without hearing, except for a loud ringing in our ears.

We were starting to get flare support from C47s, I think, and it allowed us to see the VC cross the ditch between us on their way toward the aircraft ramp. When the parachute-flares went out, it was *incredibly dark*.



*Biên Hòa Air Base: Tết 1968: Fire fight a  
3rd SPS encounters VC/NVA across ditch.*



By watching closely, I learned the VC response to the flares from the C47 flying overhead and started timing my shots when they were exposed. Along about this time I started wondering what my wife, parents, sisters, school-mates and others were going to say at my funeral. How could I be a part of this big, country USA and be at risk of being killed in field thousands of miles away? I was sent back across the drainage ditch again, for more M60 ammunition.

I quickly turned and clawed my way back down the side of the ditch, across and up the other bank only to find out that I had my weapon's safety off the entire time I had ran over and back. That realization still scares me about as much as anything, but fortunately I didn't accidentally pull the trigger. I just about threw up thinking what could have happened, but I didn't have time. It still scares me. And while I'm not making excuses in hindsight this looks like one of several augmentee safety training deficiencies: make sure you know your safety setting.

I also discovered that I had been given M16 instead of M60 ammo.

Things really heated up and everyone started firing in the direction the rocket had come from. An SP, a couple positions away, had a grenade but apparently had never thrown one because he was looking for volunteers. I took it from him and was shocked at how heavy it was—aircraft mechanics don't usually throw or even handle a grenade—so I gave it back to him and asked that he keep it away from us so we didn't have any accidents.

Then the guy next to me pointed to the end of his M16. The three-pronged fire suppressor at the very end of the rifle's barrel had been grazed by what looked like an incoming or outgoing round, possibly even one from my M16. I looked at it (who put me in charge) and suggested that he not fire it unless we were down to a situation that we really needed to fight. Right then we had enough men returning fire that it wasn't necessary for him to risk the rifle blowing up in his face if he fired it.

A few times when I was firing I felt something hitting my boots. I checked for damage but didn't see any blood and my boots were in one piece. It happened a couple more times and I finally figured out what it was—empty shells that were ejected from mine or my neighbor's weapon had bounced off my boots. Guess I hadn't fired in such close quarters before.





*Biên Hòa Air Base: Tết 1968: Fire fight as 3rd SPS encounters VC/NVA across ditch: "...Someone got a Huey Gunship from the Army helo area, up by the main base entrance, and sent him our way."*

We were near the AP with a radio, but could hear nothing but chatter—a lot of “break 6” calls and scared Airmen. Finally, whoever was on the other end of the radio [LTC Miller?] got everyone on the network to settle down and communicate. Soon after the B40 attack on, someone got a Huey Gunship from the Army helo area, up by the main base entrance, and sent him our way—we now pretty well had the enemy pinned down everywhere, but as evidenced by the rocket fired at us there were still pockets of enemy capable of doing deadly damage. However, we were finally going to get rescued.

Most of us were watching the SP guys start to sweep the field from the east end of the runway, between the 101st ABN, and toward us. All at once the Huey came up from behind us, about 40 feet off the ground, firing their M-60s and launching several rockets at the location where the VC’s rocket-fire at us had come from.

As happy as we were for the support, the helicopter gunships literally scared the hell out of us by firing so close overhead. Our radio operator figured we now had enough help with the field-sweep continuing to get closer, and we could now take it from there.

**About 0650 hours, 31 January 1968, Twilight/Dawn,**

**Barry Lyons, A1C (Major, Ret.), 3rd TAC FW, AMS (Electronics), Augmentee, 3rd SPS:**

It was time for at least one more scare—coming from the west, and opposite end of the runway—a series of loud pops kept getting louder and louder and closer.



RF-4C Recon Photo, Bien Hoa AB 31 Jan 1968, (c) 2016 by Don Poss

*US RF4-C Aerial Recon-Fly-over. Tết 1968. ([Click to Animate](#))*

The source of the Pop– Pop–Pop sound was obscured by streams of smoke and flashes, but when it got closer it turned out to be a RF4-C Phantom photo reconnaissance aircraft taking a series of photos directly down the length of the runway. The cavalry had finally arrived—and we got documented!

### **0700 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**3rd Tactical Dispensary, Ambulance** (*Excerpt from 7th AF News, Page: 5, 20 Mar 1968, Ambulance Drivers Respond to Attack*):

The battle raging around Bunker Hill-10 was so intense the ambulance did not return until after daylight at 7 a.m. By then the enemy had given up trying to take the post and were scattered throughout the area swapping gunfire with base defense forces.

Ambulances driven by Edwards and SSgt. Ernest A. Johansson, a dental technician from Madera, Calif., were called to pick up the wounded. [TSgt.] Edwards brought the first wounded enemy back to the dispensary, assisted by TSgt. James V. Bridges, Charlotte, NC, noncommissioned officer in charge of medical services for the dispensary. Two [3rd Security Police] security guards accompanied them. Johansson brought back another wounded enemy. Assisting Johansson was Sgt Albert J, Shimkus Jr., medical services, cut off

his clothing, then evacuated him from the area.

**About 0730 hours, 31 January 1968**

**Barry Lyons, A1C** (Major, Ret.), 3rd TAC FW, AMS (Electronics), Augmentee, 3rd SPS: Several of us went back across the drainage ditch so we could back-up the sweep-team, as the VC positions were captured and cleared one by one. One of our folks knew (or paid attention to our training enough) that 5-6 Viet Cong were starting to surrender right in front of us. They were being told to stand with hands in the air and move out of the trench from along the ditch they were hiding in.

There was a sudden burst of gunfire (why, I'm not sure) and the VC twisted and fell back into their holes. I had my M16 aimed at them, but didn't squeeze the trigger, as I saw them as possibly trying to surrender. Our sweep-leader got everyone calmed down and again talked the VC into coming back out in the open. They were told to remove their clothes, what little they had, so we could confirm they didn't have any concealed explosives or weapons on them.



