

**Tết 31 January 1968**  
**Battle of Biên Hòa**  
**Bunker Hill-10**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Security Police Squadron**  
**by Jon Hayes**

My brother Don Hayes and I went to the Air Force recr~~xxxx~~zuiteer in Battle Creek, MI, and it was a really big deal to us, and the Air Force: twin brothers and stuff. And we said we would enlist if the recruiter would put it in writing we would always be together, and if separated we could discharge at our wish. He had to go up the chain for approval, and they finally let us go.

**4 July 1967**

**Jon Hayes, A2C, 3<sup>rd</sup> Security Police Squadron, Biên Hòa Air Base:**

*Hayes' Twins: L/R - A2C Jon Hayes/A2C Don Hayes. At a Stateside AFB, Base Police. [Colorized by Don Poss]*



I was an A2C, and so was my twin Don. We volunteered and had orders to Vietnam with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Security Police Squadron, and arrived at Biên Hòa Air Base on July 4th, 1967. The same base that had received 189 incoming mortars and rockets just a few weeks earlier, on May 12, 1967. My first SP assignment was on the flight line, or the apron area (Baker area, with supplies and a guard post). It was really cool to have my twin brother with me, and we worked together.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Security Police Squadron at Biên Hòa Air Base was great. Your first impressions are everything, you know, and at first, the SP guys just took to us two rookies, because we were twins, and they took us under their wings. But the day after Tết, around base, SPs were all very popular.

During our first six months at Biên Hòa Air Base, we only got hit with rockets or mortars a couple of times. Then we started getting hit, a lot, at least a lot more than we were used to. By then, I had a tower assignment in the bomb dump, Able-7 or 8, and Don had Able-11.

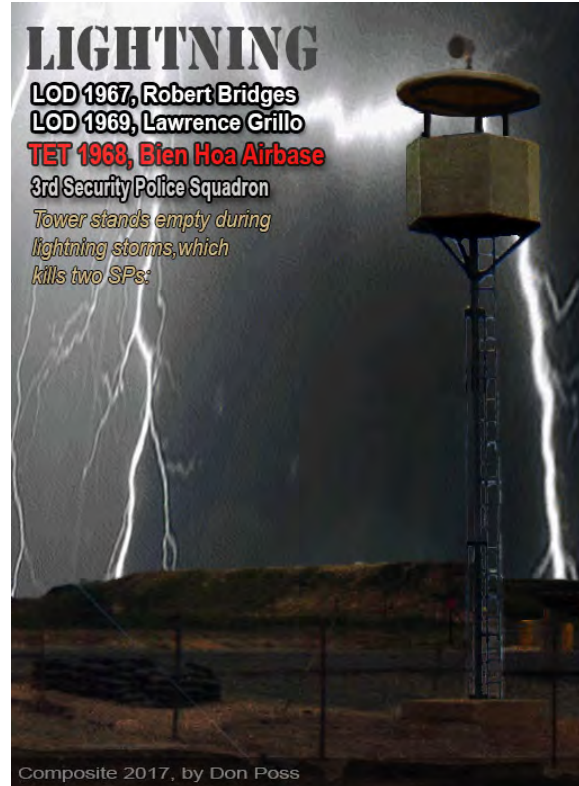
The way I got that tower post was that I hated rats, and towers in the bomb dump were the only posts without rats. I'm not talking American rats...I'm talking Godzilla Vietnam rats that I'm convinced double as Viet Cong K-9.



Everyone hated working towers—snipers will get'cha, lightning will get'cha ... *little green snakes* will twine up the pole and bite your butts—*yeah, right*. I loved towers.

The Bomb Dump, and tower posts, were north of the flight line, on the west end of the air base, and you had to go out and around the perimeter for some distance. I think it was about a mile or so and for obvious reasons to protect the base should Charlie blow it up.

SPs didn't get put in a tower until the evening dusk time, near dark, because of the *possibility* of snipers. I don't think anyone in a tower *ever* got shot by a sniper. And it was true, during the monsoon season, when weather stormed and *lightning*, we had to come down out of the towers because there weren't any lightning rods on the towers, as far as I know—they would order us out every time. Okay, but I *never* heard anything about pole climbing little green snakes biting anyone's butt.



*Biên Hòa AB: Lightning vs. Towers. Two SPs were killed in towers by lightning. (Antimate)*

Every night, there were five of us in the five towers. And every night we would all get quiet and watch the horizon, searching for the fiery red streak of a rocket launch. We got so good at it that we could tell by the angle what part of the base they would impact in; we usually spotted launched rockets at about the same time. At first, whoever saw a rocket launch first would report it on the radio. But on occasion we could have a little radio communications problem with our HT-200 Radios, and that could endanger Airmen caught in the open and not in a bunker.

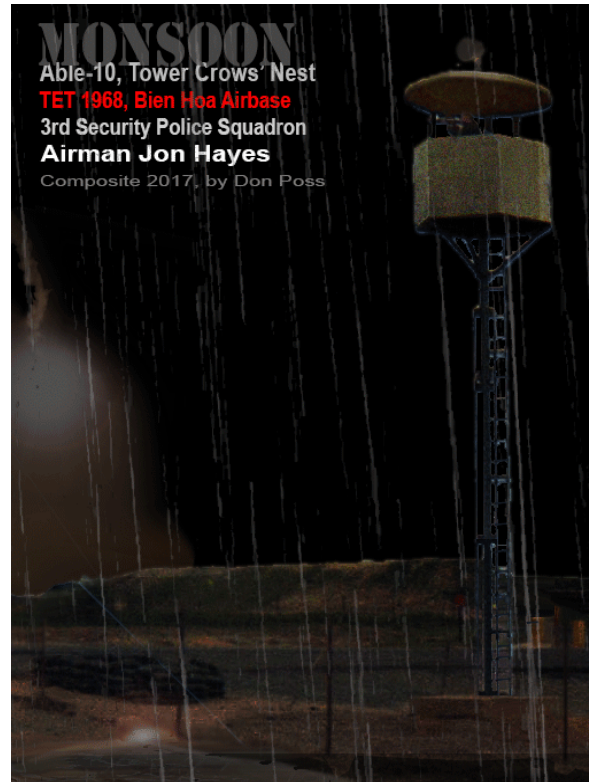
Luther Young came up with the idea that was approved to have a button installed in his tower, Able-10, that could save precious seconds notifying CSC of incoming rockets. That allowed the base siren to sound a warning when seconds counted. Rockets generally launched from the north, or from the east toward the west (too bad we didn't have video cams back then), and if we spotted a launch first, we notified Able-10 who would directly report it to CSC. Earlier warnings no doubt saved lives, and was very fast.

