

VIETNAM

Tuy Hòa Air Base

31st SPS

by Dick Larsen

(1967-1968)

"Official History of the 31st TFW, Tuy Hòa AB"

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Period of June-September

NOTE: Excerpted from Chapter 6 of the official history of the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing, Tuy Hòa AB, Vietnam, July-September 1968. Written by SSgt Orval R. (Dick) Larsen, 31 TFW Historian. Originally Classified As Secret, Now Unclassified.

CHAPTER VI SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

Introduction:

Normally the *special activities* chapter is reserved for items which do not logically fit into any of the preceding five. This quarter the special activities chapter is a unique record of events at th. For the first time in the history of the base, the enemy brought the war to Tuy Hòa as the base was attacked by a Viet Cong sapper squad in the early hours of July 29.

Tuy Hòa personnel awoke at 1:37 a.m. on the 29th of July to the sound of explosions from the flight line area. Rushing out of their living quarters they could see huge tongues of flame shooting skyward accompanied by billowing clouds of black smoke The war had come to th.

The enemy sapper units were divided into two teams. It appeared that they penetrated the perimeter before **Tiger Flight** came on duty and lay between the two runways from two to four hours. The first knowledge of their presence was when an aircraft exploded on the flight line at 1:37 a.m.

Personnel in the mobile tower observed a force of 15 to 20 men moving near their area. The immediate explosions were thought at first to be mortars but were later determined to be satchel charges. The first explosions set aflame two HC-130P Hercules aircraft belonging to the 39th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron.

A fire department staff of about 16 men immediately went to the scene, and was augmented by the rest of the staff (40 total) shortly thereafter. Meanwhile, other enemy charges were going off.

While fire fighting teams quelled the two major fires there was a continuing threat that aircraft in adjoining revetments might begin burning. Personnel from 834th Air Division's Detachment 3 were on the flight line and under the direction of the wing commander started engines, moving adjoining C-130 aircraft out of danger.

As the firemen fought to control the raging blazes, the Viet Cong sappers were moving into a defensive position heading for the perimeter. The **[31st] Security Police** responding to the attack began a four hour battle with the invaders.

The scene throughout the battle was eerie with AC-47 Dragon ships providing flare illumination for the defenders and invaders alike. Helicopter gunships from the Army's Phu Hiep base, south of the Air Base, were on the scene in minutes providing rocket and minigun covering fire. In addition, many fire teams were organized to move onto the perimeter but none were needed. As the battle subsided, personnel waited for sunrise to evaluate the damage.

A summary of the damage showed that: two **HC-130P aircraft** were completely destroyed, valued by their commander at four million dollars each. Six C-130 aircraft were damaged in degrees varying from major to minor. The base C-47 had received damage requiring six to eight weeks of repair. One **F-100** belonging to the 136th TFS had been seriously damaged.

The effect of the combined firepower unleashed against the enemy had taken its toll. A total of nine enemy were killed: four in a sandy area a fraction mile west of the maintenance area; another five were killed together seeking an exit through the perimeter fence adjoining a village of natives that work the area rice paddies. All of the nine members were dressed in similar fashion, that is wearing shorts, sandals (or barefoot) and a cloth over their head which could be pulled down to cover their eyes. The members carried a bag on their left side containing satchel charges, grenades or B-40 rocket parts. Some of the men carried B-40 rocket launchers while two of them were armed with AK-47 automatic weapons.

One or the enemy killed, possibly their leader, carried a Chinese automatic pistol in his right hand and of the nine, he was the only person carrying a piece of paper with instructions.

Concurrent with the attack, the ARVN soldiers killed two enemy in the area and the Republic of Korea troops killed four enemy. The conclusion was that those six men and the nine killed on the base were a part of the same unit.

Explosive ordnance disposal personnel were busy the next day as they searched the nine bodies and destroyed or safed the following enemy ordnance:

- 11 satchel charges totaling 18 pounds of high explosives
- 19 stick grenades of both offensive and defensive nature
- one type 50 chicom rocket launcher and rocket (B-40)
- one type 50 chicom rocket launcher
- Bangalore torpedoes totaling 10 pounds of high explosive
- five clips of AK-47 ammunition
- two clips of 7.62 chicom automatic pistol ammunition
- two AK-47 assault rifles
- one Chicom 7.62 automatic pistol, type 51

The remarkable part of the whole attack was that only three military personnel were wounded. A crew chief from the 136th TFW was seriously wounded by shrapnel from a B-40 rocket which hit his aircraft and was evacuated to the 91st Medical Evacuation Hospital at Phu Hiep. Two other personnel received minor injuries.

The attack was the first trial under fire of the base disaster control program. While the majority of the facets of the plan operated as programmed, several portions were found to be lacking precise instructions as to the defense warning signal activation and response to this signal. Other problem areas included lack of communication with base personnel or announcement of security posture and all clear condition.

Several recommendations were made to correct these problem areas including the immediate installation of a case public system and the installation of telephones in all bunkers. It was also recommended that the local Armed Forces Vietnam Network representative be added to the Disaster Control Center team to provide base personnel with a running account of the situation over the AM radio. In addition, changes were made to the operations plan clarifying responsibilities and responses.

The communications problems identified during the attack on the base were in the process of correction at the end of the quarter. A base-wide public address system dubbed "Project Giant Voice" was rapidly taking shape. The project consisted of a series of large speakers mounted on 50 foot poles situated in seven strategic areas.

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