*Wounded Viet Cong receives evaluation for medical care by QC.*

The Viet Cong or NVA were all bloody from various wounds, but the one I remember the most was a tall enemy who had his foot mostly shot off, and several other wounds. I couldn't imagine how much it must have hurt! I also looked at several places where the helo-rockets had exploded, and saw that they didn't really do a lot of damage as they had hit in some high grass area which buffered the impact and damage—but I still wouldn't want one in my lap.

Our group started to split apart, and several of us worked thru the rice and grass field, east of our night position, to where the road turned to the left and up to the 101st Airborne area. We were sloshing in a couple feet of scuzzy marsh-like water most of the way, and I could just picture a cowboy movie where the guy hides in the water while breathing through a straw until all at once he jumps up right in front of the other guy and shoots him.

Fortunately, I didn't have that happen—this wasn't a movie nor a game—but I did come across a Viet Cong body on a small rise. As others noted, it looked like he had possibly shot himself in the head, probably when it had started to get light, and like us was scared he would be captured. Who knows what they had been told would happen to them if captured.

I finally was released from duty, and walked from the Bunker up the road to near the F-102 area. When I got there, I sat down on the edge of the ramp, and in the warm sun fell asleep—exhausted. I don't know exactly how long I dozed off, but I woke to the sound of voices and a vehicle pulling a wagon nearby—it was the captured enemy loading their dead. The wagon was pretty full, maybe 40 bodies or so, with numerous wounds from head-to-toe. Gruesome. I was glad it wasn't us loading our dead.

I stood there a few moments wondering what their stories were, and whether their families would ever know what had happened to them. I suddenly realized that I was totally exhausted—bone weary—and paused, staring down at my weapon...what was it I going to do? For the life of me—I couldn't remember. Oh... I nodded to myself, and turned and headed for the Security Police compound to turn in my weapon.

After cleaning and turning in my weapon and ammunition, I started walking back to my shop, alone...one foot in front of the other. Exhausted—zoning in and out. Asleep on my feet—mind-strobing flashes of what I had seen, what I had done, trying to make sense of it all. What the—had just happened—people were dead—wounded—shot to literally stinking-pieces...scared... heroic... weapons hammering insanely—my D-Day—more bodies than I could count jumbled onto a wagon—people—bodies-floating in stagnant ponds, and killed all over again... fizzling flares ...rockets exploding...RPGs booming... gunships strafing like Godzilla-chain saws and air-guns...the horrific noise, the smells—stench of ripped up intestines—filth—and they're still out there—I...just...didn't...care—didn't want to think about it—couldn't turn it off, and it was thinking about it—mind- racing...and trying to make sense of it—if it makes sense, then it'll make sense...right? and then I can forget about it—one foot in front of the other. Exhausted to the bone.

Was it all really just about my wanting to know what happened once our planes left the ground'? Is that it—be an Augmentee, and I'm a man now because I know what happens? Was it just seeing for myself some kind of evidence of a real fight—a real war—was going on? Me and John Wayne? I saw—felt—the Saber Jets blowing the crap out of the east perimeter...and that ungodly mushroom cloud...I wonder if Long Bình is still there? I saw the elephant, and got the RPG pucker-factor rounds shot at me. I saw them coming through the wire (the only thing missing were Chinese-bugles!) and shot at them, returned fire... made my peace with God...knew I was going to die. Wanted to live. A brain-fry overload—they...were...trying ...to...kill...me, and I wanted-needed to kill them to live—and hoped I had—but why? How can I tell anyone about this? I don't even know where to start.

I got part way back and someone with a vehicle stopped and gave me a ride to my electronics' work shop...my day-job. When I walked into the shop I heard several gasps as they saw my condition, covered from head to toe with dirt and charcoal, from burnt grass.





*Biên Hòa Air Base Perimeter grass-burn. Tết 1968.*

I was happy to be back to normal shop-chaos —sanity—and wished I'd never left—glad I had—and all the while countless-ruthless-violent thoughts crashing through at its own pace and volition—not asking permission...but despite it all, I ..... was ..... alive...and grinned to myself, realizing I now knew why the dangling-foot VC was grinning.

I told everyone in the shop—maybe several times—what had happened to me, and they told what had happened on the base: several water lines had been broken and there was nothing to drink but warm beer—so what. I was exhausted and dying for a drink. I spent the night in the stifling shop-bunker, and several of my work-buddies helped me get through that night. I finally got something to drink the next day.

I was ready, should the 3rd SPS call again, but hoped they wouldn't—I didn't care what John Wayne would think of that. [A1C Barry W. Lyons (Major, Ret.).

### **0730 hours, 31 January 1968**

**Sgt Jim Lebowitz, Sgt.,** 3rd Security Police Squadron, Law Enforcement Desk Sgt: After the matter of artillery was settled, someone (it may have been Capt. Strones) called in about Air Support. I contacted the Đông Nai TOC, and shortly thereafter the Army 145th Combat Aviation Battalion was in action with helicopter gunships. The attack would quickly escalate and we would later ask for support from the Army 145th Combat Aviation Battalion, and they responded near day break and finished off many of the enemy. By about 0730 or so the main fighting was over, but killing by both sides would continue.

**About 1000 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Howard G. Yates, Augmentee** (12th Air Commando Squadron/3rd SPS):

The fighting continued well into the morning, but the resilience of the North Vietnamese soldier and Viet Cong was apparently running out of steam. Their small arms fire had, but for an occasional burst, fallen silent. We took stock of our situation and discovered that our ammunition had nearly been exhausted.