Tower posts were very important duty. One good thing about tower posts was towers had a covered roof overhead that provided some shade from a blazing sun, which was great. But in a driving rain, there was really nothing you could do—you were going to get drenched in a monsoon's horizontal winds and torrential rains. I remember thinking one time, it was raining so hard Charlie could have just walk right up and I wouldn't even see

him. But with K-9 patrolling, gates, guards, and towers, sappers never got in the bomb dump, while I was there.

I loved the K-9 guys. They were really brave and good guys. I would sometimes go out to post with the K-9 handlers. We were so far out at the bomb dump, we would just take them to their Bomb Dump posts, and drop them off on the way to our towers. Sometimes, we would get dropped off first. We knew there was a lot of distance between the Bomb Dump and the air base, and a long way out to yell help from. We were really, really *out there*.

The bomb dump was Able, Baker, and Charlie areas, and a little scary, and so dark sometimes you couldn't see the bottom of the tower's support pole, could feel like being on a *lollipop on a stick* floating in space. I don't mean *civilian-dark*, but a dark like when you *needed* to see, but couldn't: *cavern-dark*. *Braille-dark*. I thought about being so isolated from the main base. A mile north could seem very far. There weren't a lot of guys out there in the bomb dump area, and the its little perimeter was just out there somewhere.



*Monsoon vs. Bomb Dump Towers, 3rd SPS.  
(Antimate)*

## 27 January 1968

About three days before Tết 1968, I rode a moped downtown Biên Hòa City to see my Vietnamese girlfriend and have tea. Traffic was always insane. My moped ride had unnerved me. You may know how packed city streets in Vietnam always were with people, bicycles, scooters and cyclo-rickshaws. No one was walking around shopping, or on the streets--at all. It was an eerie ride. That day, the streets were almost totally clear...where was everybody? It was definitely a what the...ride through town. I arrived at her home, and felt very uneasy, but did not understand why.

She poured the tea we both liked, but seemed uneasy when saying everything was alright. It wasn't. I sensed something was very wrong, and told her I couldn't stay and had to go back to base early. She didn't try to convince me to stay, nor did she warn me of anything amiss happening. Really...spooky...vibes.

Then, I didn't know thousands of VC and NVA were staging for Tết's planned nationwide attack, and the local Biên Hòa Air Base attack; I didn't know the Viet Cong had warned the

city and threatened with annihilation for any cooperation with U.S. Forces; and *I didn't know* why my neck hairs were bristling, nor fully recognize I was in serious danger.

My girlfriend was quiet as she served Saigon Tea, but didn't warn me of anything happening. I told her that I had to go back to base early. She didn't try to convince me to stay, as she normally would do. I got a ride back to base and once there I felt very relieved. I also told some guys about that empty city and almost no one on the streets. Spooky. Once I got back to base I felt very relieved, and told some guys about that empty city and there almost no one walking around. Today, it still sends chills down my spine.

## **28 January 1968**

Just before Tết, I got temporarily kicked off my bomb dump tower post, and I wasn't in the tower when Tết hit. Here's what happened: We had a new OD in charge of the bomb dump. Young, butter-bar type smartass LT, but I don't remember his name ... or if he really was a butter-bar for sure. Bomb Dump Towers had field-phones and we would talk to each other in the towers and gates regarding what was happening. It wasn't just BS'ing around either. One night the LT came up and we were talking on the radio and he overheard us. The LT then talked to the sergeant and told him he didn't want the men on the field phones anymore. The Sgt defended us but the LT said he didn't care and didn't want us on the phones—and that was that. Several nights passed, and I called and talked to Don about something. Then someone spoke up, "*Who's this talking on the field phones?*" I replied, *Hayes*, and he said, "*Which one?*" and I answered, *Jon Hayes*—then he reamed me good. LT told the Sgt that he wanted us punished and taken off the tower. I don't think he was happy with Sarge either.

So, they took me off tower duty and next thing I knew I was standing on a small very-dark road, and told not to let anyone in without a pass. That wouldn't be a problem...no one could find the post. It was dark. I was vulnerable, and it was a made-up post in the sticks where no one even came around. Charlie could have walked right by and neither of us would have known. But...I didn't use a field-phone either. I was by myself, and basically shunned by the LT. Truth is, I shouldn't have been using the field-phone when told not to.

## **0300 hours, 31 January 1968**

*I should have been in my tower, Able-7 or 8, but when Tết hit I was in a useless Quonset hut as the rockets started slamming in—and scared, big-time—seemed like incoming rockets would never stop exploding. When the rockets started, things were happening so fast there was only react—no time to think about anything. The scariest part of Tết was definitely the 122mm Rocket attack! When it all started, with incoming, the VC and NVA rocketeers, artillery, or whatever they called them, caught our QRT in the Reserve Hooch and there was no place to go for cover...we were just so vulnerable, and no place to go at all. Scary. It was just so crazy and fast happening, and when it slowed or stopped it was playing catch-up with whatever had just happened—I couldn't believe I was still alive when the sun came up.*



*Biên Hòa Air Base, Bunker Hill-10 is under attack! An 3rd Dispensary ambulance responds to medevac wounded. Graphic Art, (c) 2017 by Don Poss*

We had a QRT truck on standby, and were told to arm up and fall outside and get in to the back of the truck—*Bunker Hill-10 was under heavy attack*. We piled into the QRT truck...I was away from my brother Don and my buddies, and didn't know anybody in the QRT. I knew Don was in a tower in the bomb dump, but when I actually was able to think about anything, other than what was happening in real-time, I looked toward the bomb dump not knowing whether to expect a tremendous fire and explosions, or continued darkness off in that direction. As long as there was no blast and concussion, I knew the bomb dump was relatively safe. If there were a blast—nothing likely would have survived.

