

Remembering Tết 1968

Battle of Biên Hòa - Bunker Hill-10

by Charles Haugen, Sgt,
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"The sound of heavy machine gun fire was coming from Bunker Hill-10...and rifle fire and an occasional outgoing 40mm grenade...there was no way I was going to crawl across the road trying to carry a loaded M60."

29 January 1968

2200 hours,

Charles Haugen, Sgt., 3rd SPS, Biên Hòa Air Base.

I was assigned to a post located at the entry to the F-100 Super Sabre revetment area. It was considered a *sort of gate* and as such included a radio for communication with CSC (Central Security Control).

I remember the intelligence reports were somewhat scary, but I don't think we were very concerned because it was Tet and there was a ceasefire in place. There had been a ceasefire during the Christmas holidays and it had been observed by both sides, for the most part. We tended to take the intelligence reports with a grain of salt.

30 January 1968

0300 hours,

Sometime around 0300 hours, 30 January 1968, there were reports of Air Bases to the north coming under attack. Biên Hòa Air Base had remained quiet and we were relieved from posts at about the normal time, 0700 hours. After being relieved I went to breakfast and then to bed.

1500-1600 hours,

Sometime in the afternoon we were told to report for guardmount early. When we showed up I was impressed and concerned due to the number of augmentees that were present. When we formed up, I think LTC Miller addressed the reinforced "C" Flight. We were told that an attack was expected sometime that night, and the base was on full alert.

At guardmount I was assigned to a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) (Defense-31?) and provided with an M60 machine gun. Two augmentees served as ammunition carriers. We were posted between the runway and the taxiway about halfway between the east perimeter and the control tower. We deployed in an open field and on the ground and were led by SSgt Sawyer. I'm guessing there were about 12 or 15 men in the QRF. In addition to the M60, we had M16s, 40mm grenade launchers, hand-grenades and slap-flares. For the life of me I can't remember the names of any other members of the team, except SSgt Sawyer.

The night of the 30th was quiet. All of the augmentees had worked at their regular jobs that day, so we were not concerned if they caught a few winks.