**Before 1200 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**Jon Hayes, A2C,** 3rd Security Police Squadron, QRT:

**Perimeter-Sweep [First Sweep]** - Our QRT and others were in place at Bunker Hill-10 area until the perimeter-sweep started. The perimeter-sweep was the third big Tết-thing I was a part of. By then, there were a lot of us. I didn't know Capt Maisey was killed until...about morning... maybe a little earlier than that. I heard about the augmentee, Airman Muse (augmentee), but I didn't even know that for quite a while...the next day sometime, when all the info started coming in as more than just rumors.

I remember we started to muster for the perimeter-sweep. I always think about it being closer to around 0900 for some reason... things can just blend together at times. By then most everyone knew that our 3rd SPS Ops Officer, Captain Maisey, was killed in action.

About then, Captain Strones began yelling that we were going to begin a perimeter-sweep. There were a whole lot of men coming forward to join in. Capt. Strones, I think, had us move in front of Bunker Hill-10, on the North side, and started us moving east in a sweep to capture or kill the hiding enemy that wouldn't surrender. It seemed crazy...really crazy.

I think we had started the perimeter-sweep around 1100-1200-ish, moving east in a perimeter-sweep line of about 25-40 of us, we were a solid team...nobody left the area... we were advancing and nervous...carrying our weapons forward ready to engage anything in a split second. I don't remember any army guys in that perimeter-sweep. I do remember we were all just so happy to be alive. I felt like I'd already been through hell once, earlier, and I thought, this isn't bad. There were several groups moving in a meandering line of sorts, and we were near each other. We just sort of continued moving eastward, staying sort of abreast of each other. And it was working. The perimeter-sweep continued at a very slow and organized pace, and it was thorough and I thought, professional.

Occasionally the perimeter-sweep line halted while someone checked something out; usually, discovering another dead body or wounded VC or NVA. All the while, there were dead bodies just everywhere in the open and bush, and several were just blown apart, really. The line would continue forward, and I thought it was executed with great precision. Nobody would get out in front of anybody else on the line. Prisoners were captured, but I didn't see any prisoners taken at that time, although there was a whole bunch of stuff going on...people moving behind us, dealing with whatever was found by the line; enemy wounded, dead, explosives, EOD requirements, or Intel and such. Still, the perimeter-sweep was always very professional and the NCOs kept it that way.

There were a lot of SP guys in the perimeter-sweep next to and near me. If the line had a

break in it because of terrain or discoveries, the line halted until whatever the problem was, was dealt with or delegated. There were also growing numbers of VC and NVA wounded, and you couldn't tell if some were faking it or not. One VC was found and it looked like he had committed suicide. Nevertheless, surviving enemy were searched really carefully, with an eye toward booby-traps, and thoroughly for weapons and Intel. Enemy wounded and POWs were turned over to the trailing QCs, but I don't remember seeing any QCs join us as a part of the perimeter-sweep. It would have been handy if they had, even if it was as a prisoner-translator encouraging the enemy to surrender.

There were a lot of us, almost shoulder to shoulder, moving very slow, sweeping the whole perimeter area around Bunker Hill-10. We swept around and kept going just a little way at a time, spreading out a few paces between us. While advancing slowly during the m, a potential prisoner did something and suddenly started moving around, and one of the guys quickly let him have it and killed him. A captain or a Sarge came running up screaming at us and ripped the SP guy that had fired off what seemed a full magazine, a new one. I think that VC was only wounded before he got himself dead. We just kept moving after the whomever was yelling got things under control and everyone calmed down; including those VC and NVA prisoners trying to survive that twilight-zone between discovery and accepted-surrender.

Our QRT SPs were together from start to finish. We were mostly just a bunch of kids really, following the NCOs and officers. After the perimeter-sweep was declared "clean", that's when our group broke off from the perimeter-sweep. We stood around some more, waiting for whatever, and couldn't help but check out the bodies and weapons laying all around.

Just as noticeable was the quiet...itself seemingly loud in the absence of last nights' insanity. No birds winged the skies at all, yielding the skies to the F-100 Sabre jets.

Souvenir temptation can be very strong. But I had made what I thought was the right and basically-honest decision not to take an AK-47 or other weapon for a souvenir, convincing myself it equated to grave-robbing or something ghoulish; besides, a full auto weapon was probably illegal to take home anyway. I was very proud of myself and feeling pretty smug about it, that somehow, I was better than those other wannabe grave-robbers...but it took a lot of wrestling with my conscious over what I could, should, or wouldn't do; it was getting blurrier by the minute.

My smugness crumbled into admiration soon enough. It was right after the battle when those army guys suddenly landed their chopper, and the gunner hopped out and ran over to a small line of enemy bodies and bagged two AK-47s—just like that—then jumped back on their chopper and flew off in a huge cloud of dust before someone could say squat, and leaving us Air Force types coated in grime. My moral argument wilted, leaving me floundering toward the abyss of selfishness and greed...again.

The Army definitely led the way causing me to fall, weaken, and sink morally to a not quite new-low, while appropriating found-property on a battlefield (an AK-47), for safe-keeping ...in my locker. It was those nasty army guy's fault I caved—right? That gunner had just

swooped in and bagged two AK-47s I might have wanted, and maybe ripped off a NVA belt from a uniform. When I looked around, no one seemed to care, and there were still bodies laying where they fell and plenty of AK-47 rifles laying where we had been firing earlier... and I mean everywhere, and not always near a body.

So, I made my very casual move and this is when I got an AK-47. I spotted my AK-47 with an inserted banana clip laying in the dirt looking reasonably in good shape, better than its nearby soldier... I nearly faltered in determination, but thought if it's okay for the army chopper guys to bag two AK-47s (and I agreed with myself that it was more than okay)...and since the NVA's head was facing the other direction, I picked up only one AK-47, slung its sling over my head and shoulder in one move, and continued walking like it was an everyday thing. With every step, I felt more justified: No NCO or officer yelled at me...lightning didn't strike—and no one said anything at all.

