

Memories of Biên Hòa AB

TET 1969

by Larry Breazeale
Biên Hòa, June 1968-1969

From July 1968 to July 1969, I was an A2C, assigned to the 3rd SPS Biên Hòa AB. Before I got there, I heard plenty of stories about the place. I knew it had frequent rocket and mortar attacks and because of that fact many referred Biên Hòa as 'Rocket Alley'. I also heard of the bravery displayed by many 3rd SPS 'Skycops' during the infamous 1968 TET offensive. News of the SP's defending the base, particularly at "Bunker Hill-10," spread through the Air Force Security Police channels like a wildfire.

By the time my aircraft touched down on Biên Hòa's runway, I knew of Biên Hòa's reputation. I had missed the 1968 TET offensive but when the 1969 TET offensive (Feb. 1969) arrived, the base was under siege by VC and NVA and proved to be challenge enough for all of us.

During my one-year tour there, our base suffered 30 rocket attacks, several sapper penetrations, and fire-fights along the perimeter, along with a ground attack during TET. Concentration of the enemy was so strong in and around the base that our own F-4C Phantom jet fighter aircraft, dropped napalm right off of the fenceline.

"Listening Post" (LP) was interesting duty. An "LP" tour of duty was usually for a couple of weeks to a month. Prior to performing this duty, troops needed about a week to train with claymore mines (assembling and disassembling them blindfolded), "Totem-pole" familiarization and general stealth. "Totem-poles," were two empty oil drums cut in half and welded on top of each other. A "Spooky" flare canister was placed inside the concave portion of the stacked Totem-pole. The 'Poles' were placed 4 or 5 meters behind the LP. If it was necessary to fall back, retrograde or retreat due to your post being overrun by the enemy, the retreating SP's could activate the Totem Poles--creating a blinding flash, facing the oncoming enemy. This technique helped slow the enemy down, while Security Police could fall back to a safer position. According to the book, Air Base Defense in the Republic of Vietnam, 1961-1973, the 3rd SPS was the first to develop and use the Totem-Pole concept.

Claymore mines would have to be checked often throughout the night by low crawling to the mine and making sure the 'face' of the mine was pointed in the right direction--toward the enemy. Sometimes, if Charlie knew you were there, he would purposely turn it toward the LP.

Off of Bravo Area, across from Bunker Hill 17, there was a high hill top called "Buddha Hill" over looking the base. 'Rumors' said it was a VC Command Post but we could never prove it. During TET we saw rounds coming from it, at us. Permission was finally granted from CSC to hit it. Finally, an air strike took it out.

My first action was when Charlie hit the VNAF ammo dump, two miles away and across the flight line from our bunker which was on top of a huge sand hill. Sand bag crews would back their trucks up to the base of the sand hill and fill sandbags during day time. The huge sand hill made an excellent observation post; from this vantage point we could see nearly half of the base. When the ammo dump blew it looked like a huge fireball emerging from the ground and then a mushroom cloud. We could even see the 'ripple effect' of the shock wave that rolled over the ground and flight line, shaking everything in its path like a rag doll.

We felt the wind blast from the explosion up against our bunker. A2C Jessie was working tower duty in the ammo dump at the time, and I thought for sure he perished in the explosion, but minutes later I was relieved to hear his voice over the radio. He was alive but he suffered a busted ear drum and singed hair, eye brows and arms. During TET 1969 in front of Bunker Hill 17, VC sappers tried to penetrate our fence line. General Patton's son, then Lt. Col. George

Patton III, commander of the U.S. Army's 11th Armored Cavalry (Black Horse), positioned his tanks in between our big bunker hills to give us more muscle for the punch. Each tank had one Security Police NCO inside with the tank crew, as a liaison for fields of fire.