All those QRT guys in the truck with me were from different Flights and didn't know each other. Even though there were only 12-15 of us, we formed up as one of the teams with a good solid armed-team Quick Reaction Team, armed with an M-60, M-16s, a ton of ammo, and grenade launchers on the M-16s. The truck was probably a duce and a half, and when we quickly loaded up, we headed out east toward Bunker Hill-10.

In the bomb dump towers, we had to check radios out at the armory. They were the *HT200 radios* [photo right], but we called them *bag-phones* because they were issued in a carry bag. In the QRT, we didn't have individual radios assigned, so I didn't have one and didn't hear a *peep* about things happening anywhere else at the time. All I knew was we were under Sarge's command and I didn't hear a thing over his radio. That was enough then, as he took care of the big picture and we focused on whatever was before us.



### **about 0315 hours, 31 January 1968**

A short distance from Bunker Hill-10, the QRT truck was driving with its light off and stopped. I think Sarge just said, *Follow Me* (and meant it) and he'd give us our orders when we got there. So, we just bailed out and hustled, following the Sarge at a fast pace trying to keep up with him (I wish I could remember his name).

We moved forward with weapons at the ready...I don't think it was very far, but all the while you could hear weapons fire growing in intensity and volume, in and outbound. Our team were all SPs, I don't think we had augmentees with us at that time. Other QRT teams were arriving and our overall numbers seemed to be growing—so were the numbers of enemy penetrating the perimeter wire. I could see their muzzle flashes and green tracers, some ricocheting or fired wildly and gliding jade-pearl-string-like well off into the distance. We were very nervous (okay...scared stuff-less) being our first time in combat and all.

When we all arrived at Bunker Hill-10, Sarge was talking to Capt Maisey. It was VERY dark. Then Sarge came over and told us what we were to do and where we were to go, and moved us a little north of the bunker where we would defend Bunker Hill-10's left and right flanks. I thought, this is the real deal.

Our QRT group stayed together and spread out in a long line on the back side of Bunker Hill-10, concealing in the tall grass and clumpy terrain as best as possible. I never had been to Bunker Hill-10 before, and could see the bunker was on my right side, facing sort of NE, and I was watching the left flank, toward the 145th Aviation Battalion area for any penetrators. We relied on each other. Other than some of the NCO's, I don't think any of us had ever been in combat before. None of us started firing until told to.

We were immediately taken under fire and in a fire-fight right away. A few trip flares had gone off and you could see the flare-lights winking rapidly, but I didn't see any mines exploding in the minefield zone beyond the wire. Viet Cong and NVA were definitely crossing through the wire.

### **0320 hours, 31 January 1968**

I remember Spooky dropping the big stuff flares—those million-candle parachute flares lite up the NE area like high-noon. It was as if the field was alive and a moving like a

swarm of invading fire ants. I don't recall seeing the enemy freeze in the light, or dropping for cover or getting hit just then. But it looked like some of the enemy were trying to flank us, and some were running West toward the base flightline and aprons, but the runway lights were dialed way down and glowing steady and not winking.

I recall vividly where we were at, just beyond the shallow little stagnant creek that was behind us. We had rapidly formed a defensive perimeter, right after the rockets stopped. Fighting was getting serious, with constant shooting. The choppers were raging around, then came flying in just yards above our heads, and we could hear their bullets going over us, saw the expended brass raining down and felt the rotor wash rake over us.

The Sarge yelled that we were taking off away—he meant run—from that area as the choppers were way too close. Well, you know how your body can run faster than your big-feet, well mine did, and I fell in the swampy bug-skating creek, which was about a foot deep in that area. and when I climbed out my M16 was a mud-clotted mess. No one said anything to me, but I know what a better you than me look, looks like when I see them.

We had backed up from Bunker Hill-10 a little bit more because the choppers were still psycho-ing and buzzing around real close and looking for something to kill, and the VC were really close and shooting like crazy at the bunker, the choppers, and us—all at once. Bunker Hill-10 was absolutely getting hammered by VC RPGs.

### **0330 hours, 31 January 1968**

Some of the 145th Aviation Battalion gunships seemed to leave (refuel or arm up?) but others [the 118th Assault Helicopter Company emergency standby fire team] showed up and began strafing with glee. When they arrived, the VC and NVA were firing all around us—that was when we were literally surrounded. Those Spooky flares and gunships really took the VC and NVA under heavy fire and literally saved our butts. The choppers were all exposed and flying really low. The VC fired a storm toward the choppers while continuing to pound Bunker Hill-10, and firing at us while attempting a break-through.

Our two M-60s were really firing up the VC and NVA in the wire and area as fast as they could. I saw one of our guys get hit, in the chest I think, and go down. Sarge yelled, hey they're going around us—trying to flank us—and we turned and could see VC/NVA running, but they didn't seem to be paying any attention to us—we paid attention to them. The flares were really bright and still lighting up the area like daylight, as only flares can do, so we fired on them as they kept trying to out flank us.

We were firing at a hellacious rate but you know how sometimes there's a momentary break and firing stopped for a few seconds, and a SP in front of us a little way suddenly stood up—right in front of our weapons. It was a very close call, because our triggers had pressure being applied and he came so close to dying right there in front of us, by our friendly fire. I don't know if he ever knew that, but I sure as heck did. I also looked around and worried about whether ammo resupply could get to us now. I don't remember anyone bring around water or food around, but things were so intense it wasn't big on my

mind at the time.

