

Vietnam

3rd Security Police Squadron
Biên Hòa

Buddha Hill: The Graves and the Snakes

by **Dave Ware,**
Biên Hòa 1967-1969
© 2002

Buddha Hill: The Graves and the Snakes

As a member of *Eagle Flight* we made several sweeps of [Buddha Hill](#) in search of any enemy activity or anything out the ordinary. Although it could be said that all of Buddha Hill was "out of the ordinary."

Buddha Hill was a monastery that consisted of a small temple and quarters for probably a dozen or more Buddhist monks and it sat squarely of the west end of Biên Hòa and was a source of concern due to its proximity to the base. The entire compound only consisted of approximately 5 or 6 acres, but was heavily grown up with foliage and blended in with the surrounding farming area and small village that lay upon the nearby river. Biên Hòa was one of the few bases that was Vietnamese controlled and had dense forests that surrounded parts of the base interspersed with village hamlets. In reality the VC controlled much of the area and many actually worked on the base and not much missed their sharp eyes or their intelligence network.

On a few occasions I and Mac went down to the river and met with some of the US Navy "Brown Water" guys and a few Seals who would make runs up the Đông Nhi and refuel at the POL river depot outside the base. Mac and I actually made one of those "unauthorized junkets" a few miles up river to a ARVN post with the Navy guys. The depot and the west gate to the base were controlled by the ARVN, *which I always found kind of odd* as it was not unusual for inbound aircraft to receive ground fire from anywhere in this area, and some firefights would take place less than a thousand meters outside the wire. I am sure some of you remember seeing ordnance dropped along the river and hearing the pounding of the fifty calibers from the LARC boats. Rarely did you see any US Military presence in the surrounding hamlets or along the river, and the ARVN seemed to stay clustered to certain areas. It was definitely VC country and this was proven during the Tet offensive. Thus our extreme concern about Buddha Hill.

On one particular sweep we carefully checked the graveyard for any signs of disturbance of the soil or any obvious human activity. We suspected that munitions were being cached in the grave sites. Many and most of the graves were above ground similar to what you see in the low lying areas of the deep south such as Louisiana. However on several of the graves we only saw a marble or granite slab lying on the ground and it appeared to be covering a grave. It was obvious from the grass that the slab had been removed and replaced and there were several small holes along the edges of the slab, not unlike animal burrows or rat holes, but appeared to have been caved in by foot traffic. Most of us felt that it was concealing something other than a grave, possibly an entrance to a tunnel or a weapons cache.

It was suggested that we take our rifle slings and loop them around each corner of the slab and four of us could drag the slab off and take a look. The ARVN officer that was without us said it was forbidden. As a matter of fact we always had a few ARVN troops without us when we made a sweep of Buddha Hill. I assumed the the Province ARVN Commander had his reasons, but I am also sure that Buddha Hill was a staging area for enemy weapons and surveillance. Rather than being accused of desecrating a grave we left well enough alone as the Monks watched us with a wary eye.

The Buddhist cannot be accused of being Communist sympathizers, but they were anti-Catholic and anti-South Vietnamese government which was comprised of many Catholics from the north. Therefore they had a tendency to turn the other eye regarding VC activity and parlayed their allegiances to whomever caused them the greatest threat. It was very frustrating to allow the enemy to operate freely right at your doorstep and not be able to do anything about it. I often felt we were being allowed to search for mere political reasons and window dressing. The ARVN and the locals did not want us to find anything. It would have been a political hot potato for the Province Commander if we showed the Monks as collaborators with the VC.

On this same day, there was a moment of intense fright on my part and some humor at my expense. Between the Temple and

the outside wire was a lot of heavy foliage and it ranged from craggy berms to almost marsh. Some of the vines were like the kudzu you see in the south and the stuff was thick and full of animal trails. I was sniffing out this one particular area that was dark and heavy with vines and on my all fours trying to make my way along a ridge. I found a small outlet in the vines and it was obvious that someone had been spending a lot of time in this particular area. The ground was bare from foot traffic, and someone sitting, and there were several C-ration can-tops lying amongst the vines. It appeared some one had dined several times on GI Cs while observing or hiding. From that location you had a clear view of the west end, [Bunker Hill-10](#), the sand pile and several fortified positions on the perimeter.

My Lieutenant (can't remember his name) crawled in the area with me and agreed that it was probably a OP for someone. He exited the space and I followed behind when I saw another opening to my right. I told the LT I was going to check it out and he said he would cover me. I crawled about ten meters and realized it was a small animal trail and too small for any human to have traversed. As I turned to exit (should have just backed out) My ruck sack got hung on some vines. I twisted and turned and all of a sudden I was falling down a ten foot ravine and going head over heels. I landed at the bottom of a narrow ravine that had a small animal trail running the length of it and I could not stand straight up.

After an anxious moment I got my composure and retrieved my rifle and helmet and told the LT I was okay and would crawl up out of the viney ravine. I could hear a few rumbles from my squad members and some humorus remarks, but I did not then



think it was funny. I was planning my escape when I was suddenly startled by a little grayish green critter with pink eyes and a darting tongue. He was about 18 inches long and was hanging in one of the vines directly in the direction I needed to go. It was a snake and I can only assume that it was a Krait as it fit the description. I am not overly afraid of snakes as I grew up in the bayous of Louisiana, but I certainly respect them on their turf. I informed the LT of my delimma and he being a good officer told me to *be careful and not get bitten*. I thought that was a profound order, even from a Lieutenant. : >)

I devised a plan where I extended the stock on my Car-15 and wrapped my OD towel around my hand and the weapon and had a pretty good "snake bat." I probably should have just shot him, but I did not wish to rile the local VC up or draw unwarranted attention to our squad.: >) My plan was to "swat" the green monster and then kill him three or four times. I swatted and my "snake bat" tangled in the vines, I jerked back with a huge lunge and fell right on my butt and had no idea where the snake was, but I was pretty sure he was mad as hell about now

It was at that time I became airborne as I literally flew out of the ravine and clawed my way to the top in less than a nano-second. As my head popped up from the vines I was looking straight into the barrel of an M16. My LT wanted to make sure it was me who was doing all the thrashing about and not a VC that I had awakened from a mid day siesta. I recovered my dignity and shook it off as no big deal, but the story was expounded on several dozen times by eyewitnesses that actually saw nothing, and they had a lot of jawing at my expense.: >)

The rest of the sweep was uneventful and a debriefing was submitted, but I only remember going back into Buddha Hill one more time. I had heard through the grapevine the ARVN was to follow-up on our Intel. I do remember spending a lot of hours monitoring the area with binoculars while posted on the west end. Always had a funny feeling that Mr. Charles was watching us watching him. It would not have surprised me if there had not been a tunnel complex in the area, the terrain was right and the cover and concealment was perfect.

Waredog

I currently live near Atlanta and fly EMS Medevac helicopters.

We Take Care of Our Own

[Click to Report BROKEN LINKS or Photos, or COMMENT](#)

Music & © 1998, by J. Eshleman, ll BMI

All music is played by permission of the composers and copyright holders.
© Vietnam Security Police Association, Inc. (USAF) 1995-2018. All Rights Reserved.