Smaller bunkers were equipped with an outside tall chain link structure, covering the front portion of the bunker, facing the enemy, to keep enemy B-40 rockets from directly hitting the bunker. We had four fence lines on the base perimeter. The base was ten miles in radius. The American fence line was the 'inside' fence, closest to us. The other fence lines were constructed, when the French and Japanese operated the base, years ago. In between the other fence lines were still active land mine fields. Trip flares were only installed on the American fence line, VC were not the only varmints attempting to crawl under or over the wire, we also had gorillas, black panthers, snakes and ocelots. When the varmints were 'in the wire', trip flares would be going off all the time. It always took a keen eye, of a Security Police troop, working tower duty, to distinguish the only varmints worth worrying about--Victor Charlie."

We had a SAT (Security Alert Teams) which was our only really armed backup response. Anything more than that, for additional troop strength, our backups were usually several Air Force Augmentees, from various job skills, supervised by Security Police. Augmentees proved very useful because, at least they were trained with the basic M16 rifle, and they could "Point and shoot." SAT's drove the standard 4-wheel drive jeeps, with an M60 machine gun resting over the top of the hood. Also used, was what was known as the "Rubber Duck," (V-100) armored vehicle. This highly mobile vehicle had ports for rifles, mounted M60's and the 90mm Recoilless rifle (cannon). The 90mm fired a bee hive round; a round with thousands of little darts, like finishing nails. At one time, I think the idea of mounting a "mini-gun" on top was seriously considered.

During the 1969 TET Offensive, I carried a cassette tape recorder in my field pack. I placed my field pack on top of the bunker, next to our field radio. If anything happened worth recording, I would turn it on. I never told my bunker buddies because everyone would want to act like John Wayne. I taped the actual battle sounds and communications with CSC. Someone had a transistor radio tuned into 'Armed Forces Radio' who was reporting the battle. I recorded that too. I sent a copy to the SP, museum years ago. I still have the original.

The only other fellow Nam Vet SP that I keep contact with, from 3rd SPS, at Biên Hòa, is SSgt (Ret) Edward Crawford. He lives in Parrish, Florida and suffers the effect of Agent Orange. Like me, Ed Crawford is a proud member of both VSPA and AFSFA. We keep in touch often, either by phone or by letter. I drew two sketches of Bunker Hill 17. Ed has one framed and hanging in his house. The other one belongs to Bob Nelson, the New England rep for AFSFA. According to Bob, it's hanging over some bar, in a local tavern, in Mass. I figure there will always be a part of me, still there, somewhere on that abandoned American Air Force Air Field called Biên Hòa.

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From: [James F. Kozlowski](#)

I read Larry Breazeale's story on Biên Hòa. *One correction.* I was a Security Police Augmentee 5/1968-1969. We could do more than "point and shoot" with an M16. I received about a weeks worth of training on the M60, 50cal, M79, (I hope my weaponry is correct after 32 years). I pulled guard on the blue and tango sites and LP's, for almost my entire year in country. His article did bring back memories that were tucked away somewhere for a long time. After my discharge from USAF OCT 1970, I had a career in Law Enforcement spanning both the local PD's and federal agencies. I am still an active LEO. I find it interesting that no one ever talked much about VN when we came home. I wonder how many others feel the same way?

Believe me, I am not complaining about the article, it was just to set the record straight. I recall everything that he wrote about. We were in country at the same time on the same base.

I spent nine with Chicago P.D., and I'm currently a Special Agent with the US Treasury. I really just started to recall my experience in the VN over the last 6-7 years. Not real interested in writing any articles at the present time, however, between CPD and Uncle, just give me a six pack and I can really tell some beauties. The more beer the better the story. I will not confirm, nor deny the accuracy Working for the "G" has its limitations on what you can and cannot write about. I

need three more and I'll retire, too. I do not need the headaches.

I spoke with a guy that I served with in the VN after reading the article. We spoke only once before about 18 years ago. We both agreed that things were very hazy after we got back to the CONUS. We heard stories about all types of things that happened after we rotated back, but no confirmation. I was a 702 (Admin. Spec.) which had another term we use to refer to ourselves as--WAFs. I worked with a lot of the locals. Quite a bit of Intel was going on and we had very close working relations with the 5th SF which was also at Biên Hòa. Believe me when your involved with anything concerning Intel, things got very strange. I am here local in O.C. I will stay in touch.

James F. Kozlowski

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