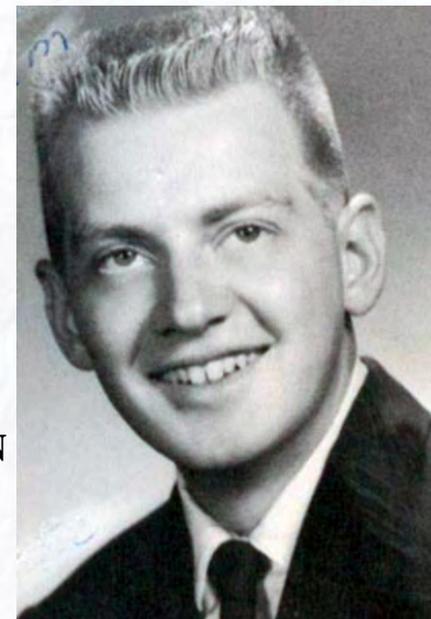




# LIGHTNING!

IN MEMORY OF  
**A1C ROBERT BRIDGES**  
LOD, 17 June 1967  
by Ric Nucifora, VSPA LM 220  
3rd APS/SPS, Biên Hòa Air Base, RVN



IN MEMORY OF  
**A1C LARRY GRILLO**  
LOD, 28 May 1969  
by Larry Ingraham, VSPA LM 364  
35th Security Police Squadron, Phan Rang Air Base, RVN

© 2011, Vietnam Security Police Association, Inc.



**Lightning and Thunder Storms were notorious in Vietnam and Thailand.** Parachute flares were a common nightly sight as man tried to cast light upon lurking enemies. Flares would light the earth like an island of amber light in a sea of darkness ... but heat lightning and thunderbolts could change horizon to horizon from midnight to brilliant daylight in a heartbeat. Air/Security Police who guarded base perimeters in Towers and Bunkers knew they could guard against Viet Cong and NVA ... but lightning could strike without warning, and was deadly.



*Photo Left:*  
**IN MEMORY OF**  
**A1C ROBERT (Rob) BRIDGES**  
**LOD, 17 June 1967**  
by Ric Nucifora, VSPA LM 220  
3rd APS/SPS, Biên Hòa Air Base, RVN



*Photo Right:*  
**IN MEMORY OF**  
**A1C LARRY GRILLO**  
**LOD, 28 May 1969**  
by Larry Ingraham, VSPA LM 364  
35th SPS, Phan Rang Air Base, RVN

We got posted at 1515 hours. I was on Entry Control, and Rob was in the Tower. At 1600 hours -- *the rains came*.

I remember the NCOIC drive by and wave, and headed to the perimeter road. Just as he came even with the tower, he waved at Rob and as Rob stuck his M16 out the tower and waved back. Lightning instantly struck Rob in the tower. I had looked up and saw a brilliant flash and red-haze, instantly hearing the lightning's boom-explosion. The NCOIC immediately called in the lightning strike, and a short while later, medics came and took Rob Bridges away. The NCOIC came over and told me Rob was hurt, and left, but came back an hour later and told me to have a seat, and said that Rob had been killed instantly by the lightning strike. Rob Bridges and I were the only guys from Connecticut on our Flight.

The thing that haunts me to this day, is that the tower was supposed to be my post and we traded. Rob liked working towers. That'll be with me the rest of my life. It took 40 years to realize why thunder and lightning still bothers me so badly.

***Ric Nucifora, VSPA LM 220*** 3rd APS/SPS, Biên Hòa Air Base, RVN

I came in country with Robert Bridges and his good friend Donald Mullens. Robert was a great guy, full of life. We spent the first night at Biên Hòa AB in a tent before getting an Hooch assignment. Rob and Donald went on days, and I asked for nights. It was a sad day to wake up and get the news about Robert. I have talked (by email) to Rob's sister, and his good friend, Donald. I have tried to get Donald to join and he said he would try. As for the lightning rods, I don't remember them but they may have been installed after the death of Robert Bridges.

