

# Vietnam

3rd Security Police Squadron  
Biên Hòa

## Alabama Boy Horace Holbrook

by **Dave Ware**,  
Biên Hòa 1967-1969  
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Horace Holbrook was a typical southern boy, well mannered, easy to talk to and a southern football college fan. He and I had many conversations about LSU and Alabama football and constantly dogged each other out about our respective allegiances. He was a Crimson Tider through and through and I bled purple and gold.

The afternoon before he died I ran into him in the chow hall before we went on duty. Of course we got into another conversation about the upcoming season. I pushed his buttons by accusing Bear Bryant of having so many players on scholarship that he was using up the swimming, tennis, golf, volleyball, softball, baseball and basketball scholarships so he could get more football players. Horace always reminded me that the Bear had said that if he had as many good athletes as LSU that he would win the National Championship every year.

I cannot say enough good things about Horace. He was constantly smiling and always had a good word for everyone. I remember him as a dedicated and disciplined trooper who always seemed to have it together. His death hit me particularly hard and caused a lot of anger and frustration. I only wanted an opportunity to hit back.

The night of May 12th at Biên Hòa was a night I will never forget. I was one of the first or maybe the first to get to Horace after the initial impact. I have no doubt that he died instantly and never knew what hit him. I try to visualize his image as someone who was sleeping peacefully amidst all the carnage.

I often wonder as to why he died and I did not. I was actually closer to the impact of the round that Horace. Fate is the hunter, I suppose and it was not meant to be. I still believe that it was not a 122 rocket that hit my hootch. I say this based on several points of evidence. I personally examined the point where the round struck and I was less than 8 feet away. There was no sign of any debris from the propellant casing of a rocket and only a small indentation as to where it struck the concrete slab. If memory serves me correctly, there were over 240 122's and 107's fired at us that night along with some 81 mm mortars and a 75mm recoilless rifle.

My first cousin, Capt Paul Ware was the Operations Officer at the US Army chopper pad (Rattlers, I believe) and had sit in on many Intel briefings and kept me abreast of what he knew of VC activity in the 3rd ARVN Corp. He told me that ARVN intelligence said that several mortar tubes(81mm) and a 75 MM RR was fired from Buddha Hill. In my opinion the round that hit my hootch was on a low trajectory. That is why I feel it may have been a Recoilless Rifle. Some of the blast took out the corner of our adjacent hootch which Horace was in. The blast knocked me and everything around me about 15 feet through the air. I may or may not have been knocked unconscious for a moment or two. Do not really know, but I know I could not hear and I felt as if a dozen hornets had stung me. I remember the "crack" as the round hit the hootch and then the subsequent explosion. Everything was a bright orange and it felt as if someone was sitting on my chest. You would think a 122, with the large warhead hitting that close, would have ripped me apart. Who knows?

I had just gotten off duty and still had my camos on and was lying in my bunk reading. I heard the rumble of exploding rounds and at first thought it was outgoing. The 173rd had some self propelled 175's up on the hill and sometimes they would fire a mission and it would rattle the hootch. I remember Combs yelled at me and asked, " Waredog!, Is that incoming or out going?" My buddy, Jimmy Mac Strange, hung the "Waredog" name on me, but that is another story. It was about this time that all hell broke loose and shrapnel began to rip through the roof and the whole place was a

constant roar of explosions. The huge explosions were definitely 122 rockets, but I could also hear what sounded like mortars being walked down the line. I hit the deck and remember hearing the screen door slamming open and close as guys made it to the safety of the bunkers. It was definitely incoming.

As I said, I heard a loud "crack" and then I opened my eyes to see smoke and fire and the smell of cordite. I dug my way out and stumbled about trying to get my bearings and gather my thoughts. I saw an SP who was in trouble and his mouth was moving and he appeared to be screaming, but I could not hear due to the ringing and roaring in my ears.

