



Air Force News

Vol. 2, No 48 FRIDAY, DEC. 9, 1966 TAN SON NHUT AB, VIETNAM



AWAITING FURTHER ATTACK — Air Force air policemen A2C Robert B. Kane of Scottsdale, Ariz. (left), and AB Alvin W. Curie, Grand Rapids, Mich., stand ready at their post shortly after the Dec. 4 Communist attack on Tan Son Nhut AB. Airman Kane holds a captured enemy .30 caliber rifle while Airman Curie mans his M-60 machine gun. Both members of the 377th Air Police Squadron at Tan Son Nhut. Airmen Kane and Curie defended their post, positioned on the inner defense perimeter, all through the attack. (U.S. Air Force Photo)

APs Smash VC Attacks Twice At Tan Son Nhut

SAIGON — Communist forces early on the morning of Dec. 4 launched a combined mortar and ground attack on the Tan Son Nhut AB, located on the outskirts of Saigon.

Air Force officials reported light damage to U.S. aircraft. American casualties were also light.

The attack started at 1:20 a.m. with a series of mortar hits on the flight line from a weapons position about two-and-a-half kilometers north of the base. Other rounds were launched by the enemy from a second position four kilometers west of the base. Approximately

40 rounds exploded within the base perimeter.

Armed helicopters, AC-47 Dragon-ships, A-1H Skyraiders and O-1E Bird Dog spotter planes joined forces to silence the two enemy positions. Flare-ship crews dropped 763 flares during the pre-down attack.

Sporadic mortar firing by the enemy continued until after 3:30 a.m. as an enemy ground force attempted a penetration of the base.

Air Force air police reaction teams and U.S. Army troops, along with Vietnamese forces, met the enemy with small arms fire. By daybreak the reaction teams had battled the enemy troops into a section in the northwest corner of the base, and mopping up operations continued until 8:40 a.m.

During the encounter, 18 Communists were killed and four others captured.

The morning's attack was the second this year. On April 13, Communists fired 75 rounds of 82mm mortar and 75mm recoilless rifle shells onto the base.

The April attack lasted 20 minutes. One mortar shell hit a fuel storage tank during the engagement, causing a fire which burned for nearly three days, before being brought under control by Air Force firemen.

Sentry Dogs Flushed Out Armed Foe

SAIGON — At approximately 8 p.m. Dec. 4, in a Vietnamese cemetery nearly 2,000 yards northeast of the west end of Tan Son Nhut's main runway, inside the perimeter of the base, a U.S. Air Force policeman and his sentry dog flushed out an armed Viet Cong terrorist. The enemy soldier was killed by the air policeman.

A quick reaction team was called for and swept the area. No further contact was made. Sentry dogs were again introduced and discovered four more Viet Cong who, when found, began firing. They were killed by the U.S. guards.

On a third sweep with the sentry dogs, they found four Viet Cong who had been in hiding underground. In the exchange which followed, they, too, were killed by the U.S. air policemen.

All nine of the enemy killed possessed small arms or automatic rifles. They are believed to be part of the force which attacked the base the previous night.

The defending force was from the 377th Air Police Squadron. There were no fatalities among the U.S. forces. A2C Robert A. Thorneburg, the guard who first found the VC, received a shoulder wound in the ensuing fire fight. His dog was also wounded, but not seriously.

The action terminated about midnight, although flare-dropping aircraft stayed over the base until dawn.

General Harris Says 'Well Done'

Personal for Lt. Gen. William W. Momyer from Gen. Hunter Harris.

Have just received a report from your headquarters that immediate reaction by air base security personnel of your command was successful in repulsing attempts by Viet Cong to infiltrate the base perimeter and inflict destruction.

I was also informed that aircraft of your command were successful in immediately locating, and bringing under fire, sites from which mortar attacks came.

This highly effective reaction by defensive forces blunted the Viet Cong attack and resulted in 18 VC killed, two wounded and two captured.

Please extend a "Well Done" to all concerned.

(See next page for new and important information from A2C Robert B. Kane and A2C Robert W. Valentine Jr.)

I just now spoke to A2C Robert B. Kane on the telephone and had a very good conversation with him. (Mar 21, 2009)

Kane has related to me the following information.

