

# The Battle of Bunker Hill 10

2017, Compiled and Edited by Don Poss



## TẾT - 31 JANUARY 1968

### Biên Hòa Airbase, RVN

by, William Pete Piazza (SMSgt, Ret.) 3rd Security Police Squadron

#### BUNKER HILL-10, Tết 1968

##### SSgt Piazza (SMSgt Ret., Silver Star), Biên Hòa AB, 3rd Security Police Squadron:

The Tết 1968 attack against Biên Hòa Airbase began at 0300 hours on the 31st of January with a sudden ferocious rocket attack.

Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army regulars were in the wire and swarming all over. Bunker Hill-10 was getting pounded by two infantry battalions and one reinforced infantry company of the VC 5th Division's, 274th Viet Cong Regiment.\* Their goal was to overrun Bunker Hill-10, assault the flightline and aircraft, and hold the air base as long as possible. If the 274th VC Regiment could hold Biên Hòa Air Base, and their comrades could hold Tan Son Nhut Air Base — Saigon could fall. Meanwhile, the call for ammo and flares resupply echoed around the 10 miles of perimeter fence, sniper fire was increasing, and Bunker Hill-10 was being cratered by more than a dozen Rocket Propelled Grenades and pocked by countless rifle rounds.

*\* The 274th VC Regiment [5th Division] consisted of a headquarters and three battalions: 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions. Each battalion of the regiment consisted of a HQ, three rifle companies and a heavy weapons company. The regiment consisted of about 1,500 men, recruited from outside the area of their operation supplemented by North Vietnamese Army regulars. Local Viet Cong elements acted as scouts during operations. Courtesy of Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/274th\\_Regiment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/274th_Regiment)*

