

Gunner **Hill 54 (AZ)**

37th SPS, Phù Cát Air Base

by Ron Arthur

37th SPS Cobra takes over from 1041st Safeside, Phù Cát, 1967-1968

I was in the first group that was trained by Safeside. I was assigned to the mortar section, and have kept fairly good records of duty there. I found all my letters home and have tried to read all but have to put them down and take time to regroup.

I was Gunner on Hill 54 (AZ) the night ol Charlie hit Phù Cát with rockets the first time. In fact, I had just stepped out of the bunker and was walking towards the mortar pit---never being in the position to really know what it would be like, I realized instantly that we were being hit and dove for the pit and grabbed the radio. As I called in, the rounds were whooshing overhead, and as the radioman answered the first rounds impacted.

What followed from our mortars and the army and their duster crew will always be with me. We fired nearly 60-70 81mm rounds back. The worst part was those old WWII rounds we used! Sometime between the wet blanket wrapped around the hot barrel, I dropped a round down the tube and clunk... nothing happened. The silence that moment was totally unreal.

The three steps to dislodge a misfire was (1) kick the tube wait (2) if that didn't work my assistant gunner would rotate the tube, and (3) as he lifted the tube up I was to catch the round as it slid down the barrel. Well, I kicked the tube and nothing happened... we looked at each other and for extra measures I kicked again. My Assistant started to move the baseplate and my hands were starting to assume the catcher's position when the round came out. I don't think it went very far, but it didn't explode.

EOD came the next day and got rid of it for us. The whole incident that night is still fresh in my memory: those fist flashes from Charlie Island to the sound of incoming overhead to the impact behind us on the base. Hopefully, I can send you some photos from 1967-68 at Phù Cát and Cobra. I have several taken during training.

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