Kane was not in the same Delta Bunker-11 as A2C Alvin W. Curie on the night of Dec 4, 1966.

Kane relates that it was A2C Robert Valentine Jr. who was in the bunker with Curie.

Kane relates that there was a third man in the bunker with Curie and Valentine. This third man is the nephew of a TV actor, John McIntire of the old "Wagon Train" televisions series. John was the trail boss.

Kane relates that the men of Delta Sector referred to themselves as the "Delta Bro's."

Kane relates that a Sgt Sherry was the NCOIC of Delta Sector.

Kane's buddy was A1C James A. Norman.

Kane relates that his time frame is Jun or Jul 1966 – Jun or Jul 1967.

Kane relates that he came from the Philippines to Tan Son Nhut.

Kane relates that he had a shotgun on the night of Dec 4, 1966 and ran out of ammo. He then picked up the enemy's rifle, an SKS and used it.

Kane relates that the officers of the 377th Air Police Squadron wanted to present Lt General William W. Momyer, Commander, 7th Air Force that particular SKS that is in the attached newspaper article. That it had been framed and presented to Lt Gen Momyer.

Kane relates that years later, he contacted General Momyer, to see if he could get the SKS back but that General Momyer had give it to the USAF Museum. (Can we say, "Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio)

(Penley's note from an email with A2C Robert Valentine is on next page)

(Penley's note from A2C Robert Valentine's email)

Inside Delta-11 Bunker on the night of Dec 4, 1966 was:

A2C Robert Valentine, ranking airman of Delta Bunker-11

A3C Alvin W. Curie

**A3C John P. Walker, first night on duty in Vietnam, arrived at Delta
Bunker-11 around midnight**

Valentine wrote in his email:

It was the 377th Air Police Squadron SOP to stand outside their bunkers as on previous occasions our superior's could arrive on post without being properly challenged.

Curie was on the far left of the bunker, Walker in the center and I was on the far right. We immediately responded by running around the left side of the bunker and diving head first into the bunker from the rear.

I remember my helmet getting knocked off as I was diving into the bunker because I was following so closely behind Walker. I had to go back out of the bunker to retrieve my helmet and upon jumping back in I ordered Curie to take the M-60 position which he was already in the process of doing and Walker to take the left side.

I remember Curie yelling "they're coming across the line (runway)."

I took up the middle position so that I could assist Curie with the M-60, fire at the enemy with my M-16, maintain radio communications with CSC and fire slap flares as needed.

I remember communicating on the radio several times with CSC throughout the battle advising them of our status.

I remember informing CSC in one of those calls that I believed we were about to be overrun if we didn't receive backup immediately.

In actuality that back up, our sector SRT (Swift Reaction Team) had already been dispatched and was pinned down with intense enemy fire behind and

to the left of our bunker.

I remember Curie having trouble getting the M-60 to fire and I remember looking at the ammo belt to be sure it wasn't twisted.

I remember ordering Curie to use his M-16 because we were not stopping the advance of the enemy with just two M-16's firing. Curie got one shot off with his M-16 and it jammed.

I remember him yelling "my gun's jammed!"

And I remember more yelling at him than giving him an order, to go back to the M-60 when he couldn't clear his M-16 because by this time all hell was breaking loose with mortar and rocket fire along with automatic weapons fire and the fact that some of the enemy of what appeared to be 30 to 40 troops, had broken through the concertina wire.

Fortunately for us, all but one the enemy failed to realize that all they had to do is go a few yards further to the left of our post and they could have gone around the concertina wire.

That enemy troop, by the way, advanced all the way from the end of the concertina wire on the taxiway to about 15 or 20 yards to our left bunker with a rocket launcher that he was about to fire at us when he was taken out by one of the guys on the SRT.

I remember the box of ammo getting knocked over as Curie turned to go back to the M-60 but I do not remember Curie working through it to find the other end.

I remember sending up the slap flares using the palm of my hand. I also remember how painful my hand was the next several days.

I remember firing at an enemy soldier less than 10 yards away. He was in a prone position on the ground to the right front of our bunker and I could see the blue burst of his automatic weapon as he was firing at us.

