

# 10-60 ... CSC!

*... not an exercise*

12th SPS Phù Cát Air Base

by **Rollie G. Holt**

*This is the story about Three Security Policemen, MSgt Fernando J. Rodriquez, TSgt Claude W. Gray and SSgt Rollie G. Holt all assigned to the 12th SPS, Phù Cát AB, RVN and how they came to receive the **Airman's Medal** for an incident that occurred on April 24, 1970. This incident involved an armed gunman (a fellow Security Policeman) who placed CSC under duress and fired on friendly forces.*

*At the time of this incident, I was a Staff Sergeant assigned to the 12th SPS, Phù Cát, RVN from May 1969 to May 1970. I relate the story from my own personal perspective, the other two members who received the Airman's Medal for this action, as well as those rescued, will no doubt have their own perspective and their own stories to tell. I am going to tell you about the things that occurred leading up to the attack on CSC by a fellow Security Policeman. This story is based on my personal involvement, briefings I received on the scene as well as information from a variety of sources and my personal impressions. The haze of time may also have its effect.*

## AIRMAN'S MEDAL, PHU CAT CSC DURESS

**On April 24, 1970**, I (SSgt Rollie G. Holt) was assigned to the 12th SPS, Phù Cát Air Base Republic of Vietnam. Our Flight Chief was MSgt Fernando J. Rodriquez, our Assistant Flight Chief was TSgt Claude W. Gray. As a SSgt, I was a Sector Supervisor and some times Fire Team Leader. I knew that one of our troops had over slept and was late reporting for duty. It was my understanding that someone had to wake him up and tell him to report to his Flight Chief. My best guess was that a counseling session was in order.

A short time later, one of my tower guards needed a latrine break. I dropped off my rider to assume his post and picked up the tower guard. Alternate CSC started putting out a lot chatter about CSC being under duress and that *this was not an exercise*. CSC was not in my sector, but it was close and I knew I was the closest Fire Team. When I arrived at the scene, I was informed by one of the Security Force members, that the young man, who had over slept, had reported to CSC and then left. He walked outside to the nearest gate shack (flight line gate) and picked up the guard's M16. At that time some gate guards were armed with 38 revolvers and M16s. This young man picked up the guard's weapon and told him to *assume the position*. The gate guard, being relatively new, thought he was kidding. With M16 in hand, the young man let several rounds go, at which time the gate guard assumed the position.

On the suspect's way back into CSC, he fired once at a vehicle coming up to the gate and at someone who stuck their head out of the Operations building next to CSC. He entered the building, but was unable to get into CSC since the door was on an electronic deadbolt. Unable to enter, he fired his remaining rounds through the door. It was my understanding that the suspect then went back out side and picked up the remaining magazines (14 magazines) from the guardhouse. He then reentered the building and locked himself in a room adjacent to CSC and proceeded to call CSC, apparently indicating his intention to kill our Flight Chief.

When I got to the scene, one Airman suggested using a Heat Round from a 90 Recoilless to dislodge the gunman. Of course that would have killed everybody in the building so that was not an option. All total, there were maybe four or five people in CSC, one of which was our Flight Chief, three or four Controllors and the armed gunman.

It was my impression that the suspect had been instructed to exit the building without his weapon, but he refused. He had a plan and he was going to carry it out no matter who got in his way. I walked over to my jeep, picked up the M60 and broke off a belt containing about 75 rounds. I had spent about six or seven months on Cobra Flight that is the night shift and the M60 was something I was comfortable with. As I got to the main door of the building, our Assistant Flight Chief TSgt Gray arrived. I briefed him on what was going on and he ask what I was going to do? I told him I was intending to go in and with his revolver in hand, TSgt Gray replied, I am going with you. I also advised TSgt Gray that if I encountered the suspect and he was still armed and posing a threat it was my intention to *terminate* the duress. This sounds so cold to write, but the reality of the situation was we were about to enter a very dangerous environment, shots had been fired -- a lot of them -- and threats had been made. Once inside we had to be prepared to deal with the situation as we found it, and that could include killing the suspect.

With TSgt Gray at my side, we entered the building and found that CSC was still secure. It is my understanding that: MSgt Rodriquez had the situation in CSC well in hand. He had evidently transferred control from CSC to Alternate CSC and he had ensured that all of his people under fire were well protected. He also ensured that information concerning the situation was being fed to Alternate CSC. However in order

to exit CSC and leave the building, one had to pass by an open hallway, at the end of that hallway was the room in which the armed suspect was barricaded.

The suspect had made his intentions known; he had fired at people outside the facility, as well as, through the locked door of CSC, and he had indicated his willingness to kill our Flight Chief. Allowing him to leave CSC under these conditions was out of the question. To make matters worse, someone indicated that the room occupied by the suspect might contain such nice little devices as clay morens and hand grenades. This was never a concern; the fact that he had an M16 and fourteen magazines and his willingness to use his weapon was a matter of grave concern.

I took up a position in the hallway while TSgt Gray motioned for the personnel in CSC to exit. It took more than one gesture for CSC to open the door and exit the building. As I stood in the hallway between the suspect and those exiting the building behind me my only focus was on the hallway in front of me and the door behind which our armed suspect had barricaded himself. Once the rescue was complete, TSgt Gray and I left the building to become part of the outside perimeter. Once outside, I am not sure, but I think it was MSgt Rodriquez or TSgt Gray who introduced tear gas into the building. It may have been both of them. I dropped my M60 down on its bipod about thirty feet in front of the only door into and out of CSC. I told TSgt Gray, that if the suspect came out of the building with his M16, I was prepared to engage the suspect.

As tear gas billowed out of the front door of CSC, a single M16 came flying out through the mist. A second or two later our suspect, no longer armed, came out with his hands in the air. Someone cuffed him and took him off. He was, as I understand, sent for psychiatric evaluation and after that I am not sure what happened to him. I safed my M60 and went back to my jeep.

The guard who called for a latrine break was still there. I said, "Okay, now I will drop you off for your latrine break." He looked up at me and said, "No... you can just take me back to my tower."

During the incident, I just did what any NCO on the scene would have done. Any Security Policeman would have gone into that building to get his friends out and any Security Policeman would have stood ready to use deadly force to save the lives of others. This young suspect was not the only one in country to have encountered unusual stresses and strains. Most people were able to handle the stress of their individual situations; most of us had ways of coping, methods of releasing our stress.

With our young suspect, I think his stress and anxiety just overwhelmed him and he vented his emotions in an extremely violent manner. This was a day that MSgt Rodriquez, TSgt Gray and I (SSgt Holt) will never forget. I am sure we are all quite thankful that the situation was concluded without serious injury to anyone.

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FOOT NOTE : In later years, SSgt Holt, was named as USAFE Outstanding Security Policeman of the Year 1976 (TSgt Law Enforcement Category). In 1979, after 15 years and 4 months in the Security Police carrier field he obtained a commission and cross-trained. He earned a Master of Science Degree in Criminal Justice Administration and after retirement, he went on to teach Criminal Justice classes for a local Community College and he also worked as an Academic Advisor. As the result of a rare disorder, he is now fully retired and he lives a simple and enjoyable life with his spouse, children and grand children.

*We Take Care of Our Own*

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