

## [A-C John Mort, TET 1968, Bien Hoa Air Base]

I began my USAF enlistment in June 1965, like all airmen, at Lackland AFB in the early morning hours, in the dark, at the chow hall being served some of the best food ever prepared. Of course that meal was S.O.S. After completing basic training I was assigned, just outside of San Antonio, at Randolph AFB until December 6, 1966 when I received orders to report to Bien Hoa AB, RVN. on January 31, 1967.

When I arrived at Tan Son Nhut and the doors of the aircraft were opened I was greeted with the heat, humidity and the smell of my new home for the next year. When I departed the aircraft I knew I wasn't in Texas anymore when I saw two USAF jeeps, one in front of the aircraft and one at the rear, each having an M60 mounted on them. At this point I was sure that my year in Vietnam would be an interesting one. Little did I know how much more interesting it would become.

After claiming our bags some of us boarded a USAF bus for our wild ride to Bien Hoa. No ride at Disney World could ever compete with that ride. When I noticed the bars on the windows of the bus I sensed that maybe there were some local folks that didn't like us very much. I thought after driving in some of the traffic in the larger cities in the USA I had experienced some really crazy driving but I was wrong.

After arriving at Bien Hoa I reported to Accounting & Finance, since my job title was General Accounting Specialist. I was wrong again. I was informed by the Captain that he did not have a current opening for me but he did need to fill a slot for a Security Police Augmentee. That was where the real adventure began for my next year in country. Since I really didn't like being stuck in an office the idea of an augmentee sounded good to me. I headed out to find the 3rd Security Police location to report to them and find out what I needed to do next.

I can't remember the exact dates of most of the events which took place over the rest of the year so I will just report them as close as possible. After receiving the gear that I needed to do my job I began training at the range, for the next couple weeks, with various weapons and tactics needed. Most of my time was spent at night in the bomb dump but other events took place in the daytime. Since I was the only one in Actg. & Finance assigned a weapon, on a few occasions, I had to drive on finance runs to Cholon, on the outskirts of Saigon. On one of these trips I was detoured off Highway 1 to what I remember as Highway 13. While driving alone on that Highway I saw 2 armour plated US Army jeeps coming up very fast behind me. When I stopped one of the Special Forces Sgt. asked me where I was headed. I told him I was going back to Bien Hoa. It was starting to get dark and he informed me that the highway I was on was

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controlled by the Americans during the day and the VC at night. He told me they were going to put 1 jeep in front of me and the other behind me and to follow them and not to stop or slow down no matter what happened. That was my fastest trip ever back to Bien Hoa.

On one assignment I was posted to observe Buddha Hill. When I looked at the low circle of sand bags I had then backed up to Buddha Hill I was sure my sandbags were way to short to protect anyone. While I was on that post a C123, known as Patches, came over my post while spraying the perimeter and I got wet. When I had the chance to ask someone what Patches was spraying I was told it was mosquito spray. Since that day I have talked to many Army Grunts and they tell me that was the same thing they were told when they got sprayed with Agent Orange. Always wondered why they only sprayed for mosquitos on the perimeter.

While working the bomb dump, most nights were uneventful. We were always told that if anything started to get into a ditch or a hole for cover. I checked and there wasn't any such low spots on my posts ever. One night while sitting half way up my reventment I was eating my c-rats and noticed something coming over the back. I got down and swung in the direction of my intruder and noticed he had 4 legs. Later when Sarge came around with coffee I told him about the

intruder and said I thought about shooting it. He informed me, after I described the cat, that it was probably an Ocelot and if I shoot at it I better kill it because he is very fast and nasty tempered. Kind of glad I didn't shoot it. One last thing I would like to say about working the bomb dump is Thank You to the SP's in the towers for being there just in case.

The worst attack while I was there is one that seems to come back at night much more often than I would like. On May 12, 1967 I was not on duty because the alert level was lower. I was at the base theatre around midnight watching a movie titled "A Poppy Is Also A Flower" about drug smugglers. We were hearing what we thought were the nightly howitzers firing over us. As the rounds started getting closer we knew that what was happening was not friendly but incoming. As I ran from the movie a rocket hit way to close to my left and I don't remember touching the road between me and the bunker. After I got in the bunker I found out what people mean when they say the events of your entire life flash before your eyes. I figured that that night had a good chance of being my last night on earth. After what seemed like an eternity the incoming rounds stopped and I ran to my hootch to get my gear and report to the Armory for what ever was to follow. After loading onto a truck we headed to the east side of the base. As we drove through the areas where the Ranch Hand and many other aircraft were parked we could hear liquid pouring out of the aircraft which had suffered damage. We didn't know if it was fuel or what was leaking. Sarge told everyone to not throw any lit cigarettes down and to put out all smoking materials. We were dropped off on the east end of the base and spread out. Sarge came down the line and instructed everyone to fix bayonets because after that heavy of inbound rounds the enemy usually will follow with a ground attack. I wasn't exactly sure where we were, but we were facing east and located on the edge of a very large ditch or some type of hole. We were hit with 189 rockets and mortars but fortunately we did not receive the expected ground attack. we had 2 aircraft destroyed, 32 aircraft damaged 6 KIA and 31 WIA.

The event that haunts me the most is the event that I just missed at Bien Hoa. Because I had been assigned with a team that took care of each other and the rest of the airmen on the base I had requested permission to stay with them for another year. My request was denied.

I was scheduled to leave on January 31, 1968, the day of the TET offensive. When a seat became available on January 27, 1968, they put me on that flight. My replacement, as an augmentee ... Edward G Muse ... killed in action during the TET Offensive. I know if I had still been there, he would not have replaced me. Therefore, he would still be alive today. Since I would have had a year of experience and training and he only had maybe a week his training and reaction time wasn't quite there yet. Ed always gave me grief because he wanted that augmentee spot. Always talked about having an M60 and taking out a bunch of VCs. When I was stationed at Westover AFB, MA after Bien Hoa I heard about Ed from a Lt. Col., who I had worked with in Vietnam, he told me Ed had died during TET 68. It wasn't until I attended a reunion last year of the Bien Hoa Reunion Group that I found out about the event that took his life. At the reunion a group of the Bien Hoa vets were riding a charter bus to a graduation at Lackland and a tour of the Security Police Museum. While riding the bus I was sitting across the aisle from Jon Hayes and David Chunn, two of the Security Police that I had worked with while stationed at Bien Hoa. Then we began to talk about the Battle of TET 68/ Bunker Hill Ten. During our conversation I had the chance to finally get an answer to exactly how Ed Muse had been killed. This had been a question I wanted answered for 51 years. Another benefit of this chance meeting is that Jon Hayes and I stay in touch with each other on a regular basis and have developed a friendship that also led me to the knowledge of the VSPA organization.

Welcome Home,

John Mort

RIP, EDWARD G. MUSE