There were so many enemy troops, they were doing everything at once—some were shooting up our line, or running and firing, or running and *not* firing, and others were taking on Bunker Hill-10. I didn't know how long we could hold out, because for a while they seemed to surround us, and I thought they could even massacre or even try capturing us. But some started bypassing us while others tried running over our middle. I think they were at least trying to block us so the sappers and others could penetrate W/B toward the aircraft; if they had made it through, there was little or nothing at that moment to stop them—*nothing*—and the whole thing could have gone *south* and turned in to a real *stuff*-storm at that point.

I don't think we had any augmentees with us at that point, but there may have been some with the other QRTs. Things just went on and on with tremendous firing, in and out, and choppers' mini's chewing up and destroying planet earth—they were the top of the food chain, and knew it, although it looked like they were also taking some hits from the bNVA and VC below.

Everywhere you looked was fierce firing, and incredibly loud. The choppers...bless their hearts...if it wasn't for them the VC and NVA would have overran us and things might have turned out differently. I remember it all as really being surreal with constant firing of weapons and machineguns, choppers whizzing around overhead, smiling POWs, bodies littering the grounds, the sounds of sizzling flares dripping trails of nova like phosphorous globs.

I don't remember having anyone bring around water or food, but things were so intense that it wasn't big on my mind at the time. I do remember that I thought I had seen a We went a north of Bunker Hfiretruck get blown up near Bunker Hill-10's arill-10 and regrouped, and that was where we would makeea, but maybe it was just another RPG hitting the bunker.our defensive stand...again...then scooted a little bit more because the choppers were still psycho-ing and buzzing around real close and looking for something to kill. The VC were really close and not hunkering down, but shooting like crazy at the bunker, the choppers, and us—all at once. Bunker Hill-10 was absolutely getting hammered by VC RPGs.

We were firing at the advancing VC NVA, and I remember two SP M-60s were firing hot and heavy about then. The VC NVA quickly took our new defensive line under fire. There were so many of them they were doing everything at once—some were shooting up our line, enemy troops running and firing or just running and not firing, and others were taking on Bunker Hill-10. I didn't know how long we could hold out, because for a while they seemed to surround us, and I thought massacre or even try and capture us.



But some started bypassing us while others, I think, wanted to overrun or at least trying to block us so the sappers and others could penetrate W/B toward the aircraft; if they had made it through, there was little or nothing at that moment to stop them—*nothing*—and the whole thing could have gone *south* and turned in to a real *stuff*-storm at that point.

I worried about what if they got in to the hut areas. I think in every hut, only one guy had a weapon and that was it. All the SPs knew that, and no one acted like they wouldn't do their duty, even when we were virtually surrounded. But as long as we kept up our defense they didn't turn on us in force. It was like we were on a small island and they were the river water roiling at, around and past us, only to encounter heavier fire power from the 40 or so SPs nearby.

Spooky's flares were constant, but then there was a break as the string of flares winked out. It was really, really dark. I don't know what the flare-kickers actually do, but even though the darkness last a minute or so it seemed forever. The firing didn't slack up at all, but there were so many of them I couldn't tell if we were having any effect on the enemy numbers.

The only time I actually saw them close up was when they were trying to flank us and flares were dropping. We kept fired on them but didn't stop them...I seen just a few clearly...and there were a whole lot more than a few.

When those choppers showed up VC and NVA were firing all around us—that was when we were literally surrounded. Those Spooky flares and the 145th gunships really took the VC and NVA under heavy fire and literally saved our butts. The choppers were all exposed and flying really low. The VC fired a storm toward them and continued pounding of Bunker Hill-10 and us, and fought very hard attempting a break-through.

Spooky's flares were constant, but then there was a break as the string of flares winked out. It was really, really dark. I don't know what the flare-kickers actually do, but even though the darkness lasted a minute or so it seemed forever. The firing didn't slack up at all, but there were so many of them I couldn't tell if we were having any effect on the enemy numbers. I had moments to look around. My thoughts were racing. I worried about what if they got in to the hut areas. I think in every hut, only one guy had a weapon and that was it.

All the SPs knew that, and no one acted like they wouldn't do their duty, even when we were virtually surrounded. But as long as we kept up our defense they didn't force the issue and turn on us in force. It was like we were on a small island and they were the river water roiling at, around, and past us, only to encounter heavier fire power from SPs nearby. The only time I actually seen the enemy close up was when they were trying to flares were dropping. When shooting, it seemed impossible to miss as their numbers were so dense we had to have been hitting something. We kept firing on them but it didn't stop them...I could see just a few clearly at times...but there were a whole lot more than a few.

## 0530 hours, 31 January 1968

Then dawn started glowing the horizon, and the sun started creeping up and the flares stopped dropping. I remember thinking, we made it man. It was so great seeing that sun rise, but as good as it was, the killing wasn't over yet. I've been thinking about this a lot, for years. Looking back, I can't believe I went all through that and survived. The Viet Cong and NVA's numbers, against the 3rd SP,S were just incredible odds stacked against us.

After the battle, I remember we stayed around Bunker Hill-10 a while, before the perimeter sweep began. Viet Cong and NVA prisoners, wounded and non, were laying around the area of Bunker Hill-10, awaiting their fates. There was a captured Viet Cong whose injuries were so gruesome it held my gaze. I thought—*this guy is really screwed up*. He was like most of the twenty-five prisoners, wounded and really bad off with multiple wounds. Anyway, this POW was sitting partially in the shade and smoking while leaning against Bunker Hill-10. His foot was nearly blown off and seemed to be hanging by a tendon or muscle. I was taken aback noting he was looking at *me*, looking at him, and *smiling*... like he had *made it* through the battle alive. Ugly wounds were plentiful, but his wound caused him to be pointed out by and to other SPs. I don't know if someone had



given the *dangling-foot* prisoner some meds by then, but I am sure he was in hurt-city later, with or without meds.