#### 30 January 1968 (Tuesday)

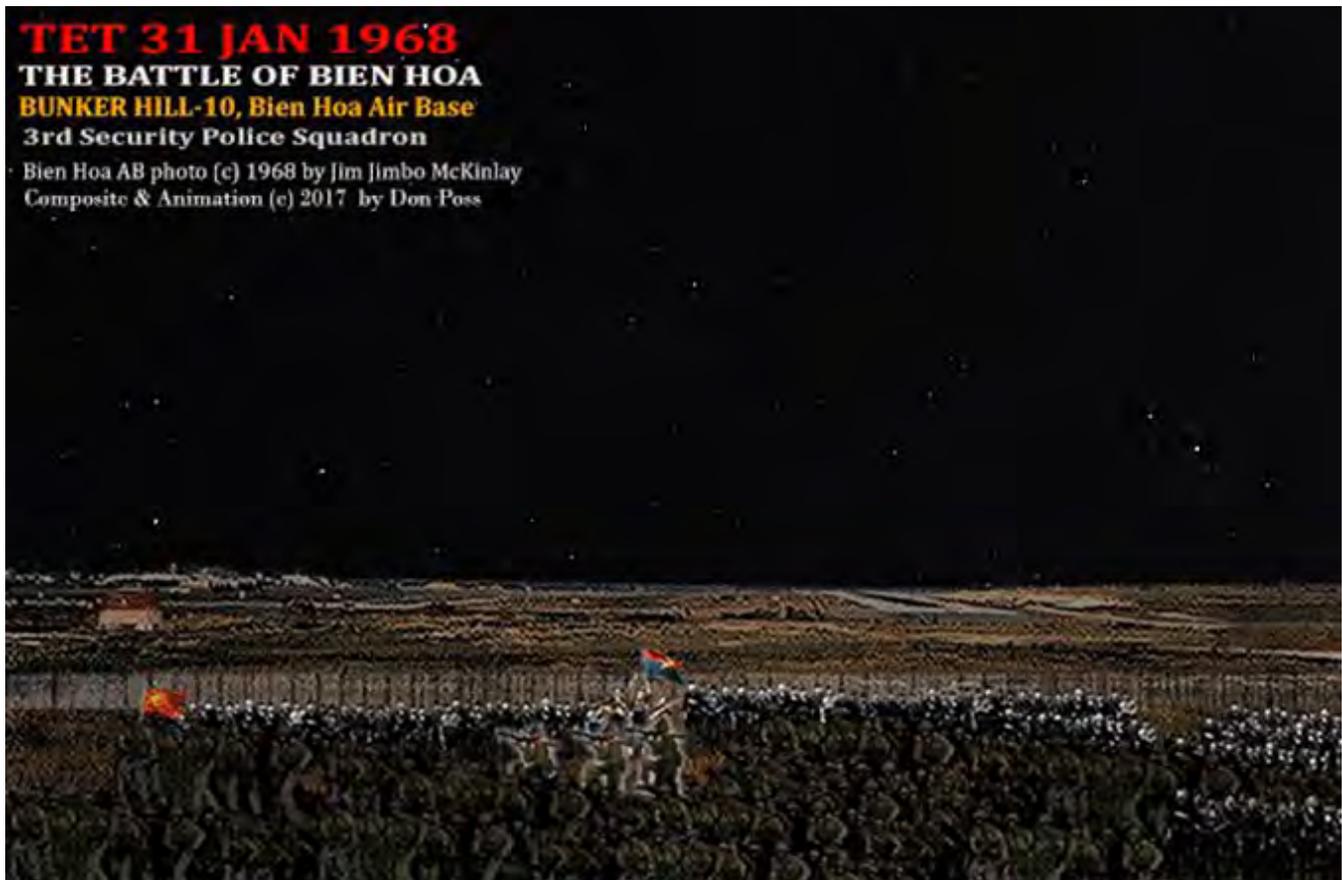
##### 1500 hours, 30 January 1968,

I had my resupply teams report to work at 1500 hours to start picking up vehicles from the motor pool for the midnight shift and "C" Flight Security. Later, when we came to work, we had two resupply teams: one for the E/S part of Biên Hòa Airbase and one for the W/N part of Biên Hòa Airbase. I was in charge of "C" Flight Resupply and assigned call-sign *Defense-5*. The 3rd Security Police Squadron were manning their posts due to the fighting in the north and setting Security Alert Condition Red.

## 31 January 1968 (Wednesday)

### 0300 hours, 31 January 1968,

As NCOIC (non-commissioned officer in charge) of four resupply teams, I was on the perimeter road in my SP truck when the first rocket attack began to hit Biên Hòa Airbase. I noticed flashes coming from the flightline area of the base. Then someone called over the radio that we were *under rocket attack*. I stopped the vehicle and told the three men with me to take cover. We could hear the rockets go over and see them hit the base.



*Battle of Biên Hòa, Bunker Hill-10, Biên Hòa Air Base, 3rd Security Police Squadron is manning all perimeter posts. All Quick Response Teams are in place. The Battle of Bunker Hill-10 begins. [Click to Animate](#)*

### 0305 hours, 0300 hours, 31 January 1968,

Rockets were still streaking the night sky and slamming across the air base after several minutes without let up. Defense-5 team was still hunkered down in a depression paralleling the perimeter road. Radio traffic was mostly various units reporting incoming. Until K-9 handler Bill Press called Break, and radioed the first-alarm of a perimeter penetration. His Sentry Dog, Diablo, had a strong alert, and Airman Press's handheld pop-flare lit up the east perimeter and he radioed—"My God, *they're everywhere!*" He then released his dog and fired on the attacking VC and NVA. Within seconds, Airman Press was WIA and USAF Sentry Dog K-9 Diablo was shot dead.

It will be mid-morning before Airman Press is found lying on the battlefield, wounded four times (including friendly-fire) and too weak to stand for loss of blood. Sentry Dog Diablo, lay

dead amongst Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army bodies.



*Above Photo: Biên Hòa AB, Tết 1968: First-Alert, K9 handler Robert (Bob) Press' Sentry Dog, Diablo X313, alerts toward perimeter. Amn. Press, pops hand-flare, fires on enemy and is shot (WIA) and plays-dead. K-9 Diablo was shot-dead (KIA).*

### **0310 hours, 31 January 1968,**

When the rocket attack momentarily ceased, after about 10 minutes, we had received about 45 rockets and mortars by then. I got my men together and started back to the main part of base, but only got as far as Q-4 and heard Central Security Control (CSC) radio call for Defense-6, an east resupply team, to go to Bunker Hill-10 for resupply.

### **About 0310 hours, 31 January 1968,**

Captain Maisey arrived at Bunker Hill-10 to assess the situation. Heavy automatic rifle fire was peppering the bunker's front and sides. Airmen were manning Bunker Hill-10 and keeping up a steady firing with an M-60 machinegun and their M-16s. It would not be enough without supporting fire from in route SAT and QRT teams.

