



Sgt Kennedy, "Of course we all thought we were cowboys in those days."

## Biên Hòa, After Tet 1968

by **Mike Kennedy, Sgt  
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A while back [Larry Breazeale wrote an article](#) about his time at Biên Hòa AB (Apr 97). After reading it, I thought I should write a follow-up since it turns out we were there at the same time, although we worked different areas and didn't know each other.

But first, let's back up a few months before I arrived in-country. Imagine a bright, sunny day in the high-desert at George AFB, California, in January 1969. I'm on leave helping my wife get settled at home with our daughter who was just three days old. After running errands, I got home to find my wife with our baby in her arms and tears in her eyes. She says, "You'd better call Sgt Miller, you got orders."

At first I thought I couldn't be going anywhere. I'd been at George so long; I told everyone I was "homesteading." Sgt Miller told me I was going to the 3rd SPS at Biên Hòa AB, RVN, and had to report on May 1. So, after taking more leave-time and to AZR schools back at Lackland, the next three months went by in a flash. Before I knew it, I was saying goodbye to my family and getting on a plane at Travis AFB... next stop Biên Hòa and the start of my Vietnam adventure.



Charlie flight Guardmount - for those who were there, let me know if you recognize yourself.

training with the .50 cal., 90 mm, Claymore, etceteras.

Although it seemed routine after a while, it wasn't until my twelfth day in-country that Charlie welcomed me. This welcome (of course) came in the form of five 122mm rockets slamming into the base at 1:22 in the morning. They were only slightly preceded by that siren that I still hate to this day, and people running through the hooch yelling, "incoming, incoming!" Did you ever notice how that damn siren always wailed for what seemed like hours after the last rocket hit?

Even after I came home, I was reminded of these times in Vietnam. The Marysville Volunteer Fire Department near

I arrived at Biên Hòa in the middle of the day with the sun shining through an overcast sky. I felt somewhat at home with the heat, after spending two and a half years in the Mojave Desert of California. Of course, that only lasted until I realized there was no air moving and the humidity level was close to 100 percent. It didn't take long before I was complaining, like everyone else, about it being cold when it got down in the 70's at night--that was cold compared to the 110+ degree heat and 90%+ percent humidity of the daytime.

My first weeks in-country as a FNG were fairly routine and uneventful. They were filled with the usual base orientation including the SP compound, tour of the perimeter and several days of additional weapons



Part of our fleet of V-100's. We mounted Mini-guns on 2 of them.



One of the Charlie Area SAT's (with the usual sleeping QC in the back seat.)

Beale AFB, California provided my first reminder. They used the local air raid system to a the fire fighters. We laughed about it later, but at first my wife couldn't figure out what I was doing when I rolled out of bed and tried to get under it at about 3 a.m. one morning. When she heard the siren in the distance, she told me it was okay and explained what was happening. Even in all my years in law enforcement since then police, fire or ambulance sirens have never bothered me. However, I still flinch when I hear an air raid type siren start to wail. Minor case of PTSD I guess.

Before I got there, I had heard the stories about Biên Hòa: the 1968 Tet Offensive, Bunker Hill-10 and Captain Reginald V. Maisey, who was killed by an RPG at that old French bunker on January 31, 1968. So, if there was anyplace that I knew I wanted to avoid, that was the place.

However, when I think of it there were several things I wanted to avoid, not the least of which was being in Vietnam, much less at Biên Hòa Air Base. When I was a FNG, I thought it would be better to work during the day, so I could see what I was fighting. I knew I didn't want to work nights (Charlie Flight); I didn't want to work the east perimeter (Charlie Area); I certainly didn't want to work Bunker Hill-10. Well, my first night on post I really thought someone was *out to get me* (besides Charlie).

ATTACK	12 MAY 67- 0740
	21 MAY 67- 21000
	23 MAY 67- 0140
	22 MAY 67- 2030
	3 JUNE 67- 0740
	6 JUNE 67- 0700
	7 JUNE 67- 0740
	12 JUNE 67- 0000
	16 JUNE 67- 1920
	18 JUNE 67- 0050
	20 JUNE 67- 2117
	10 JULY 67- 0657
	20 JULY 67- 0615
	12 AUG 67- 0100
	STER 67- 0100
	6 SEP 67- 0615
	26 NOV 67- 0021
	12 DEC 67- 0623
	21 JAN 70- 0555

A partial listing of the attacks at Bien Hoa in Kennedy's tour.



Bunker Hill 10, I spent my first night on post here. Also the location where Capt Maisey was killed by an RPG during the 68 Tet Offensive.



Another look at Bunker Hill 10 and it's neighboring tower. (Bunker is on the left.)

If you haven't guessed...

my first assignment was Charlie Flight, Charlie Area, Bunker Hill-10. As it turned out I spent quiet a bit of time there during my first couple of months in-country. I also found that I really preferred being awake when the rockets came.