That was the first time I came eye to eye with a VC or NVA, and it was surreal. Here I was all armed up and all. It was amazing. The prisoners didn't seem mad at us either, not that we cared—they were scared and no doubt concerned about their immediate future, but mostly just defeated...some broken, and some not. A lot of their comrades had died, with many still laying in plain view in nearby blooded fields. If your eyes were open, you couldn't help but see them.

We were getting ready to move out again. I glanced at the foot-guy; he never really acknowledged me personally, one way or another. I wondered what was worth that perpetual smile to him. To me his worried VC reaper's eyes betrayed inner grief, and the liar's forced smile said he still feared he could die, even today. And then it seemed to make sense: his comedy/tragedy theatre mask spoke perfect English, and boiled down to: my war is over...my life is not—how about yours? And I realized my life had the same

warranty as his: “*even today*” ... or not. Even with his mangled foot dangling by a sun-dried tendon, he was still breathing. He blew another smoke ring, like when a howitzer fires a playful *eat-this* H&I round—then closed his eyes to the victors passing Bunker Hill-10 as its meager shade crept away with the rising sun. A lingering glance (pity?), I noticed half of Charlie's body was cloaked in shade or sunlight, splitting him like a carpenter's scribe of *life* and last night's dark frantic battle—*death*—melding into languored-thoughts, best forgotten.

I was glad to move on knowing full well the pathetically-happy and pain-racked grin he wore could become the lasting lingering memory of this day...for the rest of my life. I wondered if that is what he saw in my expression, as he had stared at me? and if so, did he see that I could have as easily said a prayer for him, or killed him outright? Here I was all armed up and all, moving by dozens of prisoners. It was amazing. The prisoners didn't seem mad at us, not that we cared, their heads bowed but eyes furtively tracking those who might yet kill them. They were scared, yet seemingly ready to face and endure danger or pain as karma presented; and no doubt concerned about their immediate future, but mostly just defeated. A lot of their comrades had died, with many still laying in plain view in nearby blooded fields. If your eyes were open, you couldn't help but see them.

Frankly, I don't remember feeling hatred for them either. It was almost like...feeling sorry for them...all wounded and shot up...holes in them and all...pieces missing on some. And the bodies ... just scattered everywhere you looked across the fields (I know I've repeated this, but you just had to see it to understand its impact): tall grass—bodies. Dry creeks—bodies and parts. Bogs, marshes, shallow creeks—bodies floating. Glassy ponds...bodies submerged and staring up from below. Almost all of the prisoners were really messed up—torn up—and here and there a wounded prisoner had died amongst them; some wearing an ugly scowl or blissful expression frozen on their faces. But all of their misery and loss was necessary—I knew it could have gone the other way and been American bodies strewn about.

I know I've compared it to movies, but it was not like any Hollywood movie I ever saw and will never make that comparison again—these guys were not just dead, they were war-dead and there is no comparison to the brutality of that. Globes of human messes caked here and there...some pieces not even near a body for whomever to try and match with a gruesome puzzle.

### **1200 hours, 31 January 1968**

Our QRT and others were in place at Bunker Hill-10 area until the perimeter sweep started. The perimeter sweep was the third big Tết-thing I was a part of. By then, there

were a lot of us. I didn't know Capt Maisey was killed until...about morning...maybe a little earlier than that. I heard about the augmentee, Airman Muse (augmentee), but I didn't even know that for quite a while...the next day sometime, when all the info started coming in as more than rumors.

I remember we started to muster for the perimeter sweep. I always think about it being closer to around 0900 for some reason... things can just blend together at times. By then most everyone knew that our 3<sup>rd</sup> SPS Ops Officer, Captain Maisey, was killed in action. Captain Strones was yelling that we were going to begin a perimeter sweep. There were a whole lot of men coming forward to join in. Capt Strones, I think, had us move in front of Bunker Hill-10, on the North side, and started us moving east in a sweep to capture or kill the hiding enemy that wouldn't surrender. It seemed crazy... *really crazy*.

I think we had started the perimeter sweep around 1100-1200-ish, moving east in a perimeter sweep line of about 25-40 of us, we were a solid team...nobody left the area...we were advancing and nervous...carrying our weapons forward ready to engage anything in a split second. I don't remember any army guys in that perimeter sweep. I do remember we were all just so happy to be alive. I felt like I'd already been through hell once, earlier, and I thought, this isn't bad. There were several groups moving in a meandering line of sorts, and we were near each other. We just sort of continued moving eastward, staying sort of abreast of each other. And it was working. The perimeter sweep continued at a very slow and organized pace, and it was thorough and I thought, professional.

Occasionally the perimeter sweep line halted while someone checked something out; usually, discovering another dead body or wounded VC or NVA. All the while, there were dead bodies just everywhere in the open and bush, and several were just blown apart, really. The line would continue forward, and I thought it was executed with great precision. Nobody would get out in front of anybody else on the line.

Prisoners were captured, but I didn't see any prisoners taken at that time, although there was a whole bunch of stuff going on...people moving behind us, dealing with whatever was found by the line; enemy wounded, dead, explosives, EOD requirements, or Intel and such. Still, the perimeter sweep was always very professional and the NCOs kept it that way.

There were still a lot of SP guys in the perimeter sweep next to and near me. If the line had a break in it because of terrain or discoveries, the line halted until whatever the problem was, was dealt with or delegated. There were also growing numbers of VC and NVA wounded, and you couldn't tell if some were faking it or not. One VC was found and it looked like he had committed suicide. Nevertheless, surviving enemy were searched really carefully, with an eye toward bobby-traps, and thoroughly for weapons and Intel. Enemy wounded and POWs were turned over to the trailing QCs, but I don't remember seeing any QCs join us as a part of the perimeter sweep. It would have been handy if they had, even if it was as a prisoner translator encouraging the enemy to surrender. I saw one of our guys with a M-16 near another SP with an M-60 suddenly get hit and go down. The battle went on. Never found out what happened to him.