The morning was starting to get hot. We just kept going until Captain Strones said that was enough...it's clean. I can't talk enough about how great the officers and NCOs were... they were leading and directing us, and definitely from the front. I think some were WWII and or Korean War vets.

***Afternoon 1200 hours, 31 January 1968,***

**Howard G. Yates, Augmentee (12th Air Commando Squadron/3rd SPS):**

**Interior-Sweep** [Second Sweep] - By the time afternoon rolled around, teams of Security Police, Augmentees and a handful of Army troops (from whence they came I have no idea) had begun forming up to perform a second security-sweep [Internal-Sweep] to detect, apprehend, or neutralize any strangling VC or NVA forces. There were also reports of snipers on base, which didn't do anything for my comfort level. On the other hand—maybe I'll find that missing pack of cigs.

Side-by-side we began a slow, methodical and very cautious sweep from the perimeter to the runway. As we neared the drainage ditch, which ran perpendicular to the runway, someone shouted, "Hold up!" I stopped and looked toward my left and saw a Security Police member (I think he was an NCO, maybe a Staff Sergeant) standing in the open, confronting an enemy soldier in some brush. There was a loud "pop" and the Sergeant went down. What ensued was a brief but devastating report from at least ten nearby defenders. Another VC had gone to the "Big Rice Paddy in the Sky".

As we conducted our search along the drainage ditch I was walking behind one of those army soldiers who showed up to give us a hand. He looked like he had been in the field for six weeks: He was dirty, smelly, grungy and unshaven, but he was also loaded for bear, and I for one was glad he was there.

Ahead of us and to the left, down in the ditch, was a clump of brush wherein several VC had set up a machinegun position, and the Viet Cong machine gunner and a couple of his buddies were floating, motionless, on top of the bloody water. Suddenly the ground pounder in front of me let loose with a long burst from his Tommy gun. He killed them all—again. Then he turned toward me, spit a mouthful of tobacco juice on the ground and



said, "I thought I saw one move."

Larry taped me on the back and commented, "That boy's been in-country way too long." Rounding the corner of the arming/de-arming maintenance shack on the east-end of the runway, and still very vigilant for enemy snipers, I was confronted by a picture that will be forever etched in my memory: A Viet Cong guerilla fighter lay dead under a portable power unit (a big tractor) which he had mistakenly used for cover during the night. One of his arms had been peeled back at the shoulder and everything above his eyebrows was gone, the obvious result of intense fire power from the Security Police bunker on the airfield. Somehow, I overcame the urge to heave my guts out.

We completed our part of the sweep and were told to gather up near the end of the runway. The officer in charge dismissed several of us, "Men, go get some chow and some sleep. We will no doubt need you again tonight." Larry and I just looked at each other. I know what he was thinking ... but I won't repeat it.

We turned to leave but lingered just long enough to watch the Quan Canh (QC), South Vietnamese Air Force Police, interrogate a few prisoners, who were sitting on a log with their hands restrained. In a sudden fit of rage one of the Quan Canh rifle butted a restrained prisoner on the side of the head and knocked him to the ground. Now what he did was probably not in keeping with the rules of the Geneva Convention but I just grinned and thought, "Whoops—*wrong answer.*"

Black-dust from the scorched elephant grass was smeared on my sweaty and greasy face. Intact, we were all filthy, exhausted, and hungry. Our first priority was to head in the direction of the chow hall. As we approached the control tower on the way we notice a couple of officers surveying the damage to a shiny blue and bullet-riddled staff car. Suddenly one of the officers, a colonel, saw us walking toward him. We simultaneously rendered the best salute we could, given our condition.

The Colonel snapped to attention whipped his hand through the air and popped one of the finest salutes I have ever seen on us. He asked us if we were doing okay and I said, "Fine Sir, thank you." He came back with, "Oh, no ... it is I who should be thanking you. You guys saved our butts last night." As he dropped his salute he said some-thing like, "I'll bet you men are tired and hungry."

We agreed, and went on our way.

I had a suspicion that the cook wasn't feeling very hospitable as we shuffled up to the serving line. He barely made eye contact but continued to wipe down the grill. "I just cleaned this thing so, nothing till dinner," he grumbled. We stood there in disbelief staring at him. When he did look up he got an eyeful. He saw four scruffy looking Airmen, weapons slung over shoulders and the look of hungry puppies on their faces.

He stared for a moment and then stammered, "Were you out there...on the perimeter...all night? Damn man—*why didn't you say something?*"

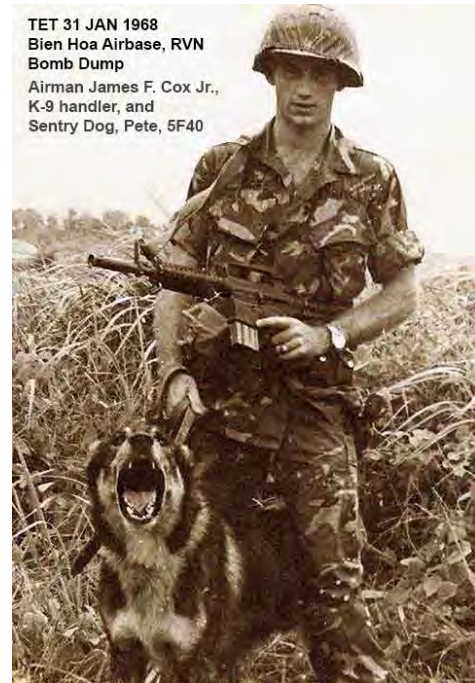
That was the best hot breakfast I've had in a long time.

