



Tet: 1968 -- Tân Sơn Nhứt

by Denis Cook (RIP: 21 May 2017), USAF;
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Charlie: I See you in my dreams ...

As a member of the 377th Security Police at Tân Sơn Nhứt, Vietnam, during Tet 1968, I worked a bunker several towers down from the 051 Bunker at Gate 051. Tân Sơn Nhứt gates were numbered, 051, 055, 057, etceteras. It's Tet 1968, and my combat experience was zip, and Charlie wanted to kick-ass right into my bunker.

The night of the Tet Offensive was a shocker for everyone. I couldn't believe that it was happening! This was Saigon, *Paris of the Orient*. From my first new-guy-day they told me we would *never* get hit at Tân Sơn Nhứt. This must be somebody's idea of a sick joke, I had thought. Doesn't Charlie know he's supposed to be in the jungle, or a nice rice paddy, or somewhere else? Right? WRONG!!

The attack started as I watched from my bunker in Alpha Sector. First, rockets hit Bravo Sector. Then a Freedom Bird started lifting off the runway. As he climbed over the fence line in Echo Sector, I saw a curtain of red and green tracers rise from the ground to the Freedom Bird. Thousands of tracers told me just how many VC and NVA were kicking at our door. I heard on the radio that the fence line was penetrated, and positions in Echo and Alpha Sectors were overrun. 051 Bunker was hit hard and fighting to repel the attackers. Then my radio croaked and died and I was cutoff from the world. I didn't learn until later that 051 Bunker was overrun and Sergeants Cyr, Fisher, Hebron, and Mills were killed in valiant defense of their post.

Scared? You bet! My knees were knocking louder than a jackhammer, and my teeth were chattering so hard it's a wonder they didn't shatter. I didn't lose my cookies, but my bladder and bowels were taking on a life of their own. It didn't matter that the 377th Combat SPS was at 100% alert, the 25th Division and the 199th Infantry Brigade were *taking names*, and many more units were engaging the enemy.

When the first choppers arrived, my spirits soared, and I knew we then had a *FIGHTING CHANCE*. With each pass of a gunship I let out a cheer! Every time a gunship fired a rocket in to the enemy I shouted *GET'EM!* Every time a chopper took a hit and went down another took its place. Choppers and Security Police--we were in a still desperate fight for our lives, and we were in it together, *to win*, whatever it took.

Heavy automatic firing chattered for several minutes. All I knew was that I had a radio that didn't work, there was no one within actual shooting distance, and Snoopy was on R & R, so we would be without illumination. For me, there was only total darkness with combat raging all about with everyone on the planet trying to kill someone else.

Then I saw a shadow--*no*--two shadows, running from the fence line, *STRAIGHT TOWARD MY BUNKER!* They were running hard and fast. Only the lights on the fence line silhouetting the two figures betrayed their rapid approach. I had the two bobbing outlines glued in my weapon's sight. I was really SCARED! But *they* were in my sights and *dead meat*, and Charlie wasn't getting past my bunker. No time to think, only time to react: "*HALT, WHO GOES THERE?*" My God! I can't believe I actually made that stateside challenge! *Blow the commie VC away--you idiot*, some forgotten training sergeant screamed in my mind. *Lock and load, ready on the right, ready on the left, ready on the firing line!* I started to squeeze off a clip and then I heard, "DON'T SHOOT! DON'T SHOOT! IT'S US!"

Wait a minute, who's "*us*"? Besides, those VC sure spoke excellent English. But it was enough to make me hesitate. I didn't fire. Before I knew what was happening, the two shadows dove into my bunker. They have no weapons and are wearing jungle fatigues. No VC in his right mind would wear this stuff. And these guys are shaking more than I am.

I can't believe this, its two Air Force dudes from the Quonset hut at the Transient Ammo Dump. I was so close to giving these two Air dudes the lick. What's wrong with them??? Can't they see I was about to *do* them both--that they were a half-ounce squeeze from death?

And then the anger set in--*not at them*--at myself. I *didn't* blow their butts away. I *failed* to do my job. *If* they were VC, I would have gone home early in a metal box. My hesitation had caused me to jeopardize all the positions behind me. As it was, several in my unit were KIA that night. I could have been responsible for many others if *they* had been Viet Cong or NVA.

Tet raged on for days. And when it was over, Uncle Ho's clock was cleaned but good! I never saw the two Air dudes again. I think that the 188th with their APC's that showed up the next day wouldn't have blinked an eye before swatting their foolish lives away.

I remember a memorial at the 051 Bunker a few days after Tet. But what stuck with me, was the military salute for Sergeants Cyr, Fisher, Hebron, and Mills: An Air Force flyby with *fast-movers* and an Army flyby with Gunships. Those moments of honoring our own will live with me, forever.

Thirty years later, logic still fails to counter *the dreams*. Those two fools ran through K-9, 50-Cals, and M16s loaded for the bear! Tet was the beginning of my PTSD's. In my dreams, I have fought more VC in my bunker than Uncle Ho sent down the trail on a good month. Guilt of what failing to do my job *could have* resulted in for those who depended on me has stayed with me these many years, and became my worst nightmare. But I deal with it, knowing **The Wall** was cheated of two fewer names than the *friendly fire* my id still calls for when I sleep--even if they were two fools running in the Tet night, and knocking on heaven's door.

In memory of those Combat Air Police that were Killed In Action during Tet 1968:

			(Augmentes)			

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