### **0325 hours, 31 January 1968, Defense-5:**

After we got to Bunker Hill-10, with critical resupply of ammo, I told Capt. Maisey that we had a truck full of ammo and other equipment nearby. About three or four minutes later I started back toward the truck, which was about 200 yards behind Bunker Hill-10, and drove it to a point just behind Bunker Hill-10 to resupply the bunker. Captain Maisey had sent me to bring

the truck up to a safe spot—right now—and get the bunker loaded with ammo and flares. He emphasized the critical need to defend Bunker Hill-10 with everything we've got.

Defense-5's team hustled and arrived back at Bunker Hill-10, with heavy ammo cans and crates of the slap flares requested. The team went about distributing the supplies as Capt. Maisey had already gathered several of the Bunker Hill-10, SRT Team and QRT Leaders on the west side of the bunker for orders. He explained what they needed to do in a rapid but clear manner, and what the goal was. While we were listening up, we heard a loud BOOM from in front of Bunker Hill-10. Everyone was looking around to see what hit the bunk. We later guessed that was the first of thirteen RPG rounds to hit Bunker Hill-10, and had struck between the sand bags and concrete bunker.

**0330 hours, 31 January 1968, Defense-5:**

The first RPG struck the bunker's upper sandbags just below the M-60, and the explosion caused the M-60 machinegun, placed on top of the sand bags, to fly off and onto the road way below, and was not used until we could pick it up later as it was under heavy enemy fire. Fortunately, it was not damaged.



*Biên Hòa AB, Tết 1968. Bunker Hill-10, Viet Cong RPG strikes bunker: On top of the bunker, one rocket put Sgt. Tuggle's M-60 machine-gun out of action. Sgt. Tuggle went below, grabbed another weapon, and continued to fight from within the bunker. The Augmentee, AIC Behnke, remained on top of the bunker, until ordered inside, and continued to fire his M16 at the enemy enveloping the bunker. LTC Miller, 3rd SPS Squadron Commander.*

**0332 hours, 31 January 1968:**

The VC (Viet Cong) and NVA (North Vietnamese Army) hit Bunker Hill-10 with RPGs and small arms fire from the east, south, and some from the north. As I began to return fire, I had noticed an Army Lieutenant (Liaison with the 145th Combat Aviation Battalion, UH-1 Huey and AH-1 Cobra helicopters) standing near Capt. Maisey, and he had a XM-148 on his army issued M-16 weapon, but was not using it.

The LT said he did not know how to fire a 40mm (grenade launcher), so I asked if he would mind trading weapons. I gave him my M-16 and took his weapon from him along with its ten rounds of ammo (40mm). I then started firing the 40mm at Charlie, who was about 75 yards to the east of Bunker Hill-10, covering in a QC sandbag bunker they had commandeered along the MLR (main line of resistance).

I took the Viet Cong RPG crew under fire my grenade launcher.



*Biên Hòa AB, Tết 1968: SSgt Pete Piazza fires 40mm grenade and takes out VC/NVA RPG team.*

The VC would fire 13 RPG rounds at Bunker Hill-10, and one would kill Captain Maisey inside the bunker, but at that time no one knew when he was hit, as they were engaged in a heavy firefight. It was surreal and like playing in a western movie scene from the classic High Noon, or a war movie: VC would fire the first round and once I heard it hit I would step out and fire my 40mm round at them.

During the firefight, Sgt Neal Tuggle, inside Bunker Hill-10, and I were yelling to each other every

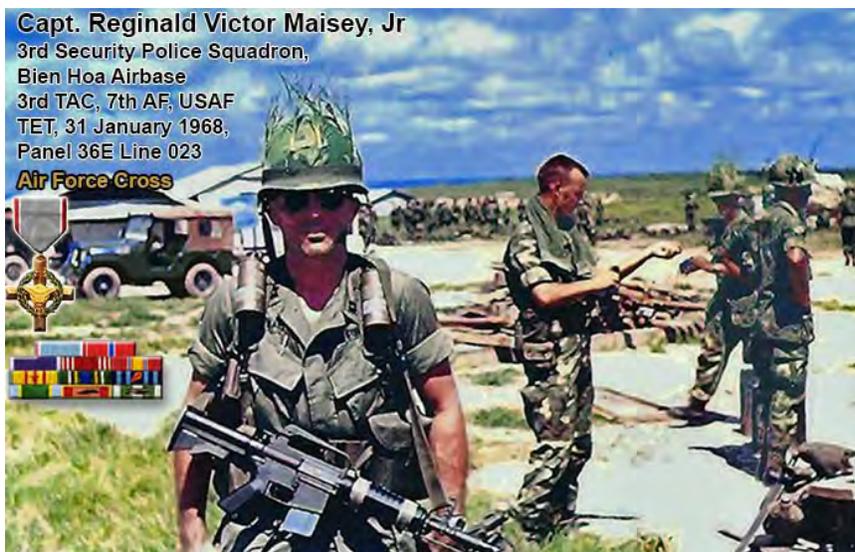
time a RPG hit the bunker, to see if things were okay inside and outside.