My Bunk—I made a quick trip to the officer's showers (they had hot water), washed off two layers of grime and then shuffled back to the hooch. I crawled into my bunk and laid my head back. "Finally, I can get some shut eye." I didn't think it worth the energy to find a cigarette.

**Around 1200 hours (Noon)**, 31 January 1968,  
**James F. Cox, Jr., A2C**, K-9 handler, and K-9 Pete, 5F40:

*Biên Hòa Air Base: 3rd SPS, K-9 Sentry Dog Handler, James F. Cox, A2C, and K-9, Pete 5F40, on post.*

**Interior-Sweep** [Second Sweep] - Around noon we returned to the kennels from the Bomb Dump. That was when we learned the east-end had been penetrated.



We K-9 were then assigned to go and assist in a second-sweep (Interior Sweep) toward the east end of the runway area to search for concealed enemy snipers, Viet Cong and NVA KIA or wounded. A lot of enemy bodies were found, and they were taken to the east-end of the runway where there was a large pit that had been dug. Captured enemy were turned over to the ARVN or QC police for interrogation. Later that night we were posted where the grave pit was, which still had bodies exposed and uncovered in it.



**Battle of Biên Hòa, Bunker Hill-10, Biên Hòa Air Base, 1968 mass-grave:** On 13 April 2017, 159 remains of VC and NVA soldiers were discovered and exhumed by joint US and Vietnam search parties. A second mass grave was located about 3 miles east, containing over 400 remains buried by US Army.

I believe they were possibly burned before the trench was finally covered. The thing that is still with me is the smell of the dead bodies, all night long, on that K-9 post.

## **VIETNAM BREAKING NEWS, 14 April 2017**

**Mass Grave update: Biên Hòa Air Base:** *According to the below Vietnam Breaking News article, the long missing Tết 1968 mass-grave was recently located and 150 Vietnamese remains recovered. The article states recovered remains number "...around 150 People's Army of Vietnam soldiers [who were] killed in the Tết Offensive nearly five decades ago." The article also states the mass-grave "...was dug by South Vietnam soldiers. Don Poss*



VIETNAM BREAKING NEWS APRIL 14, 2017

**Tết Offensive mass grave unearthed at Vietnam airport**

full article: <https://www.vietnambreakingnews.com/2017/04/tet-offensive-mass-grave-unearthed-at-vietnam-airport/>

"Items found at the mass grave at Biên Hòa Airport in Dong Nai: A military search unit, assisted partially by two U.S. veterans, believes it has unearthed the burial site of 150 Vietnamese soldiers killed in the war.

A Vietnamese military search unit has found a burial site at a southern airport which they believed was a mass grave of around 150 People's Army of Vietnam soldiers killed in the Tết Offensive nearly five decades ago.

Many items and body remains were found on Thursday morning in a pit to the southeast of Biên Hòa Airport, a U.S. airbase during the Vietnam War, in Dong Nai Province, which neighbors Ho Chi Minh City [Saigon].

Witnesses said it was the burial site of around 150 soldiers from the communist troops who were killed during military campaigns in early 1968, known as the Tết Offensive. Dong Nai provincial officials have been searching for the mass grave at the airport area for years, based on witnesses and old maps. Last month they also flew two U.S. veterans by helicopter to help identify the location of the grave, which was dug by South Vietnam soldiers."

**Later, Evening of 31 January 1968,**

**James F. Cox, Jr., A2C, K-9 handler, and K-9 Pete, 5F40:**

It would prove to be a very long night at the grave pit (I don't have to close my eyes to see it), and there was plenty of time to think about the few nights before, when the K-9 and 3rd SPS Law Enforcement Police hut was hit by a rocket.



Photos: Biên Hòa Air Base, K9 and 3rd SPS Law Enforcement Police hut. Tết 31 January 1968.







