

Tết 31 January 1968

BATTLE CASUALTIES, USAF & US ARMY

BATTLE OF BIÊN HÒA: BIÊN HÒA AIR BASE, BIÊN HÒA ARMY POST & PROVINCE

SP5 William Joseph Steffes, 520th Personnel Service Company, 1st Logistical Command

by Donald Patrick, a fellow soldier

Courtesy of Together We Served

"Lam Nut Bau troi, Rung chuyen Trai Dat" (Crack the Sky, Shake the Earth) ~ Signal to communist forces telling them to commence the greatest battle in the history of Vietnam. The Tết '68 offensive was countrywide and well-coordinated, with more than 80,000 communist troops striking more than 100 towns and cities. The Saigon/Biên Hòa regions were among those areas hit.

Biên Hòa Army Post, Tết 31 January 1968: US Army SP5 Bill Steffes was KIA.



SP5 Steffes served with the 520th Personnel Service Company, 1st Logistical Command. *(520th Personnel Service Company positions were intermixed with the personnel positions from the 537th Personnel Service Company. The two operated as one unit. Within my Composite Team, I had soldiers from both companies. ~ Don Patrick)*

Killed during an attack on Biên Hòa AB. From the Virtual Wall: "During the early morning hours of 31 Jan 1968 the Biên Hòa Air Base near Saigon was assaulted by two North Vietnamese battalions supported by sappers and mortar/rocket fire. Although

the base perimeter was breached in several places, the primary defenders (the 3rd Security Police Squadron) were able to protect the heart of the base from ground attack until infantry reinforcements arrived at sun-up.

The initial assault on Biên Hòa Air Force base was eventually repulsed by the Air Force. The repulsed NVA forces retreated to the other side of the base, thru the small town of Biên Hòa. Where they killed most they encountered, including women and children. They came out into a shallow valley between Long Bình Army Post and Biên Hòa Army Post. These NVA were stopped and cornered by 3d Sqdn, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment and several helicopter gunships, whose miniguns and later canister rounds played havoc and destruction on them. Some of the NVA frantically fought their way out and physically came over the South gate at Biên Hòa Army Post...and later others from a

Biên Hòa Army Post, USARV Headquarters.



third hidden NVA battalion breached the Long Bình Post perimeter near USARV Headquarters. It was during this time that Bill Steffes was killed.

Most of us were situated behind sandbags and slit trenches strung out along the Southern front of the company. Over our left front we were facing the South gate, at a distance. Over our right front, immediately across the street we were facing part of the Biên Hòa Jungle Training Center. I remember hearing the whining sound of a round coming over my head. I heard a commotion, I turned and looked. Bill was lying on the ground just to the front and left side of the company headquarters, surrounded by one or two others. Several more of us rushed over to help, but it was too late.

Five [USAF] Airmen are known to have died [on base] as a result of both attacks: "USAF Personnel lost: All are profiled on the USAF TWS site. Capt Reginald V. Maisey, USAF, Sonoma, CA (3rd Security Police Squadron, Op Ofcr) (Air Force Cross) SSgt Ralph T. Berry, USAF, Escondido, CA (303rd Munitions Maintenance Squadron) Sgt James B. Des Rochers, USAF, Chicago, IL (19th Tactical Air Support Squadron) A1C Edward G. Muse, USAF, Tutwiler, MS (3rd Combat Support Group) USA Personnel lost: SP5 William J. Steffes, Army, St Cloud, MN (520th Personnel Services Company)

(Actually, there were at least 29 other US Army personnel killed at [the Battle of] Biên Hòa [in Biên Hòa Province outside the base], this includes more than two from the 101st Airborne Division - due to stray rounds. There were two distinct US Forces bases with the name Biên Hòa. Both bases were joined together, but one owned and administered by the US Army and the other by US Air Force. The Air Force base was protected by the 3rd Security Police. Bill was stationed on the Biên Hòa Army Post.)

The NVA planned and executed a large assault on the air base - they were after the aircraft, fuel and munitions. If there was a planned major assault on the Biên Hòa Army Post, it was poorly executed. Certainly, there were a number of sappers and snipers attacking the Biên Hòa Army Post during the course of Tết. The subsequent intrusion of NVA forces into the Biên Hòa Army Post was due to the pressure placed on them by the 3d Sdn, 11th ACR. 101st Airborne Division was responsible for security around the Biên Hòa Army Post, their defenses were breached by the NVA at the South Gate. Over a period of a day or two, MPs cornered and mopped up these NVA at a small jungle training center located in front of the 520th/537th Personnel Company.

When the 11th ACR had beaten the two NVA battalions, they were wildly greeted as heroes when they entered the Air Force base. The 3d Sqdn, 11th ACR were then placed on station at the Biên Hòa Biên Hòa Army Post. This information from Donald Patrick)

Comments/Citation

I am reminded of John 15:13 - Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Notes/Links:

<http://www.allanfurdado.com/1>

<http://www.patriotfiles.com/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=439>

<http://www.virtualwall.org/ds/SteffesWJ01b.htm> <http://www.w7rjr.net/520psc.html>

http://www.vvmf.org//index.cfm?SectionID=110&Wall_Id_No=49619