Our QRT SPs were together from start to finish. We were mostly just a bunch of kids really, following the NCOs and officers. After the perimeter sweep was declared “clean”, that’s when our group broke off from the perimeter sweep. We stood around some more, waiting for whatever, and couldn’t help but check out the bodies and weapons laying all around. Just as noticeable was the quiet...itself seemingly *loud* in the absence of last nights' insanity. No birds winged the skies at all, yielding the skies to the F-100 Sabre jets.

Souvenir temptation can be very strong. But I had made what I thought was the right and basically-honest decision not to take an AK-47 or other weapon for a souvenir, convincing myself it equated to grave-robbing or something goulash; besides, a full auto weapon was probably illegal to take home anyway. I was very proud of myself and feeling pretty smug about it, that somehow I was better than those other wannabe grave-robbers...but it took a lot of wrestling with my conscious over what I could, should, or wouldn’t do; it was getting blurrier by the minute.

My smugness crumbled into admiration soon enough. It was right after the battle when those army guys suddenly landed their chopper, and the gunner hopped out and ran over to a small line of enemy bodies and bagged two AKs—just like that—then jumped back on their chopper and flew off in a huge cloud of dust before someone could say squat, and leaving us Air Force types coated in grime. My moral argument wilted, leaving me floundering toward the abyss of selfishness and greed...again.

The Army definitely led the way causing me to fall, weaken, and sink morally to a not quite new-low, while appropriating found-property on a battlefield (an AK-47), for safe-keeping...in my locker. It was those nasty army guy’s fault I caved—right? That gunner had just swapped in and bagged two AK-47s I might have wanted, and maybe ripped off a NVA belt from a uniform. When I looked around, no one seemed to care, and there were still bodies laying where they fell and plenty of AK rifles laying where we had been firing earlier... and I mean everywhere, and not always near a body.

So I made my very casual move and this is when I got an AK-47. I spotted my AK-47 with an inserted banana clip laying in the dirt looking reasonably in good shape, better than its nearby soldier... I nearly faltered in determination, but thought if it’s okay for the army chopper guys to bag two AKs (and I agreed with myself that it was more than okay)... and since the NVA’s head was facing the other direction, I picked up only one AK-47, slung its sling over my head and shoulder in one move, and continued walking like it was an everyday thing. With every step I felt more justified: No NCO or officer yelled at me... lightning didn't strike—and no one said anything at all.

The morning was starting to get hot. We just kept going until Captain Strones said that was enough...it’s clean. I can’t talk enough about how great the officers and NCOs were... they were leading and directing us, and definitively from the front. I think some were WWII and or Korean War vets.

*about 1500 hours, 31 January 1968*

**Interior Sweep:** I think we had started the interior sweep soon after the perimeter sweep; maybe an hour or so later after a quick break of sorts. Anyway, it started getting warm...hot even, though it was January. Both sweeps were dangerous. No one spoke Vietnamese and we didn't have a translator. And none of the POWs acknowledged speaking English.

There were a lot of us loosely formed up, almost shoulder to shoulder, moving very slow, sweeping the whole perimeter area around Bunker Hill-10. We swept around and kept going just a little ways at a time, spreading out a few paces between us. While advancing slowly during the interior sweep, a potential prisoner did something and suddenly started moving around, and one of the guys quickly let him have it and killed him. A captain or a Sarge came running up screaming at us and ripped the SP guy, that had fired off what seemed a full magazine, a new one. I think that VC was only wounded before he got himself dead. We just kept moving after the whomever was yelling got things under control and everyone calmed down; including those VC and NVA prisoners trying to survive that twilight-zone between discovery and accepted-surrender.

Sarge never told us to do anything I thought was dumb. Everything he told us to do was potentially dangerous or deadly. There were times I wasn't necessarily clear on what was happening, like when the interior sweep line stopped for some reason. But our SP NCOs and officers...were the ones we so heavily relied on what they said, and wanted us to do... and we did it straight out. They came through for us. We were all a bunch of scared people. Scared Airmen...SPs. The Army guys had joined us, but we were all just so vulnerable in the open fields...tall grass might conceal you—or the enemy—if you drop down, but there's no real cover there. If the VC was willing to die and take someone with him...that would and did happen.

Sarge's suggestions still rang in my ears: I think you might want to go clean your M-16... like now...because we have a interior sweep to do—you got less than an hour to be back. And as Sarge draped a bandoleer of M-60 ammo around my neck he further suggested—and get rid of that AK you bagged. No workable lie of denial popped in my mind, so I just sort of gave a non-commenting shrugged.

That's when I thought of my twin brother Don, who was still at the bomb dump—you don't take your M-16 rifle up in the bomb dump towers...which meant that his M-16 was most likely in his hut locker. So, I took my newly acquired (but mud-caked) AK-47 and my M-16 rifle (that I took a mud bath with in the creek earlier) back to the hut. My M-16 looked like a long skewered shish kabob, deep-fried and mud-dried.

An hour! There was no way I was going to clean any weapon in that time, and make it to the interior sweep. You may remember the red Vietnam clay—when it was wet it was the worst muddy goo on the planet—when it was sunbaked and caked-brick-dry—it was concrete. Anyway, I hurried to our hut, filthy from head to toe, a little ripe, and with both weapons encased in Vietnam-concrete mud.

