

## **The Battle of Bien Hoa, Bunker Hill-10 Biên Hòa Air Base**

**LTC Kenton D. Miller,  
Squadron Commander, 3rd Security Police Squadron**

**TET 31 January 1968**

**Dawn Arrival: 101st Airborne Division, 2nd Btl, 506th Infantry Reg.**



BATTLE OF BIEN HOA -- A time exposure captures the action at Bien Hoa AB when the Viet Cong recently attempted to penetrate the base. Blurred streaks to the right-middle are flares dropped from an AC-47. Ellipse of light with diagonal lines running to the center of the action is minigun fire from an Army Huey Cobra gunship. Focal point of all the fire is Bunker Hill-10 and the areas around it at the east-end of the Bien Hoa runway. Enemy forces were stopped by the forces of the Air Force's 3rd Security Police Squadron, Vietnamese security police and Army gunships. The enemy lost 153 men killed and 25 suspects detained in their attempt to storm the air base. (USAF PHOTO)

**0617 hours, 31 Jan 1968,**

**LTC Kent Miller, Squadron Commander, 3rd SPS.**

Finally, after the sun came up and it was about 0617 hours or so, the 101st Airborne Division, 2nd Btl, 506th Infantry Reg.\* came out with one M60 Patton main battle tank (MBT) and a platoon from the MP Check Point. They started down the road toward Bunker Hill-10 but stopped about 30 yards from the QC house [east of Bunker Hill-10, at the corner of the MLR where it turned towards the 101st ABG area along the MLR. Fighting [outside the east end of the Air Base] was intense and they lost two APCs, and the lone M60 Tank took 19 hrs and lost two crewmembers, but remained in the battle. Then, in

\* Read: 101st Airborne Division, 2nd Battalion, 506th Infantry Reg. "*Officers Daily Log*": Hourly contacts during Tet 31 Jan 1968 attack east of Biên Hòa Air Base; and dawn arrival at Air Base.

the confusion of VC running, smoke, QCs in the area, and explosions, the tank turned its 105mm gun toward Bunker Hill-10 as if they were going to fire at us. That did not go over well with us, and I called CSC/LED to report this, and tell them to contact the Army and have them go back into their area.

After what seemed like a very long time the Army troops and tank moved back into the 101st Airborne Division base camp area, and did not come out again to support us, thank God.

*The following excerpts are courtesy of:*

*USAF Police Alumni Association: The Battle for Biên Hòa Air Base: Tết 1968 [which includes excerpt from "Defenders of the Force: The History of the United States Air Force Security Forces 1947-2006" by James Lee Conrad and Jerry M. Bullock.]*

“The Arming/de-arming pad [near Bunker Hill-10] was taken on next. Since the Americans did not possess any heavy weapons, the Quan Canh [QC] brought up a 57mm recoilless rifle and trained it on the pad where one VC with a rocket launcher could be seen in the open. After a QC call to surrender over a loudspeaker went unheeded, helicopter gunships strafed the position and the recoilless rifle turned the wooden armorer’s shack into splinters. As the VC fled the position, they were shot down.”

During a sweep, “Some mortar and rocket rounds were fired at the SPs in a “feeble attempt” to cover the enemy withdrawal, but when the sweep ended four hours later, 139 enemy bodies were counted between the perimeter fence and the de-arming pad. Twenty-five prisoners were taken.

SSgt Piazza and his men at the bunker did their part by lighting the elephant grass in front of the bunker on fire with slap flares, and capturing two VC who popped up with their hands in the air--as the blaze reached their hiding places. Although enemy stragglers were still being hunted down two days later, the battle of Biên Hòa Air Base was essentially over.”

Capt Martin E. “Marty” Strones, C Flight commander, posted Piazza and four other SPs on top of the bunker to observe the battle going on outside the base. This battle was being fought between the enemy and the Army’s 101st Airborne Division’s, 2nd Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, which had been brought in at dawn by helicopter, and Troop A of the 9th Infantry Division's, 3rd Squadron, 5th Cavalry, which had run the Highway 1 gauntlet. In a fight lasting most of the day, the Army cut off and ejected the attackers from [outside] the eastern end of the airfield.

Troop A lost two APCs in the fighting, and its lone tank took 19 hits and lost two crews, but was still operational when the battle was over.

[LTC] Miller and the “Thundering Third” lost two killed and ten wounded, but had held the base against a determined enemy attack until Army forces could arrive. SSgt Pete Piazza and the men at Bunker Hill 10 were finally relieved around 1800 hours, but not

before having to endure another scare. After the destruction of the enemy at the de-arming pad shack, the QC recoilless rifle crew set up their weapon on top of Bunker Hill 10.

Finally, after the sun came up, about 0617 hours or so, as the battle outside the base was winding down, the 101st Airborne Division, 2nd Btl, 506th Infantry Reg., came out with one M60 Patton main battle tank (MBT) and a platoon from the MP Check Point. The Army M60 Patton Tank and platoon of soldiers advanced down the road toward Bunker Hill-10, but stopped about thirty yards from the QC house that Charlie had taken over [earlier]. The QC house was east of Bunker Hill-10 along the MLR, at the corner where it turned toward the 101st ABG area.

SSgt Piazza was alarmed to see the M60 tank stop and turn its turret and train its gun on Bunker Hill-10. Piazza and his men had no direct communication with the tank, but were in contact with CSC/LED and now they were “screaming in our radios, telling the Army to go back in to their base, “Because they’re aiming at us and we don’t want to get blown up.”

Piazza was particularly concerned that, “If they mistake a QC ...for a [North] Vietnamese, we are dead in the water.” After some breathless moments, the tank commander got the word and the tank and its infantry support withdrew. Miller later angrily ordered the QCs out of the area altogether because, “We can’t tell the difference between the good guys and the bad guys.”



*Battle of Bien Hoa, Bunker Hill-10, 31 January 1968. Composite 2016, by Don Poss.*