The SP was trapped beneath some debris and fire was burning around him. His eyes were wide with fear and panic and I tried to get him to extend a hand so I could reach him, but he obviously could not or did not understand. I pushed over towards him and began ripping at anything in my way and was finally able to get my hand under his left armpit and get some leverage. I pulled as hard as I could, but was not making much progress when a fellow SP threw his weight against the debris, giving me a chance to get in closer. I was able to get the wounded SP on my shoulder and myself and the other SP fought our way out and put the wounded SP in a bunker.

I remember having a mouthful of blood and the copper taste. The wounded SP had a severe wound and it was apparently spewing blood directly onto my face as I had him on my shoulder, plus I had lost a tooth and had a busted mouth. I could not hear, but I could feel the impact of concussion as the rounds hammered the nearby area and I remember the sky being alight in fire and smoke. I made my way back to the fire in an attempt to help any others. It was then that I saw Horace. Nothing could be done and I remember someone grabbing my arm and trying to guide me away from the fire. I pulled away and wormed myself to the area where my quarters use to be. I wanted my rifle and gear. I somehow found my rifle, combat harness, pisspot and two boots. I grabbed all I could and stumbled out face first into the sand next to the revetment adjacent our hootch.

I remember sitting in the sand putting on my boots and trying to get my act together and not much after that. It is mostly a blank from there. I was posted somewhere on the line in expectation of ground attack.

I later found myself lying on a gurney with some airman trying to cram some smelling salts up my nose. I was sick at my stomach and nauseous and my vision was blurred (concussion) and I could not hear very little. I was panicky for some reason, because my weapon and gear were missing and kept looking around trying to figure out where I was and who stole my damn gear. I do remember a medic examining my feet and yelling in my ear and asking me if my foot was hurting. It seems I had on either two left boots or two right boots and this caused them a little concern until they figured out what they were looking at. They also asked if I wanted to notify my family of my injuries. I could not hear or understand at the time, but they sent a telegram to my family and this caused my family a lot of fear. I was later able to make a MARS call and assure them I was alive and well.

At sometime during the day I was back in the 3rd SP area. I apparently looked like Fido's butt, but was none the less OK other than a few stitches and burns, lost tooth and concussion. As I recall I sat down on the ground near the revetment near the destroyed hootches and some of the guys were coming up to me and talking, but I could not hear well enough to engage them in any kind of conversation. A few moments later Col. Miller came up to me and asked how I was doing and had a few words of encouragement, or so I was later told. I remember him giving me the once over and pulling the straps back on my harness so he could read my nametag. Someone then took me to a spare bunk in another hootch. Someone else was apparently assigned to keep me awake for a few hours until the effects of the concussion wore off. I remember drinking cokes and smoking, but not much else.

I had a million questions and finally things began to come back into focus and then reality hit like a hammer. I stayed busy the next few days trying to garner some personal effects and get some new uniforms. I had lost everything other than what was on my back or in my hand and I was relieved of duty until I had got a clearance from the aid station. Apparently someone at the aid station had pinned a note on my blouse addressing my ailments. Maybe that was what Col Miller was looking at when he gave me the once over. I thought I had screwed up, but I knew I had not lost my gear or rifle. : >)

A few days later I spoke with an SP who was Horace's best friend and it was heartbreaking as I watched the tears flow from his eyes. He really took it hard, as we all did. The SP we helped was reported to have lost a kidney and medevaced to Japan. I never heard anything more about him and I am not even sure of his name. I think it was Thomas, but I am not sure.

Alabama went on to beat LSU that fall in a 7-6 win that was marred by a controversial call. To this day I think that Horace had something to do with that.: >) I am a season ticket holder of LSU and everytime I watch LSU and Bama play I salute Horace during the playing of the National Anthem.

So Horace, I will be in Tiger Stadium on Nov 16th and when your beloved Crimson Tide takes the field I will tip my hat

**to them and then hope my Tigers rip them a new one. Save me a fifty yard line seat. Geaux Tigahs and Roll Tide!**

## **Waredog**

I currently live near Atlanta and fly EMS Medevac helicopters.

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