

First Contact with Charlie

by Bill Scholtz, aka: "Feet"
37th SPS, Phù Cát
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I was assigned to work the swing shift (1400-2200) base security. My assignment was on the southeast area of the base adjacent to the river. There was a rice paddy in front of my tower with an eight (8) foot fence between the rice paddy and tower. My equipment included my M16, starlight scope, M60 and radio. During the hours of darkness there was a K-9 unit assigned to patrol in front of my post. Located behind my tower was a mortar pit again manned during the hours of darkness. Also assigned to the area was a three-man. SAT team.

After arriving on my post and getting all my equipment up the tower I made the necessary contacts with flight control and surveyed the area. As was customary I mounted the starlight scope on my M- 16. I would then adjust the "T" sight of the scope on the object. I figured that I would be close to whatever I shot at if the need arose.

Throughout the night I would make frequent checks with the starlight scope. I would check the rice paddy and the rivers edge for any activity. At times I would watch the K-9 unit make its rounds up and down the fence line. It was an uneventful night as usual. At about 2145 hours I decided to take one last look starlight scope before taking it off my M16 and putting it back in the case. As I started to sweep across the rice paddy, I saw three (3) shadowy figures floating across the rice paddy. It was an eerie feeling to see the three VC moving ever so slowly across the rice paddy. As I said, they appeared to be floating. All I could see of them was from about the waist up. I will never forget what I felt with my first contact with Charlie. Without taking the scope off the figures, I called on the radio that I had three unidentified subjects about 100 yards out in front of my post. Flight control acknowledged and sent the SAT team and reserve SAT team to my location.

After I made my first call, I could hear the radio in the mortar pit come alive and within a few minutes the night became day as the mortar pit restarted sending up flares. With flares in the air the VC disappeared. With the assistance of the flares I could see better than anyone responding. I started directing the SAT team to the location where I last saw the VC. Sometime during this exchange a Tech Sergeant climbed up my tower and started relaying my instructions to the SAT teams. While the TSgt gave the instructions, I kept my eye glued to the scope watching for any movement in the rice paddy. During the SAT team search for the three VC a fire fight broke out.

With the muzzle blast, the tracer and flares the starlight scope intensified the brightness. At one point the mortar pit ran out of flares. Just as they fired off the last flare, the resupply truck arrived. I could hear the frantic effort by the troops breaking open the flare cases. As the last flare burned out and before the resupplied mortar pit could get another flare up, there was about 30 seconds of darkness. That is when the VC started to move toward the river. I saw one VC at the river's edge and reported this to the TSgt who requested permission for me to fire from flight control. I was stunned when I heard the response from flight control '*permission denied.*' What a way to fight a war.

After the flares again turned the night into day, the SAT team successfully captured one of the VCs. Sometime in the early morning hours I was relieved (from duty) and the TSgt took me to the operations office where I met Mr. VC. He was wearing only a pair of shorts and had covered his body with some type of dark oil. He was armed with an AK-47. It was later learned that the reason for the infiltration was to test our ability to observe and respond. The AK-47 was mounted and placed over the doorway of Operations.

It's strange how one is aware of what is happening around them in a stressful situation. At one point I heard the troops in the mortar pit request additional flares as their supply was running low. I remember the SAT leader yelling at the VC they captured later. I remember the TSgt's (not his name) voice that was a calming effect on me. I was no hero at the time, just a scared 19 year old.

From: Don Cox

The TSgt that was referred to in the story is me. I am Don Cox, MSgt, USAF, Retired. I remember the incident very well. Just thought you might like to know who the other guy was in the tower.

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