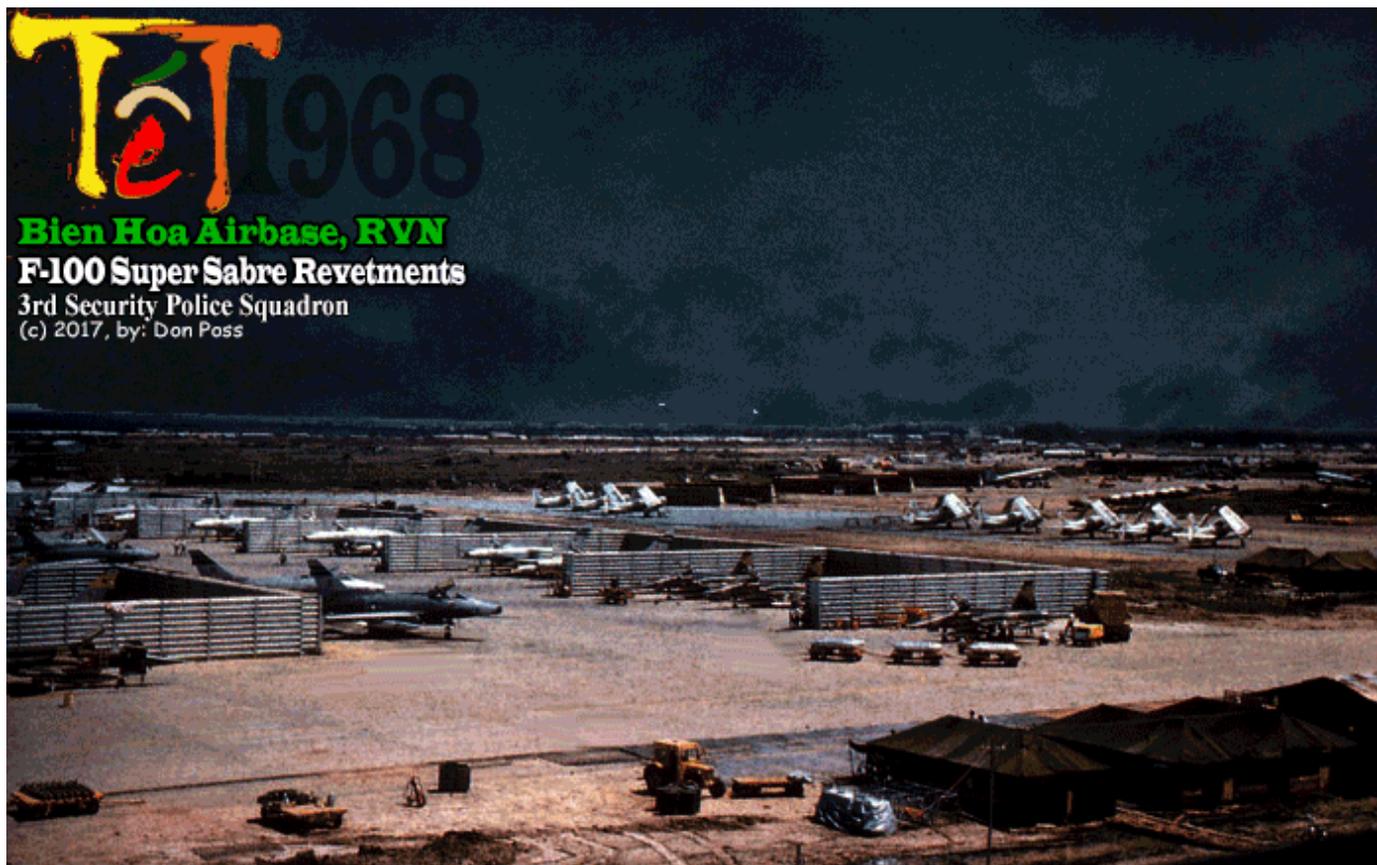
31 January 1968

0300 hours,

At 0300 hours, I remember the sound of something flying overhead and then the sound of explosions in the F-100 Super Sabre parking area—Rockets! The aircraft were parked in revetments, and a few were in maintenance hangers. The sound of the rocket impacts must have been directed upwards, because I didn't hear loud explosions, just a kind of “buff ... buff” sound. I could see the impacts and there were reports coming over the radio that we were under attack.

The base siren began to sound and there were more incoming rocket impacts. I don't remember being afraid at that point. I had never experienced a rocket attack before and no incoming-ordnance had impacted in the area where my team was deployed. It was all kind of surreal.

Suddenly, the rocket attack ended and SSgt Sawyer called for all of us to board the SP QRT vehicle. He said Bunker Hill-10 was taking fire and we were going to support it. We all piled into our vehicle, a crew cab Dodge pickup truck, with no doors. I got into the bed of the truck because it was too cumbersome to get into the interior while carrying the M60 and my M16. After we were all aboard we headed for the east perimeter.



Biên Hòa AB, RVN, Rocket Attack strikes F-100 Super Sabre Revetments. Tết 31 JAN 1968.
[\(CLICK IMAGE TO ANIMATE\)](#)

0320 hours,

We traveled along the flight line, headed toward the east perimeter. It was very eerie as there were no other vehicles moving. There were some fires burning in the revetment area and I remember a radio message came through that an F-100 Super Sabre was on fire and about to explode. I don't recall if it actually did explode, as we were well past the area by then. We traveled past Bunker Hill-7 and out onto a road that would take us to Bunker Hill-10.

When we got to within about 100 yards or so from the bunker, SSgt Sawyer pulled off the road into a field. We all jumped out of the truck and sort of half-ass deployed in a defensive manner. SSgt Sawyer told us that he wanted us to crawl across the road, and I mean crawl!" Then we were to proceed along the western side of the road, using the road for cover, until we reached a sort of earth berm where we would take up a position. At this time, I made the most bone-headed mistake I have ever made. Rather than carry both my M16 and the M60, I placed the M16 under a seat in the truck and left it there. What in hell was I thinking?

0330 hours,

Well, we started to cross the road. The sound of heavy machine gun fire was coming from the bunker as well as rifle fire and an occasional out-going 40mm grenade. As I approached the road I decided there was no way I was going to crawl across while trying to carry a loaded M60. I gathered up as much fortitude as I could and ran in as low a crouch as possible. Now I will say that I was not as much afraid of being hit, as I was by not following SSgt Sawyer's orders. I had and still have much respect for the man and to disappoint him would have been unthinkable.

I made it across and we began to move toward our position. When we reached the berm, I took up a position in the center of the team with my M60 pointed across the perimeter road. We were ordered not to fire. SSgt Sawyer ran across to Bunker Hill-10 to check on the situation. Sergeants Neal Tuggle and Marshall Gott were in the bunker and firing into the fence line, and out into an open area outside the base. I was not aware of incoming-fire at that time. Then I realized Sgts. Tuggle and Gott were firing at Viet Cong (VC) and NVA (North Vietnamese Army) coming across the perimeter fence.