### 0345-0350 hours, 31 January 1968,

We both go horse- voices from all the yelling. It was cover and concealment during the exchange of fire and lasted until someone was knocked off, like sudden-death in a ports game; except it wasn't a game and it would be deadly for someone; I was lucky that it was the VC and not me that morning.

I continued firing from the south-side of Bunker Hill-10 and at the time I had *exactly* one 40mm round left. No doubt, the VC were well stocked in RPGs. The grenades were the only thing holding the VC at bay for the moment.

The VC RPG Team fired another round...I stepped out and quickly fired my 10th round and final grenade, which hit Charlie (VC) who was firing from a sandbag bunker. We heard a terrific explosion! I looked out and could see three enemy bodies flying up in the air—I must have hit their ammo stash as there was a large secondary explosion.



I know that some will disagree with me, but I believe this is the time- frame when Captain Maisey was killed.

Everyone agrees that he was killed by an RPG. I was there, and know for a fact when the Viet Cong fired their last RPG. I believe Captain Maisey was killed by the last RPG they fired, but it could have been the one just before

*Biên Hòa AB, Capt. Maisey (KIA).  
 Tết 31 Jan 1968.*

After I had knocked out the VC RPG crew firing at Bunker Hill-10, I went to get the pick-up truck, still full of ammo and parked about 50 or so yards to the rear of Bunker Hill-10, and drove it closer to the bunker. As I drove up, I saw some troops (about a platoon size) moving rapidly outside the wire adjacent to Bunker Hill-10. If they saw me, I was ignored—they were focused on their mission. I called CSC/LED and reported this, and asked if they knew of any of our troops moving up near Bunker Hill-10, as nothing was reported on the radio at that time. CSC's LED Sergeant came back and said that no friendly forces were coming toward Bunker Hill-10 at that time.

I did not fire upon those enemy troops at that time, since I was all alone and without any other SP or Augmentees covering my backside. The enemy moved thru the cut barbed wire fences and advanced toward the Aircraft Engine Run-up pad near the approach to the end of the east runway.

That group of VCs seemed to have ignored Bunker Hill-10 altogether, and in the flare- light it looked as if they were wearing brand new uniforms and carrying AK-47s right by us. I reported this info to CSC/LED (Central Security Control / Law Enforcement Desk) and told them we were now surrounded, and then moved some of our SPs and Augmentees around to cover our rear.

For a while I was the only man outside the bunker and could see the enemy all around us. Choppers were firing from right overhead at the enemy. It seemed they were flying an irregular race-track around the bunker area. I kept shouting to the men inside the bunker and asking if they were okay. It was a miracle they could hear me at all, as their firing full-auto M-16s in such a tight-closed space had to be literally deafening. When the choppers' firing started getting too close, I would dart inside the bunker for safety, then back out again to fire at the VC with my M-16.

After firing from inside Bunker Hill-10 for a while, I noticed through gun ports there were fewer drifting flares and the sky wasn't lite up as much as before. I went outside the bunker again and could see drifting hazy-smoke columns, from burnt out flares, drifting like retreating soldiers. Stars were actually visible again in some places, so I started popping the rest of the hand-flares we had, while talking on the Motorola Handie-Talkie HT200 radio (two channels: Security and LE to CSC) and trying to direct firepower around Bunker Hill-10.

I really did not use my radio until after I heard CSC/LED calling Capt. Maisey repeatedly and getting no response. The point is, I started giving info to CSC/LED and they were feeding info back to us as to the movement of Capt. Marty Strones' (Silver Star) defense-line, so if we had to fire we would not friendly-fire at them.

Although I was initially running ammo resupply, I ended up assuming command at Bunker Hill-10. CSC/LED called me at one point and asked me to use the XM-148 to fire on the Aircraft Engine Run-up pad area, because that was where VC and NVA were forming up. I had several additional rounds from the truck by then.

