

Shaking Hands with The Enemy

Tân Sơn Nhứt Air Base

377th SPS

© 2001 by Peter Coxon, MSgt Ret.,

377th APS/SPS

1966-1977

SHAKING HANDS WITH THE ENEMY

After the Dec 4, 1966 Sapper Attack on Tân Sơn Nhứt Air Base, we of the 377th Air Police Sqd were all pretty proud of ourselves having engaged and defeated the largest Viet Cong force, at that time, to attack a major USAF installation.

Everyone had stories of what they did or were doing at the time and during the attack. I'll never forget a K-9 Cops story that he told me about a week after the attack. This Airman was only about 5 foot 5 tall and kind of slender. He was posted on one of the Alpha K-9 posts when the VC emerged from the Ditch just across the main runway--and the crap hit the fan. He said the VC were all around him and he opened up on them with his M16. A VC threw a grenade, which detonated close by his dog and the dog, as he said, went crazy and he let it go.

He did not have any control over the released dog when he did this. He called into CSC and let them know (which I heard on the radio) and proceeded to expend all his ammo at the shadows of the VC. Without any ammo left the Airman didn't know what to do, as the VC seemed to be everywhere. He ran to the ditch and went down into it and started rolling over in the mud and water of the ditch, covering himself from head to toe with mud.

He lay there in the ditch for awhile and a VC ran right past him, not noticing him lying there. He then decided to get up and head in the opposite direction of the VC. Just as he got up and took a couple of steps, he came face to face with another VC. The VC looked at him and being small in stature thought he was a comrade. Without thinking he put out his hand and the VC took it thinking he was one of them, and he shook the VC's hand for a second. The Airman then grabbed the VC and threw him into the mud and water, and tried to drown him. They were struggling and the VC managed to yell something, and the VC that had past him earlier heard this and started back down the ditch in his direction.

Seeing the VC approaching the K-9 handler jumped up and started running down the ditch in the opposite direction through the mud and water. The VC that he had shook hands and wrestled with had gotten up and apparently could not find his AK-47, as he took a grenade and threw it at the K-9 cop. The grenade landed just behind him in the mud and water which muffled the blast of the explosion, which he said only made him run faster.

After what he said seemed like 10 miles of running (in record time) he left the ditch and saw a Security Alert Team (SAT) approximately 100 yards away and started running toward them yelling and waving. Upon reaching the jeep he dove into the back, happy to be alive!

I later talked with members of the (SAT) team who stated that they saw the mud-covered man running toward them and thought he was a VC, and were about to open up on him, when he yelled something and they realized he was an American.

Peter W. Coxon
MSgt Ret
377th AP/SP Sqd
1966-1977

We Take Care of Our Own