SSgt Sawyer called to me to bring my M60 over to the bunker because the gun that Sgt Tuggle was using was malfunctioning. I ran with my M60 over to the bunker and climbed up onto the top of the bunker. There was a sandbag wall around the top of the bunker with a turret in the center where Sgt Tuggle was located. I gave my M60 to Sgt Tuggle and he let me use his M16. Sgt Gott and I took up positions behind the sandbags and started to fire at movement outside the perimeter. At this point things turned serious—we began receiving incoming RPG fire—and some rounds hit the lower portion of the bunker.

To our surprise, a vehicle began to approach the bunker from the direction of where we had been firing. It was a ARVN pickup truck racing down the road in reverse! It took us a few seconds to realize what must be happening. The ARVN had a post located about 300 yards outside the wire from Bunker Hill-10. The troops that were manning that post had [wisely] abandoned their position and were backing the truck toward us, using the front of

the vehicle as cover. We couldn't be sure if the people in the truck were friendly so we trained our weapons on them until we felt reasonably safe.

As the ARVN truck got closer an RPG hit it head-on lifting it into the air and dropping it like a stone on the road. Surprisingly, all of the ARVN soldiers in the truck were okay.



Biên Hòa AB, Perimeter Road, ARVN truck hit with VC/NVA RPG.

Then an RPG round impacted directly in front of the turret of Bunker Hill-10, exploding and spraying shrapnel all over, and I got some in my left arm and left butt cheek. I didn't see Sgt Tuggle and thought he was certainly dead. I forced myself to look into the turret and there was no sign of the man. Now Sgt Neal Tuggle was a rather large man—tall and wide. I don't mean that he was overweight, just big. I shouted his name several times and finally he answered me! It seems he had the trapdoor open in the bottom of the turret and when the RPG hit he just jumped into the lower level of the bunker.

At some time, SSgt Piazza and Captain Maisey arrived at the Bunker Hill-10. The Captain was in his own jeep and Sergeant Piazza came in his Resupply truck with more ammunition and other supplies. Sgt Marshall Gott and I were ordered to get down off the bunker's upper deck, as it was too dangerous to remain in that position. I think Sgt Gott went into the bunker with Sgt Tuggle. I stayed outside the crowded bunker and found a depression in the ground where I took up a prone position. I couldn't do much from there, except try to guard our right-flank and watch to make sure no enemy came through a large culvert under the road, or tried to sap the bunker's open entrance in the back.



Bunker Hill-10: View from the bunker's upper deck roof, facing N/E. Culvert can be seen that was used by NVA and VC to cross under the road. Bomb strikes against enemy positions, by F-100 Super Sabres airborne from Bien Hoa Air Base, can be seen. US Army troops arrived after day light and drove the NVA and VC back in to the jungle. View is N/E from bunker's roof.



About 0430 hours,

Capt Maisey, and the Army LT liaison, and Sergeant Piazza had gone down into the bunker. Capt Maisey was coordinating the firing and trying to get flare and helicopter support. As I lay on my belly watching the right flank, there was still incoming RPG fire. The bunker was taking a real pounding!

About then, I heard someone call out from the bunker that help was needed to get an injured man out of the bunker. I got up and went down Bunker Hill-10's stairwell. A voice said, "Take his legs." Because of the harsh-light from the flares outside, and the darkness inside, I couldn't see where anything was inside the bunker, so I asked the voice (it turned out to be SSgt Piazza) to guide my hands to where he wanted them. Hands grabbed mine and guided them to a pair of legs. I lifted and we moved the injured man out the bunker door and up into the stairwell. The constant din of firing made it almost impossible to hear anything unless shouted.

When flare light made it possible to see a little on the stairwell steps, SSgt Sawyer, who was now looking down over the stairs, said, "*Oh God—he's dead!*" I looked up from the lower steps where I had been hanging onto his legs, and could see that the man I helped carry was Captain Maisey. His midsection was laid open and his internal organs were exposed. He had taken the full impact of an RPG. We left him, his body, in the stairwell...and went back to our previous positions.

Shortly after Captain Maisey's death, SSgt Sawyer decided he would transport me, and an augmentee, and himself to the base dispensary for treatment. Sawyer had also been wounded by shrapnel, and the augmentee had received wounds of some kind. SSgt Sawyer drove Captain Maisey's jeep.

Upon arrival at the dispensary we were directed to small rooms where we were each treated for our wounds. In order to get to the treatment rooms, we had to through the ER. There were four or five gurneys, with severely wounded or injured men receiving treatment. There was blood on the floor and doctors were performing surgery on a couple of guys. As we walked through the ER I was told to drop my web belt on the floor. Which I did and went into the room where the shrapnel was removed from my left arm. They looked at my butt and said that the wounds were not serious and the skin had not been broken. They said I could leave.