After the battle and during the debrief, I learned there had been Air Force personnel in the arming-shack hiding on the floor, and this was near the Aircraft Engine Run-up Pad area.

Now here is one of those unexplainable parts to this story! I tried to fire two grenades from the XM-148 grenade launcher, and two from the M-79 grenade launcher—neither would fire a 40mm round. I double checked each weapon and they seemed to be in good working order, but still they would not fire any 40mm rounds. The firing-pins did put a very small dent in the rounds, but not hard enough to fire them. I told this to CSC/LED, and wondered why this happened.

My thought was someone was really watching over these folks and did not want me to fire on that area for fear of hitting the shack and killing them! Later, I also talked to our armories and they had never heard of that happening to either of the weapons. We also fired them during the day and they worked okay, when firing off base, for some reason.



*Biên Hòa AB, Arming/de-arming Shack, after Tết 1968 battle. [Click day-light photo.](#)*

#### **0400-0405 hours,**

The 145th AVB (145th Combat Aviation Battalion, UH-1 Huey and AH-1 Cobra helicopters) were flying around like rabid-hornets, shooting danger-close near and around Bunker Hill-10 firing at Charlie. The 145th's miniguns were feverishly chewing up everything—indiscriminately—and were headed my way—so I moved quickly down Bunker Hill-10's five-steps and through a heavy metal door that was opened inward—I do not think it was ever closed during the battle—and entered into the bottom part of the bunker where I quickly tripped over a body.

I didn't know who was dead on the bunker's floor so I yelled again, hoping someone may have seen the body in flare light or muzzle flash, but neither SP responded, their training by long forgotten sergeants had kicked in and their focus was totally upon killing whatever appeared in their gun ports—it simply was too dark to see your hand in front of your face.

Adding to the ever-changing reality were as if your eyes each looked through separate kaleidoscopes of white-amber light strobing through gun ports. Muzzle-flashes danced a plague of insane shadows within, and our movement for ammo seemed like a Halloween movie flickering from a stuttering projector. Million-candle-power parachute flares, kicked from an orbiting C-47 flare ship, added their macabre light patterns of confusion as enemy soldiers advanced with multiple-wavering shadows in pursuit. M-16s firing and RPGs exploding with bone jarring compressions, assaulted our eardrums which were threatening to burst.

Broken ammo crates lay about where they were opened—affirmed life was cheaper than ammo — firing and reloading was the only way to assure our lives could last a few seconds more. Hundreds of expended brasses were strewn about the floor and pooled beneath the two gunners, as additional brass rapidly bounced toward the center attempting to knit a crazy-quilt metal carpet.

Despite the carnage, someone paused shooting and yelled that one man was dead—he repeated the phrase a few times, probably uncertain who had asked...or even if anyone had actually asked. There was no time for me to consider the body's ID any further—nor mourn a fallen brother—and it was quite possible, even probably, we would all join whomever it was within minutes, if not sooner. We were killing the enemy in growing numbers—just not fast enough to include their comrades still piling on and wanting us dead. Dead and wounded VC and NVA were everywhere in front and around Bunker Hill-10—a determined enemy ignored their gruesome casualties: war and sausage— never



*Biên Hòa AB, Bunker Hill-10: SSgt Pete Piazza and Sgt Charles Haugen carry unknown body (Capt. Maisey) outside onto steps.*

watch them being made. We were the grinder...most of the time ... some of the time ... as we saw them blown apart and falling, adrenalin carrying them another step ... the din of battle was such that we could not hear their death cries.

Bunker Hill-10 was a cramped pockmarked-matchbox at best, an eight-sided octagon-coffin at worst, being only ten-twelve feet across from wall to wall, and a tossup as to whether it would remain a matchbox or become a coffin for us. We were fighting a fanatic enemy for our lives and survival —firing ... reloading ... firing ... reloading—muscle-memory faster than thought—skating

and sliding on .223 brass littering the concrete floor; we needed immediate room to fight the enemy from inside the bunker—and the body was in the way.

I grabbed the body's arms, and I believe it was Sgt Marshall Gott who grabbed the ankles, and we picked him up and carried him just outside the open reinforced metal door and placed the body on the steps leading up and out of the bunker. We laid him (I refused to think of him as an it) on the steps, with minimum cover from outside firing and explosions, his head toward the top of the stairs.