In our hut, we had made those horse-shoe like bed-cubicles with our bunks (tidy but considering it was Vietnam—seemed like a grand hotel). I opened my locker and saw Don's pristine-clean M-16 setting there, just begging me to take it. There was only one thing to do—I left Don the AK47 and my M16 (I didn't have a spare jackhammer to clean them) and both were looking like a troll's mud clotted tongue depressor. I closed the locker, then eased it back open... and thought, I'm sure my bro wouldn't mind cleaning both of them before guardmount, or if he suddenly needs a weapon—right? And he's working a tower so we can't take a rifle anyway. After all, it was all the Army's fault: if those thieving chopper pilots hadn't made me cave and take that AK...and if God hadn't let me fall into that muddy creek...then nothing would've happened... and I would be scrounging something to eat instead of borrowing Don's M-16—right? (FYI: Don actually cleaned both weapons).

*The AK eventually disappeared.*

I had heard there was a grave pit somewhere for the enemy bodies, but didn't see it, nor any of the VC or NVA bodies being moved around. We were relieved off the field before that, I guess. Just never saw it. We did that perimeter sweep after the battle, then were told to head back to our huts and tents, or wherever for a short break. And we geared up again for an interior sweep.

In less than an hour I was back and ready for the interior sweep, which didn't seem as intense to me having just finished Bunker Hill-10's defensive line perimeter sweep. I just remember mounting up and taking the interior sweep from here to there on foot. It had been a really long day. Sarge spotted me and looked at my M-16, nodding approvingly. Nothing was mentioned about the AK.

Everyone was nervous that some of the VC might have gotten as far as in the air base aircraft areas, and rumors were flying that some stragglers were still hiding there, so we formed up again. Someone had passed it on that we would interior sweep from the west end, eastward, in the grass-area between the runway and apron—the whole length. I know there were grass fires in the area, but I didn't see any from where I was at: nada. Our interior sweep cleared it without finding any enemy. Seemed they never got further than the Run-up pad area.

The interior sweep was a just get it done type of thing and not a big deal, especially after what we had just been through and mostly uneventful, as my part of the war went. After we were relieved for the day, we were told to get some rest that we might be needed again for the coming night.

Later, I learned that all the enemy body parts and pieces were quickly shoveled in to an open pit, along with the bodies. The puzzle didn't seem to matter, or be worth solving, to anyone. What did matter was that today would be very hot... tomorrow, hotter...the day after, unbearable—and the bodies would putrify. I doubted if their families knew yet, or would ever know where the bodies were buried. War is hell for families too.

## ***after Tết 1968***

A couple of days after Tết, things calmed down somewhat. It never seemed the same for the six months I had left at Biên Hòa, although I went to Saigon for a visit twice, and it was great. That was later. I don't remember them ever opening Biên Hòa City and downtown again while I was there. Those two Tết days had changed my life for sure. The ironic think is I never went back to Bunker Hill-10 again...didn't want to...opportunity never really came up and I didn't seek it out.

I went back to my tower post—Bomb Dump Sarge said I earned my right to go back. I was real glad about that. But looking back I realize now more than then just how dangerous it was...if the VC and NVA had decided to blow the bomb dump, there really wasn't much to stop them...in those towers no one would have ever found us had it blown.

Having worked 30 days, they started giving guys a night off. We had a rare night off, I saw a few of the perimeter-interior sweeps guys, from Baker and Charlie (days and swing shifts). One night a buddy and I went to get a beer somewhere and started talking and it came up that I was on the defensive-line at Bunker Hill-10. Don knew I was there and I knew he was in the ammo dump in his tower then, but I didn't know if they were getting hit with rockets or not.

When we were coming back from drinking, the VC let go with some little mortars that rained down like hundreds of little tiny things all over that started popping like individual explosions...we got caught out in the open and with nowhere to cover we just went to ground and prayed. Never experienced that before or afterwards. It was an exciting time, that's for sure. LTC Miller later told me he had a report that captured VC and NVA told Intel that they thought they were attacking US Marines at Bunker Hill-10 and not the 3rd Security Police Squadron.

**Don got home two months early than I** because of the rule that brothers, back then, could go home early and that one could go home 90 days early. Don's wife had a little girl and I let him be the one to go home first. But...being brothers, I had to make him squirm a little bit before I signed off on it in a legal document. He squirmed and I signed, but thought it would be too much to hold out for him to agree that his cleaning my weapons was a good thing.

After Don left for home, every time we got hit at Biên Hòa, I said a few grumbly words about him leaving...*abandoning me*...he left in May. Don't think we got hit much afterward anyway.

**SHORT:** My last several days before going home...I was so happy I was going home. Really going home and not early in a body bag like some did—the ultimate short. Guys came up to you ... getting short they would smile. It was exciting.

At home, Don and I were talking about Biên Hòa Air Base and that we got out six months early, and about our service for three and half years. We did a lot and had seen a lot.



We had Top-secret clearances. Stateside, we had stored nukes in igloos, and went to Vietnam. But to this day, *I still can't remember 6 hours of stuff during the battle*. I remember parts of it...images of stuff and then moving on and not knowing what the results of different incidents were...or what happened later. It was like going to a movie and leaving right in the middle of it.

LTC Miller and I became good friends, years later, and would talk on the phone every month or so. We usually ended up talking about Biên Hòa. He said he had people on the base come up to him and thank him after Tết. Biên Hòa was the perfect forum...and is the greatest story never told. He told me he never believed any of the intel put out—it rarely ever proved out. Then here came Tết and sure enough Tết-Intel was right on. LTC Miller told me that 30 Jan 1968 was the one and only night in Vietnam he wore pajamas in Vietnam...and then at 0300 hours on the 31st, incoming rockets started pounding Biên Hòa Air Base, and he took off running to CSC (Central Security Control), which was put out of action, and then ran over to LED (Law Enforcement Desk) that had assumed the Central Security Control duties and LED, and that he felt like a damn fool and a weak little girl in his PJs (it was an Emperor has no clothes moment)—and Buddha (Sgt Jim Lebowitz) bug-eyed him and just looked away (he figured Buddha was trying to choke down a laugh) and wisely didn't comment on his attire as the Colonel quickly changed into a uniform.

