

A Night to Remember

Cam Ranh Bay AB

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312th SPS, Cam Ranh Bay AB,
1969-1970

Tiger Flight had just been relieved of duty for the day. We had worked the normal swing shift, and night had fallen. Most of us had changed clothes and were ready to eat chow or party as usual, however, about an hour later, the sirens went off and we were on alert.

The majority of Tiger Flight was deployed to the *west side* and along the Navy compound overlooking the village. I remember riding in the back of a duce & 1/2 and being dropped off outside the main gate somewhere enroute to the west side. The sky was still lit up from the POL. area in flames. Sappers got through our perimeter and placed satchel charges on a number of large petroleum storage tanks. Two or three of the tanks were either empty or contained very little fuel, and there were just enough fumes in the nearly empty tanks to blow a large hole at the bottom of two of them. The one or two tanks with JP-4 jet fuel went up like a large mushroom cloud.

Remaining security police were deployed, and all that could be heard was the klaxon. The strong smell of burning jet fuel permeated the area. I recall that as I passed the Navy entrance, I saw a dead VC lying in the middle of the road. The SAT team driving in front of us had just shot him, as he fired at the jeep. He evidently crossed the bay earlier with other locals, and waited until dark to sneak through from the village.

The entire base was on alert for 24 hours--a long day for Tiger Flight. Except for short breaks from Ranger Flight, we had not slept for almost 36 hours. Most of us were scared out of our boots and were *making promises* that if we made it through the night, we would change our lives. At the time, I felt we were making a difference in Vietnam. Having been there and knowing the people and their way of life--*after all these years*--I still believe it was the right thing to do, and we did make a difference.

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