At the time, it was so dark that I could not identify who the body was, nor did anyone else in the bunker during the fighting. I was thinking that the body might be that of Captain M a i s e y , because we had not heard or seen him since the initial attack of RPGs, and before that he was vocal and seemed to be everywhere directing things. But I did not learn for certain it was Captain Maisey who's body I had tripped over, and carried out of the bunker during Tết, until much later in the day. I don't know when Captain Maisey's body was removed from the steps of Bunker Hill-10 and taken to Biên Hòa Air Base's 3rd Tactical Dispensary. I do know they had four ambulances for transporting injured, wounded and KIA from all around the air base that day.

***About 0617 hours, Twilight/Dawn hours,***

After a very long six-or-seven hours of night battle, the growing daylight looked really good. As I looked over the battlefield, I could see a lot of dead—I mean a lot of dead — more than a hundred Viet Cong and NVA bodies confettied around Bunker Hill-10 between the perimeter and the Aircraft Engine Run-up pad. Carnage had ruled, and we were still alive.



I had watched sausage made ... and it was not yet over. As the day went on, we had to be very careful of not shooting any US troops making sweeps for enemy outside the base. I had a set of binoculars and could see the 101st Air Cav and the VC and NVA moving back and forth about a quarter mile off the east-end of the airbase.

Capt. Marty Strones made a sweep across the flight line toward the Aircraft Engine Run-up pad area. Upon getting to the end or the taxiway they found a lot of bodies of VC/NVA KIA and WIA. Then they began to sweep the Aircraft Engine Run-up pad shack area, and this is when Charlie tossed a grenade at one team of SPs and Augmentees.

*Biên Hòa Air Base. Tết, 1968: KIA Edward Grady Muse, Augmentee, 3rd CBT SPT GRP, 3rd TAC FTR Wg, 7th AF/3rd SPS, 31 Jan 1968.*

From what I was told, this is when A1C Ed Muse (Edward Grady Muse, Augmentee: 3rd CBT SPT GRP, 3rd TAC FTR Wing, 7th AF/3rd SPS) was killed in action. When the team moved around a culvert; the first SP saw Charlie toss a grenade and shot at him, then went to the ground and yelled "grenade." A second SP, following him, came around the corner and hit the

dirt, and then A1C Muse, third in line, came around the corner but for some reason did not hit the ground and walked right into the blast of the grenade and was killed.

I and four Airmen remained at the bunker all day, without food and little water, and helped give cover to Capt. Strones and the men who made two-sweeps with him through the field just north of Bunker Hill-10.

During both sweeps, CSC's radio called upon us to give them fire-support, plus I would radio information from Capt. Strones to CSC, and vice-versa. That old HT200 radio really took a beating and kept on working, that's for sure. Only real problem with it was the battery would not always last an 8-hour shift, or the distance it transmitted was sometimes not very good, especially if anything tall was in your way, like a mountain or a bunker ..... *but it held a charge through the long night of Tết 1968.*



*1962-1970: Motorola HT200 Portable Two-Way Radio served in the jungles of Vietnam through the late 1960s.*



General William W. Momyer, 7th Air Force Commander presenting the Silver Star medal to SSgt William "Pete" Piazza for his actions at Bunker Hill #10, Bien Hoa AB, RVN during the TET 1968 offensive. during the Jan. 31 enemy attack on Bien Hoa AB. (USAF PHOTO)

## General Momyer Awards Sergeant With Silver Star

BIEN HOA — SSgt. William Piazza, a member of the 3rd Security Police Squadron at Bien Hoa AB has been awarded the Silver Star, the nation's third highest decoration for valor by Gen. William W. Momyer, commander of Seventh Air Force.

Piazza, a native of Wichita Falls, Tex., received the medal for gallant and meritorious service during the enemy attack on Bien Hoa, Jan. 31.

Piazza was assigned to Defense 5, a mobile resupply unit. He made a run to Bunker Hill 10, which was where the enemy ground forces were attempting to penetrate the base.

When he arrived at the

bunker, his support was needed, so he stayed.

Small arms fire could be seen all through the area. Then, B-40 rockets fired by the enemy came in. A total of 12 rounds hit the old French fortification. One of the rounds killed the officer in charge and wounded bur other defenders. Piazza then took charge of Bunker Hill 10.

The Viet Cong and NVA (North Vietnamese Army) made repeated attempts to overrun the outpost but, with the sergeant directing the defense, they were repulsed.

The battle raged for more than six hours. When Piazza left, 153 VC and NVA had been killed and 25 had been detained near his post.



BATTLE OF BIEN HOA AB, JAN 31, 1968

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