

A WAR STORY

Tools of our Trade

*(Information in this article was obtained from:
Air Base Defense in the Republic of Vietnam 1961 - 1973)*

Air Base Defense

The Stevens Pump (Savage), Model 77, 12-gauge shotgun was the least adequate weapon issued to Security Police in Vietnam. It was used by sentries assigned to the flight line or other high value resources. The weapon was designed for civilian use, not military, and jamming was a major problem. In the high humidity brass casing ammo corroded and paper ones swelled and rotted rapidly. Air Police were armed with Savages when Viet Cong assaulted the flight line at Tan Son Nhut in December 1966; three of the weapons jammed. The weapon was unreliable, awkward in loading and short ranged. They were replaced with the M16A1.

Tet Offensive of 1968 made it apparent that the Security Police needed heavier weapons, Air base defense *an to get the weapons needed to defend a base adequately. We got the M-67 90-mm recoilless rifle, M-29 81-mm mortar, M-72 66-mm light assault anti-tank weapon (LAAW) and the M-2 .50-caliber heavy-barrel machinegun. The mortars were used primarily for illumination during rocket attacks to prevent penetration. The 50's were used for H & I fire. There is no record of the 90mm or M-72 being used after Tet 1968. *(Editor Note: I remember them being used in 1970 to discourage a Junk from coming too close to the beach at Cam Ranh Bay AB)*

These weapons gave Security Police the capability to defend against the VC or retake any position that had been over run. There was no major attack against an Air Base after the weapons came into the security inventory, this may be because we had the capability to protect ourselves and the VC knew it. I like to think that our good training and dedication had a lot to do with this.

The new weapons also meant other new vehicles and methods of Air Base defense. That is for the next issue.

Next issue: More information on other weapons