**About 1500 hours, 31 January 1968: JON HAYES**

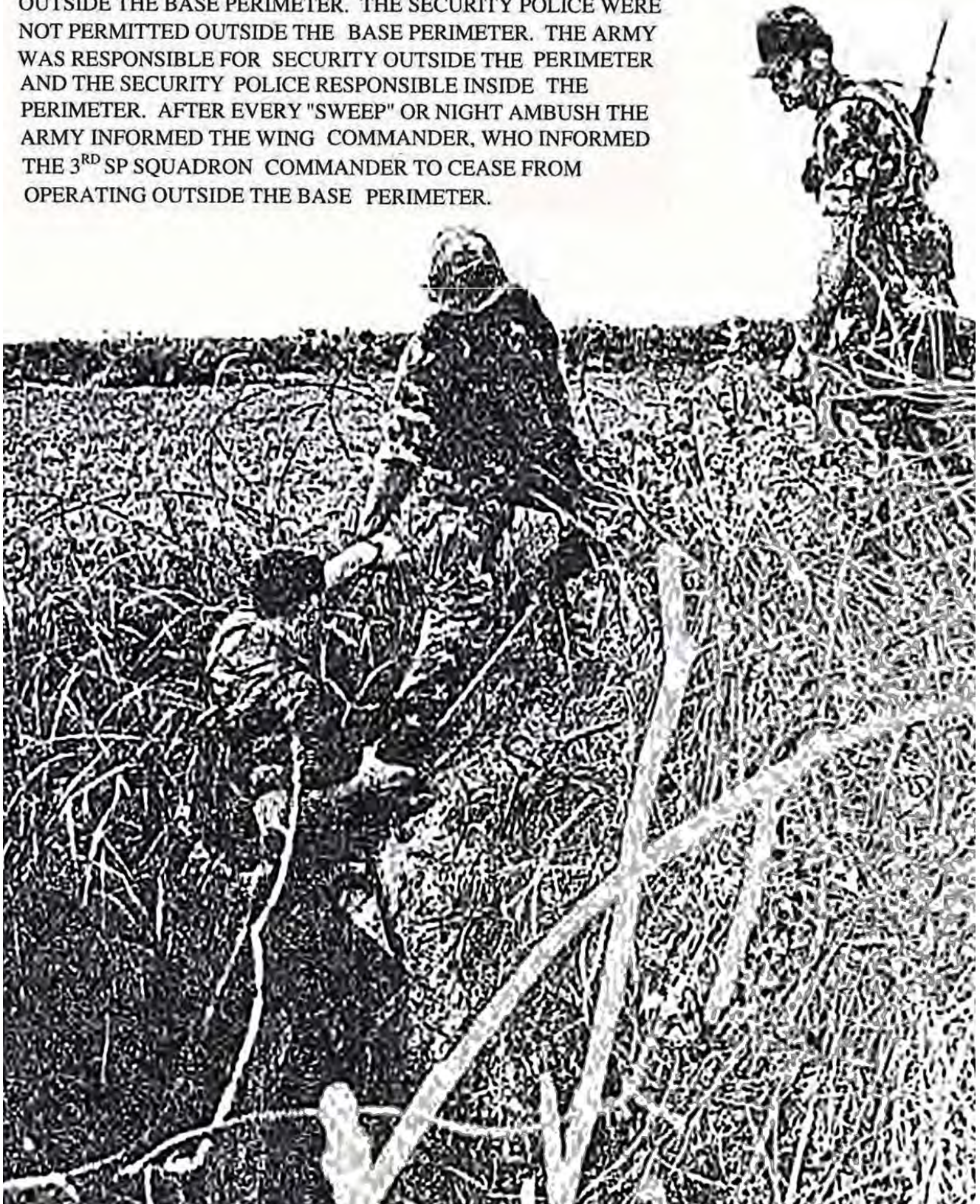
**Interior-Sweep [Second-Sweep]** - I think we had started the interior sweep soon after the perimeter-sweep; maybe an hour or so later after a quick break of sorts. Anyway, it started getting warm... hot even, though it was January. Both sweeps were dangerous. No one spoke Vietnamese and we didn't have a translator. And none of the POWs acknowledged speaking English.





## PERIMETER SWEEP and INTERIOR SWEEP

THIRD SECURITY POLICEMAN CONDUCTING A "SWEEP" OUTSIDE THE BASE PERIMETER. THE SECURITY POLICE WERE NOT PERMITTED OUTSIDE THE BASE PERIMETER. THE ARMY WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR SECURITY OUTSIDE THE PERIMETER AND THE SECURITY POLICE RESPONSIBLE INSIDE THE PERIMETER. AFTER EVERY "SWEEP" OR NIGHT AMBUSH THE ARMY INFORMED THE WING COMMANDER, WHO INFORMED THE 3<sup>RD</sup> SP SQUADRON COMMANDER TO CEASE FROM OPERATING OUTSIDE THE BASE PERIMETER.





Sarge never told us to do anything I thought was dumb. Everything he told us to do was potentially dangerous or deadly. There were times I wasn't necessarily clear on what was happening, like when the interior sweep line stopped for some reason. But our SP NCOs and officers...were the ones we so heavily relied on what they said, and wanted us to do... and we did it straight out. They came through for us. We were all a bunch of scared people. Scared Airmen...SPs. The Army guys had joined us, but we were all just so vulnerable in the open fields...tall grass might conceal you—or the enemy—if you drop down, but there's no real cover there. If the VC was willing to die and take someone with him...that would and did happen.

Sarge's suggestions still rang in my ears: I think you might want to go clean your M-16... like now...because we have an interior sweep to do—you got less than an hour to be back.

An hour! There was no way I was going to clean any weapon in that time, and make it to the interior sweep. You may remember the red Vietnam clay—when it was wet it was the worst muddy goo on the planet—when it was sun baked and caked-brick-dry—it was concrete. Anyway, I hurried to our hut, filthy from head to toe, a little ripe, and with both weapons encased in Vietnam- concrete mud.

That's when I thought of my twin brother Don, who was still at the bomb dump—you don't take your M-16 rifle up in the bomb dump towers...which meant that his M-16 was most likely in his hut locker. So, I took my newly acquired (but mud-caked) AK-47 and my M-16 rifle (that I took a mud bath within the creek earlier) back to the hut. My M-16 looked like a long skewered shish kabob, deep-fried and mud-dried.

In our hut, we had made those horse-shoe like bed-cubicles with our bunks (tidy but considering it was Vietnam—seemed like a grand hotel). I opened my locker and saw Don's pristine-clean M-16 setting there, just begging me to take it. There was only one thing to do—I left Don the AK-47 and my M16 (I didn't have a spare jackhammer to clean them) and both were looking like a troll's mud clotted tongue depressor. I closed the locker, then eased it back open... and thought, I'm sure my bro wouldn't mind cleaning both of them before guard mount, or if he suddenly needs a weapon—right? And he's working a tower so we can't take a rifle anyway. After all, it was all the Army's fault: if those thieving chopper pilots hadn't made me cave and take that AK-47...and if God hadn't let me fall into that muddy creek...then nothing would've happened... and I would be scrounging something to eat instead of borrowing Don's M-16—right? (FYI: Don actually cleaned both weapons).

I had heard there was a grave-pit somewhere for the enemy bodies, but didn't see it, nor any of the VC or NVA bodies being moved around. We were relieved off the field before that, I guess. Just never saw it. We did that perimeter-sweep after the battle, then were told to head back to our huts and tents, or wherever for a short break. And we geared up again for an interior sweep.

Later, I learned that all the enemy body parts and pieces were quickly shoveled into an open pit, along with the bodies. The puzzle didn't seem to matter, or be worth solving, to



anyone. What did matter was that today would be very hot... tomorrow, hotter...the day after,

unbearable—and the bodies would putrefy. I doubted if their families knew yet, or would ever know where the bodies were buried. War is hell for families too.