***Jerry Walker, 3rd APS/SPS, Biên Hòa Air Base, RVN***

Upon arriving at Juliet-10 we got no response from A1C Grillo from his tower post. I left the jeep, climbed up into the tower and found him laying on the tower floor. I noticed a large burn on the side of his head and neck and burns where the chain of his dogtags had been. I called CSC and reported what we had found. At first they didn't want to believe me. After I told them again, they instructed us to give Larry Grillo CPR, which didn't work.

The first person from CSC to arrive was MSgt William Childs, our Flight Chief, then Major Powell, OIC. After they checked things out the body was placed in the base ambulance and taken to the base hospital. The rest of the shift was very busy for A1C McCall and myself as we had to find someone to repost at Juliet-10, which we did.

From about 1630 hours on, the storm opened up and there was a lot more lightning and rain. We told all our people in the tower area that if they wanted to they could leave the towers during the lightning and post to the ground bunker.

The death of A1C Larry Grillo affected people in many different ways: the airmen on "B" Flight Security had lost a brother; and the 35th SPS had lost a good man. Guardmount the next day was very quiet and subdued. Two days after his death, there was a very nice memorial at the base chapel which was well attended. In the next week or so, lightning rods were placed on all towers at Phan Rang AB.

***Larry Ingraham, VSPA LM 364***





I believe there were lightning rods at Biên Hòa AB in the Able area towers, but that fact did not make me feel any safer during those terrific thunder storms.

**William Gallant :**

**Lightning: Near miss? How about a hit?**

**My buddy Stan Skjei was hit by lightning one night**, at the missile storage area at Ubon RTAFB, while standing in the guard shack.

The lightning hit the metal roof of the shack, jumped out to Stan, ran down his side and jumped back to the lower metal portion of the shack through his canteen, pretty much welding the bottle and cup together in the process. I was on one of the hard stands, right across from the missile storage area and saw the strike as it happened.

Another buddy, Jim Cording, was the strike team leader that night, and he was in the area as well. He sped directly to the site and found Stan out on the road, smoking in the rain (too bad it wasn't cigarette smoke... ).

We have all found each other somehow and Jim tells me that Stan (who now calls himself *Sparky* still has the canteen and cup as a memento of that night, and a rather profound loss of hearing on that side, as well.

**Steve Kipp**

8th Air Police Squadron

Ubon RTAFB

1965 - 1966

*(One of the original club and whistle guys)*

**Gents,**

*All the decisions we make in life carry us to the appointed date, hour, and location of our last breath. The mind understands this... but logic plays a small part in acceptance. It wasn't your time, is probably something you realize. Why it was Robert's time can only be answered when standing before our Maker. Somehow it seems fitting that Robert's last gesture was a wave of friendship that serves as a greeting... or a farewell.*

*Did either of you attend Robert's squadron chapel service? and if so do you have the chapel service bulletin, or photos of that service you could scan and email? What I want to do is have the story be a memorial page for both SPs killed by lightning.*

**Thank you, Don Poss**



## A1C LARRY GRILLO LOD, 28 May 1969

**Grillo** , Lawrence H. A1C Phan Rang 35 SPS 28May1969 Non-Hostile: Lightning/Guard Tower 23W-008



On that day in May 1969, when A1C Larry Grillo was struck by lightning, it had rained early that morning. Bravo Flight, 35th Security Police Squadron, was on second-shift with Guardmount at about 1330-1400 hours. The troops would truck down to CSC (Combat Security Control) to get their sentry post assignments and then go to the Armory to check out weapons needed for that post. A1C Grillo was on tower Juliet-10, which called for M60, M-79, M16.

The tower guards were driven by truck to their posts. A1C McCall and I, working SAT-Juliet-2, drove out to the area ten to fifteen minutes after posting to check with the guards to make sure they were all set, and to see if they needed anything. After post-check was completed, we would go to the ice-house to get ice and water for our people. While getting the water and ice, a thunderstorm rolled in with very close lightning and heavy rain. This was about 1500 hours (not sure of exact times) and we took shelter from the storm for fifteen to twenty minutes after which time it stopped raining. We took off to deliver water and C-rats to our posts.