

EXPLOSION!
Biên Hòa AIR Base
May 16, 1965
Ground Casualty, Other Accident

3rd Air Police Squadron

Steve Thimlar



http://home.att.net/~jbaugher2/b57_4.html

On 16 May 1965, Biên Hòa AB, major flight line munitions mishap, 26 USAF killed, several injured and deaths and injuries to VNAF personnel, plus the loss of the Aircraft, POL, 3 out of 4 EOD men killed in line of duty. I was there!

SSgt George Graham was the Com Plotter that morning. Each time a jet bomber blew up he was tossed out of his chair. TSgt Ander, the Flt Chief on duty, went into the air when either an A/C blew up or a string of bombs piled on the ramp went up.

On the second day, an AP was dispatched with a riot gun to shoot dogs eating human flesh. There are many more things such as 3 APs at an intersection directing emergency vehicles to and from the flight line, and AC parts landing in the area of the AP huts while we were responding to what was first thought to be an hostile action.

On May 16, 1965, while waiting to takeoff on a mission, a B-57B exploded on the ground at Biên Hòa, setting off a whole chain of secondary explosions. The resulting conflagration destroyed ten B-57s, eleven VNAF A-1H Skyraiders, and a US Navy F-8 Crusader. The surviving B-57s were transferred to Tân Sơn Nhứt and continued to fly sorties on a reduced scale until the losses could be made good. Some B-57Bs had to be transferred to Vietnam from the Air National Guard, and 12 B-57Es had to be withdrawn from target-towing duties and reconfigured as bombers to make good these losses.



<http://skyraider.org/skyassn/memberpics/hilliard/hilliard.htm>

Damage was not caused by VC action. We did it all by ourselves. The B-57s, I think 24 (but at least 8) were parked wing tip to wing tip and armed with 500 pound bombs. The B-57 was started with a black powder cartridge that fired when the pilot hit the starter switch. That in turn caused a small starter turbine to spinning. These turbines had a nasty habit of spinning loose and coming out of the starter housing like a buzz saw. It didn't much matter as long as it did not hit anybody or any thing. In this case it came out and hit the fuse of one of the 500 pounders starting a chain reaction. I think I am right about these numbers, but you might want to check them:

24 B-57s destroyed
2 crew men in each B-57 and I think they were all killed
24 VNAF A-1s destroyed
Several VNAF killed
Several VNAF A-1s damaged
Several USAF (other than B-57 crew) killed
Several USAF A-1s damaged

One USN jet fighter (I do not know the type) destroyed. The pilot was USAF Maj. Bell, on an exchange tour with the USN. He had a hung bomb and they would not let him back on the boat with it. He was almost into base ops and went back to his plane to get his maps. He was standing on the wing when the B-57s blew. We found his name tag and it took about 3 days to figure out who he was.

Col. Wild Bill Beatha (Cmdr. 34 TAC Ftr Gp) said he was in command of the worst U.S. military disaster since Pearl Harbor.

Delmar Shelley Hilliard

May 16, 1965 Biên Hòa AB B-57 Disaster Photo -- Chris Godfrey, Tue, May 18 2004, 13:41

The photo by Steve Thimlar of the B-57 disaster at Biên Hòa AB brings back vivid memories as I was there and was involved in rescue/recovery operations until we were ordered out of the area due to the continuing explosion of bombs "cooking-off." Although his photo shows A1E aircraft, we did loose many B-57s. In addition, our rescue helicopter was severely damaged and the control tower was 35+ per cent destroyed. Needless to say the parking apron was severely damaged and all munitions on the ramp were destroyed. Steve and I also served on the "Drydock" Special Express convoy (munitions escort from Cat Lai to TSNAB and BHAB) for a brief time.

Tough times but good times with very good cops!

Trying to locate: Anyone who knew TSgt Donald Joseph Seaman:

Branch of Service: Air Force

Unit was: 34th Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron

Where served: Biên Hòa AB

When served: died May 16, 1965 at Biên Hòa

Message is: I am interested in finding anyone who either knew my father or was there at Biên Hòa when the explosions happened that fatal day in May.

Please contact: Joseph F. Seaman

Mailing address: 18 South Boulevard Avenue

City, State, Zip: Maple Shade, NJ 08052

Or send email to Joseph F. Seaman using this automatic email form.

Of the 26 Casualties, 21 were married, each leaving a widow and family.

We Take Care of Our Own

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