I remember firing at him and seeing the dirt kick up about a yard or so in front of him I fired again and again saw the dirt kick up in front of him only closer. I fired a third time and I swear to God I could hear the bullet enter

him as it hit. He never fired again.

After the attack of 4-5 Dec and the 3 days of sweeps that followed to be sure we got all remaining NVA and VC off the base, Curie and I were permanently assigned to the machine gun post because of the way we handled ourselves during the attack.

I convinced my sergeant that was more of a punishment than a reward so he finally relented and assigned us to other posts.

I do remember that several nights after the attack in the early morning hours just before dawn, a large and very dense fog bank came in that was thick you couldn't see five feet in front of you.

Every man on our flight volunteered to stay on post until the fog lifted. After just having gone through a ground attack that literally took days to complete, sitting in that fog was scary as hell.

Curie and I talked about the attack several times while we were pulling machine gun bunker duty and we never could figure out why the M-60 failed to fire at first.

There was never a mention on either of our parts about the possibility of the belt being put in backwards.

To this day, I believe it would be impossible to do that. I believe the links that hold the bullets together to form a belt would have made it impossible to fully close and lock down the breach.

It would be interesting to know for sure. I know that the breach was fully closed and locked because when Al and I first arrived on post, Al handed me the ammo belt and I seated the belt in the weapons and locked down the breach.

We did not cock the weapon and chamber a round because it was against our SOP.

In my mind and I feel certain, in the mind of A3C Walker, if he's still with us, Airman Curie fully deserved the award of the Silver Star which he received as a result of his valiant actions while under intense enemy fire on the

night of 4-5 Dec 1966.

Even though he had never experienced hostile fire before and in the face of the fact that the M-60 machine gun he was assigned too had failed to operate and that his own personal weapon, an M-16 rifle had jammed upon firing it's first cartridge, he had the composure of thought and the tenacity of being to go back to the M-60 machine gun and clear it and make it operational.

It was that fact and the fact that the two other Airmen with him fought in such a manner that it bought Airman Curie the time to make the M-60 machine gun operational which prevented the enemy from over-running our post.

Once Airman Curie started firing the M-60, the enemy dropped to the ground and fired intense automatic weapons fire at us from those positions.

With few exceptions, they advanced no further. Upon recognizing they were under both M-60 and M-16 fire from our post, approximately two dozen or more of the enemy broke off their engagement with us and went further down the MLR and broke through there.

I know this for a fact because I saw the enemy still behind the concertina wire run away from our post to the right, not back across the runway.

We continued to be engaged with the enemy who had gotten through the concertina wire until most all of them were dead or so severely wounded the could no longer present an active threat.

It was definitely Airman Curie's machine gun fire that was the primary cause for the success of this battle. Without it, we were simply out numbered and out gunned.

I remember to this day, making a decision that has remained alive in my mind and haunted me to this day.

Toward the end of our engagement with the enemy forces directly in front of us when they were all but completely neutralized. Airman Curie, Airman Walker and myself saw what appeared to be uniformed Vietnamese

soldiers running toward the runway to the right of our post across the delta sector MLR, approximately 150 yards away.

Curie turned his M-60 on them but before he could fire, I ordered him not to fire. He disagreed with my decision and I again ordered him not to fire because we could not make positive identification of those troops and because it would be firing across our designated line of fire with a weapon armed with tracer rounds and I did not want to get into a firefight with friendly forces, (our own Delta Sector Airmen) or possibly South Vietnamese Soldiers.

As it turned out, it was the North Vietnamese Forces leaving the flight line area for the cover of the boondocks on the far side of the runway.

Alvin Curie was my friend! His bunk was right across from mine in our hut.

We walked to duty together more times than I can count. He used to like to torment the night shifters of the Engineering group whose hut was about two up from ours.

They were still trying to sleep when we were heading for guard mount so he'd take a stick and rattle it along the side of their hut.

When they'd start cussing and threatening us, he'd yell back at the top of his voice, "YOU CAN'T TELL ME, CAUSE I ALREADY KNOW!"

Then we'd make fast tracks out of there before somebody would actually come after us, laughing as we went.

I can tell you much more about Al but this post is not the place for it.

Respectfully,

**Robert W. Valentine Jr.
Former A2C, USAF**