From Bunker Hill-10, I graduated to SATS. While the primary duty of our SATs was to be mobile patrol and response force, I'm sure like many other bases; we spent most of our time playing "Winchells on Wheels. We always went to the Army's 145th Aviation Battalion mess hall to

**scrounge what we could for the troops working the bunkers and towers because we seemed to have an easier time getting food from the army cooks.**

When I first got to Biên Hòa, the 3rd SPS had a fleet of seven Ducks (V-100s) and one old gas powered M-113 APC. During the summer of 1969, we received four new diesel powered APCs. Shortly after, we gave the old "gasser" to the army. We later heard they dropped a diesel into it and on its first mission in the field, it was destroyed and the crew killed when an RPG hit it.

Anyway, I was soon trained to drive the new M113s and found myself spending most of my time running a QRT in Charlie area. It was strange learning to steer by pulling sticks instead of turning a wheel, but I soon got the hang of it and was an expert at popping donuts in no time. Although we had the armored vehicle, our manpower was such that we rarely had little more [personnel] on our APCs (usually 4-5) versus the usual 3 on a SAT. I can only remember a couple times when we had more people on our QRT. Once was when we went on alert during the Tet holiday in January of 1970, when we had just eight people on the team.



The old gas powered APC "Fluffy" before we gave it to the army. Note the extra armor plating and the QC patch on the side.



One of the 4 new APC's (M-113) we received in mid 1969.

The other time was during President Richard Nixon's visit to Vietnam, which was a long and boring day. I remember my team was one of several pulled from our regular night-watch duties and deployed during the day as additional perimeter security in preparation for the visit. My team, with several augmentees and a SP lieutenant along with a second APC, was positioned on a small village road outside the west perimeter fence, about two hundred yards off the end of the runway. Our job was to block the roads on either side of the runway approach and provide a secure path as *Air Force One* landed at Biên Hòa. I remember we sat there for something like 12 hours waiting for Nixon's

plane to arrive. Not only was it a long boring day, but President Nixon's plane never came closer than 10-20,000 feet above, as it flew over us and landed at Tân Sơn Nhứt. All we got were two of the President's F-4 Phantom fighter-escorts and sunburns. We did a hell of a job protecting that road though.

As Larry speculated, we did in fact mount mini-guns on a couple of our V-100s. This was just one of a number of improvised weapons or defensive Systems developed by Air/Security Police in Vietnam, many of which originated at Biên Hòa.

As I'm sure many of you saw, Vietnam was probably the largest test lab (up to that point in history) for tactics and weapons. In one case, my QRT participated in one of the initial deployments of one of these new weapons systems, the XM-174 automatic grenade launcher. We were called into the armory one night and issued this new weapon with several magazines. It would use the same mount on our APC as the M60. So, after mounting the weapon, we headed back out to our area, before we got two blocks away, it broke and we had to take it back for repair. I know for a time after that, the XM-174 was always transported on someone's lap and mounted after arriving on post. When it worked, it was great and because of the automatic feed, it could lay down a perfect pattern of grenades.

I was at Biên Hòa when President Nixon instituted his "Vietnamization Program." While we understood what was intended, it really created some problems for SP's trying to protect bases. I don't know how things were after I left, but it was crazy at first. As part of the efforts to wind down U.S. involvement in the war and save money, we were even told at one point that we had to have a confirmed target before we could put up a slap flare. A lot of guys had a hard time with this because it was often difficult to know if you had a target without putting up a flare so you could see what was there.

Because Biên Hòa City was off limits, my entire tour of duty in Vietnam was spent on base except for a bus ride to Tân Sơn Nhứt for my R&R flight, a four hour trip to Long Vinh in an attempt to get Comm-Gear for our new APC's; and that wonderful day off the west perimeter on top of my APC.

I was lucky enough not to have to defend against a ground assault, but I did experience more than 20 rocket attacks, a mortar attack and unfortunately, two friendly fire incidents. On one occasion, an Army fire-base several miles northeast of us got bad coordinates for a fire mission. They walked two rounds each of 105mm, 155mm and 175mm Willie-Pete across the east Perimeter towards where my SAT was delivering coffee to a tower next to Bunker Hill-10. The last round landed about 100 feet across the perimeter road from us. You can bet the *pucker factor* was in full force then. Luckily no one got hurt.

The other incident; however, had deadly results. In this case, the III Corps ARVN Special Forces fire-base on our southeast perimeter fired two 105mm HE rounds directly north over my QRT's position near the end of the runway. The rounds impacted inside the Army's 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne area, killing several soldiers. To make matters worse, 3 hours later, after an investigation of the incident, they fired the same gun again, hit the same target, killing and wounding more soldiers. We were on a sandbag detail at the time and hit the dirt because the rounds were fired so low; they sounded like they were coming in on us.

My Vietnam adventure may not be as glamorous as some or as frightening as others, but an "adventure" nonetheless and a proud part of my memory. In fact, it seems that my service in Vietnam and as a Security Policeman has actually become more important to me over the years and has furnished me with memories and friends, some new, that will last a lifetime.

My last memory of Biên Hòa AB was getting on my "Freedom Bird" and taking off, ironically over my first post, Bunker Hill-10, on the east perimeter.

*We Take Care of Our Own*

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