In less than an hour I was back and ready for the interior sweep, which didn't seem as intense to me having just finished Bunker Hill-10's defensive line perimeter-sweep. I just remember mounting up and taking the interior sweep from here to there on foot. It had been a really long day. Sarge spotted me and looked at my M-16, nodding approvingly. Nothing was mentioned about the AK-47. And as Sarge draped a bandoleer of M-60 ammo around my neck, I was surprised and hopeful that he would never mention the AK-47 again.

My AK-47 eventually disappeared.

Everyone was nervous that some of the VC might have gotten as far in as the air base aircraft areas, and rumors were flying that some stragglers were still hiding there, so we formed up again. Someone had passed it on that we would interior sweep from the west end, eastward, in the grass-area between the runway and apron—the whole length. I know there were grass fires in the area, but I didn't see any from where I was at: nada. Our interior sweep cleared it without finding any enemy. Seemed they never got further than the Run-up pad area.

The interior sweep was a just *get it done* type of thing and not a big deal, especially after what we had just been through and mostly uneventful, as my part of the war went. After we were relieved for the day, we were told to get some rest that we might be needed again for the coming night.

### **1500 hours, 31 January 1968**

**3rd Tactical Dispensary, Ambulance** (*Excerpt from 7th AF News, Page: 5, 20 Mar 1968, Ambulance Drivers Respond to Attack*):

At 3 p.m., SSgt. Leonardo V. Silva, Durango, Colo., a medical administration specialist, went to Bunker Hill-10 to pick up two members of the Defense Force. One was unconscious from heat exhaustion and the other was suffering from severe leg cramps and could not walk.

"Bullets were flying when we got there," said Silva. "We crawled 50 yards, got to the unconscious man and dragged him back to the ambulance. Then things got hectic," he said. Exploding mortar rounds pinned the medics down for 30 minutes.

"We were carrying the other man to the ambulance when a helicopter spotted some enemy nearby and opened up with its miniguns," said Silva. "The one man was able to run the rest of the way, beating us there, before he collapsed," Silva concluded.

### **About 1545 hours, 31 January 1968**

**SSgt Pete Piazza, Defense-5 (SMSgt, Ret.):**

About twelve hours earlier, a VC RPG exploded on the face of Bunker Hill-10, and a mass of shrapnel penetrated the open firing port embrasure which limited a focused funnel-like cannon-shot jagged metal inflicting a mortal wound on Capt Maisey.

As Capt. Strones led field sweeps toward the perimeter, I and four Airmen remained at the bunker all day, without food and little water. We helped give cover to the men who made two-sweeps with him just north of Bunker Hill-10.

During both sweeps, CSC's radio called upon us to give them fire-support, plus I would radio information from Capt. Strones to CSC, and vice-versa. That old HT200 radio really took a beating and kept on working, that's for sure. Only real problem with it was the battery would not always last an 8-hour shift, or the distance it transmitted was sometimes not very good, especially if anything tall was in your way, like a mountain or a bunker ..... but it held a charge through the long night of Tết 1968.

**About 0617 hours, Twilight/Dawn hours**

**SSgt Pete Piazza, Defense-5 (SMSgt, Ret.):**

After a very long six-or-seven hours of night battle, the growing daylight looked really good. As I looked over the battlefield, I could see a lot of dead—I mean a lot of dead — more than a hundred Viet Cong and NVA bodies fell around Bunker Hill-10 between the perimeter and the Aircraft Engine Run-Up Pad. Carnage had ruled, and we were still alive.

I had watched sausage made ... and it was not yet over. As the day went on, we had to be very careful of not shooting any US troops making sweeps for enemy outside the base. I had a set of binoculars and could see the 101st Air Cav and the VC and NVA moving back and forth about a quarter mile off the east-end of the airbase.



*Photo Left: Biên Hòa Air Base, Tết, 1968: KIA Edward Grady Muse, Augmentee, 3rd TAC FTR Wg, 7th AF/ 3rd SPS, 31 January 1968.*

Capt. Marty Strones made a sweep across the flight line toward the Aircraft Engine Run-Up Pad area. Upon getting to the end or the taxiway they found a lot of bodies of VC/NVA KIA and WIA. Then they began to sweep the Aircraft Engine Run-Up Pad shack area, and this is when Charlie tossed a grenade at one team of SPs and Augmentees.

From what I was told, this is when A1C Ed Muse (Edward Grady Muse, Augmentee: 3rd CBT SPT GRP, 3rd TAC FTR Wing, 7th AF / 3rd SPS) was killed in action when they moved around a culvert; the first SP saw Charlie toss a grenade and shot at him, then went

to the ground and yelled “grenade.” A second SP, following him, came around the corner and hit the dirt, and then A1C Muse, third in line, came around the corner but for some reason did not hit the ground and walked right into the blast of the grenade and was killed.

*Photo Right: Typical perimeter road culvert as seen from Bunker Hill-10.*



I and four Airmen remained at the bunker all day, without food and little water, and helped give cover to Capt. Strones and the men, who made two-sweeps with him through the field just north of Bunker Hill-10.

During both sweeps, CSC's radio called upon us to give them fire-support, plus I would radio information from Capt. Strones to CSC, and vice-versa. That old HT200 radio really took a beating and kept on working, that's for sure. Only real problem with it was the battery would not always last an 8-hour shift, or the distance it transmitted was sometimes not very good, especially if anything tall was in your way, like a mountain or a bunker ..... but it held a charge through the long night of Tết 1968.

*Photo Right: 1962-1970:  
Motorola HT200 Portable 2-  
Way Radio served in Vietnam.*



During the Perimeter-Sweep (first-sweep) that morning, K-9 handler Bill Press was found lying on the battlefield severely wounded. Airman Press had sounded *first-alert* when he set loose Sentry Dog, Diablo (X313) and fired his M16 at hundreds of Viet Cong and NVA storming through the barb-concertina perimeter wire. Diablo was shot dead and Bill Press wounded.

