

Vietnam

6251st Security Police Squadron

Mayor of
Biên Hòa!



1971

by **Jack King**

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In front of the barriers were the twisted, bloody remains of two VC that appeared quite dead....



When I arrived at Biên Hòa in early November of 1971, I never intended the irreparable harm that I would inflict upon the local lifers. After signing in for my second tour of duty in Vietnam and being assigned to early morning base police with the 6251 SPS, I surveyed my situation. I had one year to the day left in the Air Force and could hardly wait until I hit civilian life. I was a Buck Sergeant and would pretty much skate through my tour. In addition, we were advised that the base was closing soon and there was an excellent chance that I would receive an early out.

(Photo: Jack King, Biên Hòa AB Main Gate, 1972)



The first day that I arrived for work a tall, slim, first-term Buck Sergeant was the Acting Flight Chief and he took me out on patrol. We became fast friends and I got a full tour of the sprawling base that included the downtown of Biên Hòa City. Mike introduced me to his friends both Vietnamese, and American civilian workers at their homes off base. We even stopped at a house that one of our SP lifers owned and had tea. I was pretty much amazed by all this, since the town was off-limits to us while not on duty or official business.

Mike also had a brother in our unit who was assigned to customs at the air terminal. Marty was taller than his twin brother, but I'm quite sure there were many who must have thought they were going crazy when they ran into both within minutes in opposite directions. The twins were also in their second tour and being discharged in a few months. The three of us hit the NCO Club that night and from then on became three peas in a pod. We attended parties given by civilians and lifers downtown and sometimes the civilians would send a limousine to pick us up. Other times we would be stopped at the main gate and the SP who attended it would only laugh as he waived us through.

Christmas Eve of 1971 we attended a large party downtown that was given by the Army MPs. The Provost Marshal found out about the merry event and raided it. Twelve of us were brought in and booked for being off-limits. Our Captain came down in a duce and a halve truck to pick us up and didn't appear that upset. This was probably due to the many lifers in the jackpot, including some high ranking ones. The paper work was "lost" and we never heard a

word about it.

This was the way my tour of duty was going. The three of us were connected big time and had friends everywhere. We had chums on the Army side of the base in supply and could easily procure steaks and chicken for squadron barbecues. We were in collusion with many of the local MPs and knew most of them who attended our parties, and we theirs. Being on days facilitated the growth of our empire and the lifers started to come to us if they needed anything for their events.

Things were good at Biên Hòa, until the war got in our way. The Easter Offensive started March of 1972 and things deteriorated quickly. We were in constant state of alert and days off were canceled. To further acerbate the situation the friendly lifers in connivance started to DEROS and were being quickly replaced by shaky stateside lifers who wanted to put a mark on their territory before the war ended.

The heat was on and the three of us felt it. We couldn't even get a pass to Saigon! So when we finally did get a day off together we went to the chow hall boss who was part of our empire. He let us type our own passes in his office and reluctantly helped us forge our Lieutenant's name on it. It was a great trip until the twins got into a large bar fight that started with an Army guy and a "fly boy" remark that cumulated in someone firing a gunshot that stopped it. Marty's back was out but we all got back to base without a problem, passing scrutiny through a more then usual number of check-points.

April 6, 1972 the three of us got off patrol at the normal time and headed to the NCO Club for some chow. Before long we decided to make a trip downtown to the Cherry Bar despite all the intelligence reports indicating VC in the area. We walked up to the main gate where A1C Fisher, a German, was working. Fisher had joined the Air Force in order to become an American Citizen. He wasn't amused by our intentions, and in a thick German accent said, "You guys are nuts! The VC are all over and you're going downtown?" I still remember what Mike said as we waived a lone Labretta taxi down, "Hey someone has to write a tour book of downtown!"

So that was what this was all about. We were doing research for a tour guide! Now it all made sense and we laughed as we meandered through the

alleyways and main roads of the city. We were going to "rate" bars, restaurants and other amenities the off-limit town offered for a greater purpose. After all, someone needed to do it and it may as well be us. As we pulled up to the iron gates that protected the Cherry Bar we slipped a couple of MPC dollars to the driver and gained quick entry into the bar that was devoid of any customers, but loaded with female tour guides.

It wasn't long until they took us to separate handball games in a courtyard at the rear of the establishment. I was dead asleep after a few matches and we had to get to work at 3: 45a.m., so I was perturbed when all the commotion started at around 1:30 a.m.. The twins and the proprietor were frantically pounding at my door and I was quickly brought up to speed on the situation. Apparently Marty had gotten real hungry after all the exercise and went to the bar. As he was indulging in some hot and sour soup and contemplating the handball game, an unfamiliar MP with a QC in tow strolled in. They promptly spotted Marty in his reverie. "Hey fellow, you got some ID!" Marty was always a very clear thinking cop and never panicked or overreacted so he just glanced at them and said, "Bye!" and ran to the rear courtyard.

