

ATTACK ON PLEIKU AB BOMB DUMP

5-6 Jan 1967

633rd SPS

by Ben Barto (RIP)

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VSPA Life Member 1

Here are the events of 5-6 Jan 1967 attack on Pleiku AB.

I was a strike team leader for "C" flight, 633rd Security Police Squadron, Pleiku AB, the night of 5/6 Jan 1967. Somewhere around 0130 hours, our ARVN outpost out from the bomb dump on the North perimeter was overrun by the VC and 4 ARVN's were killed. The VC cut the wire right in front of the machine gun post and took it from the ARVN guard who was apparently sleeping. The VC threw many hand grenades in to the outpost huts where soldiers, women and children were living. Fortunately many did not explode.

Two Spooky birds scrambled right away. They were really burning up the ramp past us to get to the runway for a quick take off. The VC then began mortaring Pleiku AB from our own outpost. The incoming was being directed at the bomb dump and the aircraft revetment areas.

There was a Security Police strike team in our bomb dump led by SSgt Gingrich. Another SSgt and I were just west of Base Operations and the North perimeter fence line when the incoming began. Gingrich picked up the mortar flashes immediately. He began pouring machine gun fire in to the mortar emplacements in the outpost.

There were 3 dog men on the perimeter fence. They got in to the same perimeter bunker and also began firing at the outpost. They quickly ran out of ammunition and called for resupply. *(A side note. The dogs never attacked any of the dog men in the bunker nor fought among themselves all the time they were in the bunker together. Have never been able to figure that one out.)*

A squad member, A2C Brown, picked up two canisters of ammo. He ran down along the North perimeter fence to get the ammo to them. He was getting fired upon. Where the fire was coming from, I do not know. He made it safely to resupply the dog men in the bunker.

Another one of my squad members, "Lurch" (A1C Fred Krisch, VSPA Member), was manning a perimeter bunker on the North perimeter and he opened fire with the machine gun. Flight Cdr, MSGt William Welch, was directing Krisch's machine gun fire.

At II Corps Headquarters, Artillery Hill began to fire at the VC positions.* If I remember correctly, there were between 7 and 14 artillery rounds fired that night. We were taking rounds in the bomb dump before someone looked at the grid coordinates and called the artillery support off. We were later informed the VC had gotten on our landlines and called our own artillery in on us.

SSgt Gingrich was seriously hurt when he tried to get out of the bomb dump during the mortaring and shelling. He was on one of the ammo storage mounds. He forgot where he was and ran off the top of the mound and fell 10-12 feet, seriously hurting his back. With the shelling going on, no one was able to go help him. He did suffer serious back injuries that caused him to be relieved from duty for quite awhile.



Spooky as now airborne real quickly, and began illumination. They reported they had the enemy spotted and wanted to open fire with the Gatling guns. TSgt Roy Clark, C Flight Assistant Flight Cdr., was working in CSC. He gave the order to open fire. MSgt Welch picked up the transmission and refused them permission because of the friendly forces trying to escape from the outposts. Also, there was a very grave danger the North and East areas of the Air Base would be sprayed. There were many security police and augmentees deployed in that area, plus other base personnel scrambling to safety.

At the same time the VC overran our outpost, they attacked the army helicopter base at Camp Holloway and blew up the fuel dump. Holloway was able to get the choppers in the air and they began white phosphorus rocket strafing runs along the Northeast and East perimeters of Pleiku AB, the only possible exit route for the VC.

During the attack, the base commander came on the radio and informed MSgt Welch he had two Hobos (A1Es) low on fuel that he had to get down. There were no other bases in the area where they could be diverted to before running out of fuel. He asked Welch if the incoming rounds and fire were suppressed enough to let the A1E's land. Welch let him know it was okay for them to come on in. They landed safely.

The mortar fire subsided and we remained on continuous alert until daylight when patrols began to sweep the area. No dead VC were found nor none captured in the outpost or perimeter sweep.

The return fire by SSgt Gingrich, the dog men and A1C Krisch, prevented a VC penetration to get to the revetments where the A1E's were parked and blow them up. We were on the sweep of the revetment areas, supply yards and adjacent areas after daylight.

A large number of casualties from Camp Holloway soon began arriving after daylight and were being loaded on two C-130's for MED-EVAC.