K-9 Bill Press later related the perimeter wire had lit up with trip flares and enemy weapons firing. Wounded, he played dead as NVA and VC soldiers literally ran around and over him, probably believing him dead. He lay there through the night as battle waves of surging enemy-infantry fought against Bunker Hill-10.

Hours passed until early daylight, when Airman Press found the strength to get up, and began to wave at a helicopter hoping they would recognized him as a friendly. However, being in the middle of the battlefield and without his K-9, he was presumed hostile, and gunship rockets were fired at him. He turned in time to avoid being killed, but chunks of shrapnel from the gunship's rocket blast hammered him in the back. That time he didn't get back up, and was not found until the field was being swept a second time later that morning.

Airman Bill Press later said that he first arrived at Biên Hòa Air Base just in time for Tết 1968. He was the first WIA casualty on the Tết Biên Hòa battlefield, wounded by the enemy, hit by friendly rocket-fire shrapnel during the battle, medevac to Japan and spent weeks in healing. Weeks later, he returned to Vietnam on 2 March 1968—to complete his tour!

Mike J. Mahan told me he saw Bill Press's scars, and it was amazing he wasn't killed. As Capt. Strones led field sweeps toward the perimeter, I and four Airmen remained at the bunker all day, without food and little water. We helped give cover to the men who made two-sweeps with him just north of Bunker Hill-10. During both sweeps, CSC's radio called upon us to give them fire-support, plus I would radio information from Captain Strones to CSC, and vice-versa.



**About 1800 hours, 31 January 1968,**

**David Parks, SP5. USA Radio Intelligence Team, 856th Radio Research Det.,** billeted with 3rd SPS:

We stayed atop our sand pile, avoiding our friendly sniper, till dark then went back to our Air Force home, and to that lovely mess hall. Sorry to say, my Air Force friends had suffered greatly that night and day.

Carpenter and I really were loving living with the Air Force: real beds with sheets and everything, and oh, great food! I will never forget those Air Force guys treated us right. The Biên Hòa Air Base mess hall was overwhelming: real eggs, fruit, steaks, and honest to God real milk, not that powdered stuff! A nice change from C-Rats three times a day! I will never forget going to the mess hall for breakfast the first morning and being asked, “*How do you want your eggs?*” I was astonished and overjoyed.

I would love to hear from anyone from the 3rd Security Police Squadron, USAF.

**About 2200 hours, 31st January 1968,**

**Charles Haugen, Sgt, 3rd Security Police Squadron, Biên Hòa Air Base:**

We returned to duty late the night of the 31st and relieved some guys who had been on duty all night. Some Airmen had been deployed along the east perimeter in various positions all day and most of the night. They were totally beat, but they had to stay out there. They were told they could allow every other man to catch some Zs and then trade off.

**1 February 1968,**

**About 0630 hours (Sunrise), 1 Feb 1968,**

**Charles Haugen, Sgt, 3rd Security Police Squadron, Biên Hòa Air Base:**

By the morning of 1 February 1968, Biên Hòa Air Base smelled pretty bad. There were dead NVA and VC bodies that had laid in the sun during the day and all night— there is nothing worse than that smell—today, the smell of a dead animal takes me back there immediately. The day before, I saw trucks hauling bodies away, and VC/NVA prisoners in the back of a truck being taken someplace.

I seem to remember LTC Miller hitching a ride on an Army Huey, but I might be wrong about that. At some point LTC Miller got the base rescue helicopter to take him up and fly over the bunker and perimeter area. Someone on the ground tried to talk to him over the radio, but there was too much noise for effective communication. It was a great moral booster to see him though.

In a day or so things returned to a normal routine, except we were working longer shifts. At some point a load on Safeside troops landed to “save” us. Their presence did help because we were able to get back to a normal three-shift day.

**1 February 1968,  
Refortifying Bunker Hill-10**

**SSgt Piazza, Defense-5 (SMSgt, Ret.):**

Air Base Defense at Biên Hòa Air Base, Bunker Hill-10, and major Air Bases of RVN, were manned throughout Vietnam War by USAF Security Police Squadrons. No Air Base protected by Security Police Squadrons was ever overrun and captured.

The Battle of Tết, 31 January 1968, was a major *military defeat* for the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army— Never again, did the Viet Cong take to the field of battle.



*Photo Above/Below: Bunker Hill-10: Rebuilding and Re-fortifying began at once.... Tết 1968.*





Partial Decorations awarded to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Security Police Squadron during the Vietnam War:  
DECORATIONS.

**Presidential Unit Citation:**



**Presidential Unit Citation**

- (Vietnam) 8 Jun 1966-16 Apr 1967.
- (Vietnam) 6 Mar 1968-31 Jul 1969.

**Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V" Device:**



**Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V" Device**

- 8 Nov 1965-30 Jun 1966.
- 31 Jan-5 Mar 1968.
- 1 Jan 1969-15 Apr 1970.
- 16 Apr-31 Oct 1970.

**15 Feb 1973: The 3rd Tactical Fighter Wing, 3rd Security Police Squadron (PACAF) is awarded the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, with *Combat-V Device*, for exceptionally meritorious service in support of military operations from 21 January.**

1970 to 31 October 1970. JOHN D. RYAN, General, USAF Chief of Staff.

**The Air Force awarded one Air Force Cross and three Silver Stars to the following men who fought that day:**

Capt Reginald V. Maisey, Jr., Air Force Cross (Post humous); Capt Martin E. Strones, Silver Star; Staff Sergeant Larry H. Sawyer, Silver Star; and Staff Sergeant William Piazza, Silver Star.