### ***After rotating out of Vietnam:***

Don was already back home, and we ended up at PCS at the same base, at Barksdale AFB... Bossier Base...until 1957 it was a top secret base within a base and way out in a bunker area where all the nukes were stored at, and where all the B52s were at. Everyone there were pretty top-notch guys there. Good guys. Good duty. Liked it a lot really. Refreshing, after what we had just did. We mostly had patrols there and the main gate duty and a nuke area gate. *No towers*. No parachute flares.

On patrol...I pretty well put Biên Hòa Air Base behind me. Barksdale AFB, Bossier Base, was a good place to go after Vietnam, but it was tense at times. There were a few Vietnam vets there...sometimes we talked about it....

### **Memories of Biên Hòa Air Base, Vietnam:**

**The grinning prisoner**, I won't forget.

**Barksdale AFB** - A tough of normal in a Cold War world: There was a couple of guys, and we went out and had a couple of beers one time. We didn't even know we were at Biên Hòa Air Base at the same time until then. At Bossier Base, I met a guy that hadn't been to Vietnam yet...I talked about Bunker Hill-10 and he said he had heard about that. Barksdale was a far cry from Vietnam.

What really happened to the AK-47 I took off the dead VC during Tet? you might wonder. I wanted to take it home, big time—that wasn't going to happen. I kept it in the hut for about 6 months...that was an open secret...it was my most cherished possession then. People would come around to check it out sometimes. So, after Tet, after the battle, after the two sweeps, some guy came to my hooch one time... everyone knew about the AK-47 being an honest war trophy—and it was a massive piece of killing machine, really. I played around with it. It was an amazing rifle...AK-47...deadly, deadly. Anyway, he took a picture of me mugging with the AK-47 for the camera. There are a few pictures in my life that are important to me, and that one, this one is one of them...it's right up there...and proves it all was real, for all to see.



Then the word came down and they started coming around saying if you get caught trying to take something like an unauthorized weapon home, we would be prosecuted for it and jailed for it, maybe locked up at LBJ and do the time there. I believed them and so did everybody else. Except perhaps for a captain who came into the hut and sought me out, and came over to me; maybe he was a 1st Lieutenant ... anyway,

he had heard about the AK-47 taken off a body in the battlefield, and mentioned they really were cracking down on taking weapons home. You might remember all the *anti-war* protests and violence going on stateside in 1968. He wasn't an SP officer, I'm fairly sure, and he said he really wanted the AK-47 bad, and offered me a *hundred bucks* for it. In '68 that was a lot of money, considering minimum wage was only a buck sixty an hour.

Anyway, I always thought that guy, that officer, probably retired as a colonel or something, if he stayed in. I still think to this day he probably had it hanging on his wall in a special case as a battle trophy. He kept working in to the conversation that he really wanted it and couldn't believe I'd taken it off a KIA in the battlefield as a genuine battle trophy. He meant that in a positive way, and not in disbelief. He wasn't threatening or anything, and he seemed okay. I thought then that he probably had big time connections to get the AK home, and I didn't. So, with mixed feelings, I agreed to his offer.

For a while I was not happy about having sold the AK-47, figuring I had been screwed...but



I knew deep down I hadn't been. I could have said no, the weapon could have been stolen later, or taken by the military, or whatever, but for certain, I would have lost it anyway.

A couple of my hut buddies hated to see it go to, but everyone knew they were getting aggressive about checking us close for contraband, us Short guys anyway, and we knew the consequences, for enlisted. But for six glorious months—the AK-47, a banana clip, and ammo...was mine. And I'll admit it took some years before I felt at piece about the AK being sold, and actually I was glad the Captain ended up with it. At least he was there when Tết went down.

And yes, the AK-47 was and is the Captain's to do as he wished...but

it would be nice to have a one-time visitation privilege, even this late in life's game.

**When I met my wife, at Barksdale AFB,** her dad was a SMSgt. We were married in 1969. When I first got home I did have some trouble sleeping...I'm doing better than I was then, I think. My wife said I was very...I was a different person back then, when we got married. It was all still fresh, and recent. I don't really do that much thinking about it anymore...I don't want to...it's all so tense—nightmares at night, she said.

My father in law was admin sergeant in the SPS's first post office at Đà Nẵng Air Base in 1965. He was also at Đà Nẵng in 1965, either a Staff or Tech...maybe a master sergeant. He had transferred from the PI to Bergstrom AFB, 12th AF, Austin Texas, and retired in 1975. He was the ranking NCO in the 12th AF. He was in charge of starting up the post office, because in those early days there wasn't a post office, so he organized a "mail room" and the CO liked it and said he was now in charge of the squadron's postal office. So, Lyle Springs, and he organized the first Post Office for the squadron.

**Years later, Don and I agreed that our war really started on Jan 31, 1968.** One thing I



regretted was not being in my tower that night, but I'm proud of helping protect Bunker Hill- 10's flank. When those trip flares started going off in the wire and the choppers came in, it was amazing. Don said that when the Sarge came up checking posts after the rockets stopped, he told Sarge he wanted to go down to Bunker Hill-10, and Sarge told him ... Don you can't do it. And that went back and forth ending again with I know your brother is down there, but you can't go.

Don told Sarge if they asked for volunteers he wanted to be first on the list to go, and Sarge said, "Okay... *you're not going.*"

Recently, a buddy asked where VSPA's reunion was going to be at this year, so while we were talking I was at my computer and pulled up VSPA.com to find

the date and location for him, and saw that amazing picture (below) of Bunker Hill-10 on VSPA's homepage! I would never have known the story of the 3rd Security Police Squadron's *Battle of Biên Hòa* without seeing that, and told my friend I just had to have a print of that painting. And then that other Don (Poss) roped me in to telling my *Bunker Hill-10* story...and twenty pages later...*here it is.*