One of our spotter planes was working a ways out from the East perimeter and called in that he had VC spotted. He was dropping markers to let us know where they were. We had SP's patrolling in that area and they began a search. They were able to locate the markers, but unable to find the enemy.

There was one comical event that came out of the sweep. SSgt John K. Gill was in that sweep off the East perimeter and we lost contact with him. There was an immediate search and they soon found him. He was stuck in the mud and unable to free himself. He somehow lost his radio and was unable to contact anyone for help. He was lifted out the mud, but the whereabouts of the radio is unknown to this day.

We finally ceased operations and were relieved by the day shift. I can remember a group of us going to NCO Club on Artillery Hill for breakfast. The adrenaline was really still flowing in all of us and all of us were still shaking quite a bit. Some were on the verge of tears (including me) elated about the fact that we came out of that attack alive!

After 36 years, this is all I can remember about 5/6 Jan 1967.

BEN BARTO, SMSgt, USAF (Retired)

**** Attempts to have US artillery and Navy forces fire upon itself by English speaking VC/NVA are documented for Pleiku AB, Jan 1967 as follows:***

[Courtesy of <http://www.asalives.org/ASAONLINE/cll64.htm>]

HEADQUARTERS

UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM

APO San Francisco 96222

MAC J343 15 September 1967

SUBJECT: Counterinsurgency Lessons Learned No. 64:

3.(CMHA) VC/NVA ICD ATTEMPTS TO GAIN INFORMATION:

a. A radio operator, station call LITTLE JOE ALFA, received a voice transmission in English from station LIMELIGHT requesting a communications check and asked what time the helicopters were departing in the morning. LITTLE JOE ALFA replied "0730". After checking his schedule the LITTLE JOE ALFA operator found he was in error on the time and called LIMELIGHT to correct the error. The LIMELIGHT operator reported that the LIMELIGHT transmitter had not been used during the night and that he had made no such request. Two days later the bogus LIMELIGHT station again requested operational information. On this occasion LITTLE JOE ALFA requested authentication and the bogus station was unable to comply.

b. Two attempts to gain information using telephone taps were made at Camp Holloway, Pleiku in January 1967 as follows:

(1) The caller speaking in excellent English with a slight Spanish accent called all the bunkers and stated, "Hot food is being prepared for the men in the guard bunkers. How many men are there in each bunker and how many bunkers are there?" One of the bunkers started to answer when a guard at another bunker broke in stating, "don't answer! If that's Vega (the commander of the relief) he should know how many men and bunkers. " The caller broke off transmission. A check was made with SP4 Vega and found that he had not made the call. The

people in the bunkers, however, felt the caller's voice sounded exactly like Vega's and that the caller must have been very adept at imitation.

(2) At bunker number one in the POL yard a telephone caller, speaking in fluent English, reported that food was coming down shortly, wanted to know which bunker this was and how many men were in it. The guard at bunker one answered him. The guard became suspicious, however, when the caller asked how many men were in the other bunkers and the caller hung up. The guard called the commander of the relief to verify the previous call and was told that no such call had been made. A check of the telephone line leading to bunker number one revealed that someone had tapped the line.

c. Two additional deception attempts were made by telephone at Camp Holloway when a caller impersonated a SFC assigned to post headquarters. The caller identified himself on both occasions and spoke in a clear normal conversation tense and speed. He attempted to have the Sergeant of the Guard post one man on top of each bunker in the defense perimeter and to have the perimeter lights turned off. The text of the message did not appear to be prepared speech for when asked several questions, his response was reasonable and undisturbed indicating a thorough command of the language. The attempted ruse did not work, however, because in each case the Officer of the Day was notified. The SFC concerned was in the mess hall at the time of each call and stated that he did not place the calls.

d. A US Navy ship on Market Time received a radio message over Fleet Common from a station identifying itself as an aircraft with a possible fire mission at coordinates 975228 (no letters given). The only audible portion of the station's call sign were the digits 098. The station transmitted again asking (in English with oriental accent) "Are you a Market Time patrol ship?" The transmission was not understood and the station repeated the question. The ship replied "Roger wait out". The ship attempted to contact 098 five times to ask for authentication but 098 failed to respond.

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