Miraculously, the authorities did not follow but rather posted themselves inside the bar and contacted the White Mice (civil police) to lawfully search the rear courtyard where we were trapped. The proprietor was a smart Vietnamese businessman and was looking for repeat customers, and he may have known about our guidebook. He quickly led us, holding our gym clothes, through the maze of different rooms, alleys and out buildings to a desolate bleak room. There we observed many Vietnamese sleeping with mosquito nets and a radio blaring their traditional top ten.

We were guided through the room to a small door on the far side. Inside was a small utility room without a roof. Woks and other cooking utensils were hanging on the wall and a claustrophobic would not have lasted inside very long. Our friend warned us to stay quiet and the door was closed as we stood against the stone wall staring up at the star filled night. Mike and I were patient, "Why didn't you just tell those guys you were a Security Policeman!" Marty just shrugged and said, "Hey, I just reacted."

We could hear the distant sounds of a search going on and the voices of Americans and Vietnamese. Remarkably that was not our biggest concern because we could now distinctly identify the sounds of rockets slamming into the Air Base where we should have been. Helicopter gunships were now flying over us and we knew they weren't seeking us. A firefight was in progress in the city, and we agreed that some of the fire sounded like a communist AK-47. To make matters worse, the action was in the same direction that we had to shortly travel in order to return to the Air Base. Just when we thought things couldn't get worse we heard someone coming to our hideout. We accepted the fact that we were caught as the door slowly opened. It was the friendly proprietor who had a deal to pitch. He wanted Marty to give up so that Mike and I would be free. No one knew about us he explained and the police would leave if Marty gave himself up.

We were the three musketeers and we weren't going back without him. Besides, I was outvoted! One of us suggested we all give up due to what was going on around us. That too was vetoed and as quickly as we got into the mess it was over. The search party suddenly gave up and left ostensibly to fry bigger fish. Greatly relieved and now repentant we went back to the handball courts, only now Marty was warned to stay away from the hot and sour soup.

At around 3: 00am, we rallied up at the bar for our return to the base and 3: 45am Guardmount. As was our practice we would have a towel girl from the handball court stand outside and wave a Labretta taxi down for us as we hid in the alleyway. This was not going well because in addition to all the electric being out all over the city, there was neither taxis nor pedestrians. Usually at this time the city was beginning her day and the streets were active. Due to time constraints we started to become frightened in regards to Guardmount.

We didn't feel any better when the wave girl finally got a Labretta that quickly departed after a two-second conversation. She came back with the news, "He say no can do, boo coo VC, you come back inside". Of course that was out of the question although at this point it wasn't such a bad idea. We sent her back as we pondered what would happen to us if we were late for work. The time was moving fast to posting when another taxi came along. This time we ran out with her and managed to stop the driver by jumping into the back compartment. The driver was speaking rapidly in Vietnamese to the girl but we understood exactly what he was saying, "no can do!"

The driver had no chance to refuse as Marty produced an Army 45 pistol, courtesy of the amnesty box at the terminal, and pointed it at popason's head. He ordered the driver to the Air Base forthwith and the car-jacked taxi took off abruptly. We could only sit back and hope that he could navigate through the hostilities and get us out of our difficulties and to work on time. It wasn't long till we ran into the subject of the small arm fire. Straight ahead was a barbed wire barrier blockade manned by Vietnamese troops who were alertly grabbing their weapons at the sight of us. In front of the barriers were the twisted, bloody remains of two VC that appeared quite dead. Our driver, although coerced, was an excellent victim and self-starter. He made a quick turn down an alleyway before the trigger-happy soldiers could level their rifles. We drove down streets that even we weren't familiar with and then ordered him to a stop at a storefront near the main gate. We slipped him a roll of hush money and he seemed happy with the outcome as he drove off.

As we peered around the corner we could see the gate even though a fog surrounded it. This was highlighted by the fact that only the base had lights and they were pointed toward us. It was difficult to see if any one but A1C Fisher was there. We didn't want to just walk up in the event an unfriendly lifer was making a post check. Sure enough a jeep was parked at the gate and we just stood there until it slowly drove off. We were in a real huff now with just minutes to go before roll call.

We walked slowly out of the shadows and toward the gate into the morning fog. We didn't go undetected as Fisher yelled, "Halt or I shoot!" I retorted back the appropriate, " Fisher it's me King and the Farley brothers!" Fisher appeared in a good mood from standing post all night and distinctly summed up how we felt about ourselves, "You jerks!" A1C Fisher then went into a lecture mode and began to report the attack on the base and the firefight downtown. We were running toward the armory as he was rambling. We arrived at Guardmount and checked our weapons in a nick of time and had that feeling that we had gotten over. It was short lived however when the head flight lifer asked us where we were at recall. We just banked on the confusion and told him we were there.

At the end of the day I was ordered to night security and the three of us were split up. The empire was fractured, but we all remained friends: Even today!

We Take Care of Our Own

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