About 0500 hours,

I went to find my gear, and it was gone! I asked a guy who was in the ER, where I had been told to drop my web belt, what had happened to my stuff. He said he didn't know. He took me out into a small courtyard and said it was probably in one of those if I wanted to look for it— he pointed at several body bags lined up neatly on the floor. I decided I didn't want the stuff that badly.

I should have made a ruckus over it but I wasn't thinking right. The thing that pissed me off is that I had a bayonet that I had traded for. Bayonets were not part of our normally issued equipment. The bayonet was on my web belt along with ammo and a canteen. A few days later I got the gear back, minus the bayonet.

About 0530 hours,

Daylight was coming and I went outside and walked over to the APO (Air Police Office), that's the communication center for the law enforcement division of the squadron. I mingled around there a while.

About 0615 hours,

The sun was coming up and I felt kind of at loose-ends with nothing to do, so I walked to the armory and stood around there. I could hear gunfire and helicopters working on the east perimeter.

All of a sudden there was a flash and a huge mushroom cloud could be seen to south east. Someone yelled "concussion!" We all got into the bunker that was there and waited until the earth trembled and a very large explosive sound reached us.

Tết 1968, Long Bình Bomb Dump, 15 miles S/E of Binh Hoa AB, attacked by VC and NVA.

After a while SSgt Sawyer showed up and said, "Let's go back out to Bunker Hill-10. I said, "Okay, but I don't have a weapon." I went to the armor and asked for whatever they could give me, and ended up with a 12-gauge shotgun and about 12 rounds of ammunition. That's when I realized what a bone-head I was for leaving my M16 in the truck when we were ordered out to the east perimeter. Well the shotgun was better than nothing and I guess if I had to defend myself it would have done the job.



TET 1968
LONG BINH, AMMO DUMP

(15 miles S/E of Bien Hoa AB)

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20th Preventive Medical Unit

Composite by Don Poss

We got into a jeep and headed out. Choppers were also clobbering the water tower located just outside the main gate. There had been an enemy spotter in that tower. He likely didn't survive.



Bien Hoa AB: F-100 Super Sabres take flight.

Out at Bunker Hill-10, the firing had stopped and a *search and destroy* line had been formed to sweep the areas between the runways and taxiways. We kind of milled around for a while. Captain Maisey's body had been removed. An ARVN soldier was there who was carrying a Thompson sub machine gun. I had never seen one so I was staring at it I guess. He suddenly told me he had found the body of his brother someplace. I assumed he meant that his brother was VC and was one of the attackers. Was he telling the truth? All I knew is that he seemed sincere.

By now a few F-100s were taking off on support missions, and at least one was working over an area just outside the east perimeter fence in support of the 3rd Security Police Squadron's base defense.

Below Photo: Biên Hòa AB, F-100 Super Sabres support 3rd Security Police Squadron air base defense.



Above and Below Photo: Biên Hòa AB, F-100 Super Sabre Revetments.



I went back to my hooch along with several other guys and we tried to get some sleep. We were all roused out sometime during the day and taken out to the east end of the runway area. There was an enemy soldier who had made his way into the Aircraft Run Up pad. We were deployed in a ditch across from the pad to support whoever was to go in and take care of him. I believe someone went in and killed him, but I can't remember the details of it. I only know it was hot and I was half asleep. All I wanted to do was go back to bed.

We returned to duty late the night of the 31st and relieved some guys who had been on duty all night. Some airmen had been deployed along the east perimeter in various positions all day and most of the night. They were totally beat, but they had to stay out there. They were told they could allow every other man to catch some Zs and then trade off.

1 February 1968

About 0630 hours, Sunrise,

By the morning of 1 February 1968, Biên Hòa AB smelled pretty bad. There were dead NVA and VC bodies that had laid in the sun during the day and all night— there is nothing worse than that smell—today, the smell of a dead animal takes me back there immediately. The day before, I saw trucks hauling bodies away, and VC/NVA prisoners in the back of a truck being taken someplace.

I seem to remember LTC Miller hitching a ride on an Army Huey, but I might be wrong about that. At some point LTC Miller got the base rescue helicopter to take him up and fly over the bunker and perimeter area. Someone on the ground tried to talk to him over the radio, but there was too much noise for effective communication. It was a great moral booster to see him though.

In a day or so things returned to a normal routine, except we were working longer shifts. At some point a load on Safeside troops landed to “save” us. Their presence did help because we were able to get back to a normal three-shift day.

Before I left Biên Hòa, in July 1968, we continued to get hit with rockets, but no more ground attacks.

The events I have described are as I remember them after 47 years have passed [since 1968]. No doubt my memory has faded and I no longer remember some things clearly. I hope I can be forgiven for that. Sometimes at night when I can't sleep, I relive some of these ... Memorial Day always takes me back to Biên Hòa and Bunker Hill-10, to a certain degree....