

## TẾT 1968

### Battle of Biên Hòa, Bunker Hill-10 Biên Hòa Air Base

by Donald J. Sheehan,  
Catholic Chaplain, Captain, USAF

*At a time when bravery was common,  
Captain Maisey's bravery under fire was uncommon and contagious. After the  
battle... 153 NVA were found on base KIA and 25 were taken POW.*

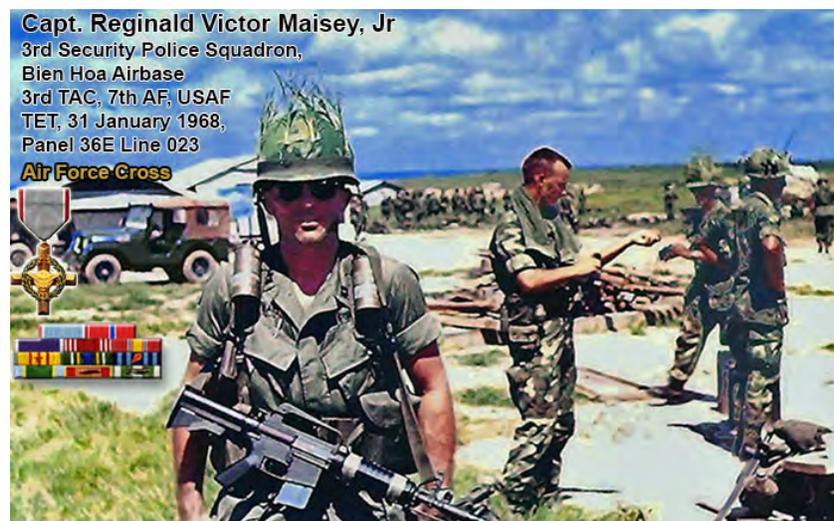
**Biên Hòa – Around 9 p.m. on January 17, Captain Reginald V. Maisey of our 3rd SPS here at Biên Hòa Air Base,** stopped by the chapel in his jeep and picked me up. Earlier in the day I had asked if I might join him that night on his inspection round of the perimeter guard. *"Love to have you, Father" he said. The men are a bit jumpy."* They'll appreciate seeing a chaplain." While accompanying Captain Maisey on his security inspection trip that night, I noted that the men were much more reassured by seeing Captain Maisey than by seeing an unarmed chaplain. I know why now.

That night I spent about four hours with Captain Maisey, being briefed at the Command Post, driving around the perimeter of the base, and visiting all the posts. His presence visibly reassured the men we visited in their isolated locations. At one stop, he climbed the ladder to visit a guard in his lonely watch on metal roost some 30 feet above the ground. At other stops, he checked the security of a bunker or the placement of a machine gun. Along the road he halted the jeep frequently to chat with a K-9 sentry. You could see that Captain Maisey troubled himself for his men. He was a professional.

At three a.m. on the 31st of January, the communists launched their 'Tết Offensive' against Biên Hòa Air Base. It commenced with a ten-minute rocket bombardment that sent men scurrying for protective shelter. The bombardment was followed by enemy sapper teams breaching the perimeter of the Air Base on the east end.

The next time I saw Captain Maisey I did not recognize him. I can't recall just what time it was during the eventful morning hours of the 31st of January that I conditionally absolved and administered the Last Rites to an officer who was dead on arrival at the dispensary. I do remember someone at one time informing me that Captain Maisey had been killed at Bunker Hill 10. Later in the day,, I unzipped the heavy canvas bag containing Capt. Maisey's remains. I recognized him as the man I had anointed earlier that morning. The story of Capt. Maisey and Bunker Hill-10 is one worth remembering.

Bunker Hill 10 is a reinforced concrete structure, built many years ago by the French. It is situated on the edge of the east perimeter road, a few hundred yards beyond the end of our runway. Immediately after the rocket attack the morning of the 31st, a large number of well- armed, pajama-clad communist troops penetrated the fence northwest of Bunker Hill-10. They spilled out into the fields to the left and front of the old French bunker. The enemy subjected Bunker Hill 10 to the most intense fire imaginable, using their automatic weapons, as well as the devastating and destructive RPG-2 and RPG-7 rockets. At the outset of the battle, Bunker Hill 10 was manned by two Security Policemen, Sergeants Neal Tuggle and Marshal Gott, and an augmentee, A1C Neil Behnke.



*Bien Hoa AB, Captain Reginald Victor Maisey, Jr., CO, 3rd SPS, TET 31 Jan 1968.*

When the enemy attack started, Captain Maisey was at the western end of the base. He immediately sped in his jeep to the Central Security Command Post. Realizing how critical holding Bunker Hill 10 was, Captain Maisey volunteered to go there to

direct the defense of that area. Shortly thereafter, he arrived at the bunker and took charge of the small band of men from the 3rd SPS in the vicinity of Bunker Hill 10. The communists attacked the bunker with a vengeance. They knew it was the key to overrunning the east end of the field and the maintenance hangers, and other vital areas of the Air Base. The enemy hit Bunker Hill 10 with everything they had. About 12 direct rocket hits at pointblank range were recorded by the enemy. On top of the bunker, one rocket put Sergeant Tuggle's machine gun out of action. Sergeant Tuggle went below, grabbed another weapon, and continued to fight from within the bunker. The augmentee, A1C Behnke, remained on top of the bunker, and continued to fire his M16 at the enemy enveloping the bunker.

Capt. Maisey seemed to be everywhere. To direct and concentrate the fire power of the twenty or so Security Policemen in the general area on the enemy that was within 200 feet of the bunker, he constantly exposed himself to danger. To communicate by radio with the Security Command Post, Captain Maisey had to leave the relative security of the bunker and expose himself to enemy fire. He did this throughout the battle. Above the noise of the battle, he yelled orders and directions to the men around him. His voice instilled confidence and bolstered the moral of the beleaguered defenders of the bunker.

As Chaplain Sheehan observed, Captain Maisey's bravery was "uncommon and contagious" and other figures were also instrumental in the victory, perhaps none more than Staff Sgt William Pete Piazza who earned a Silver Star for his gallantry under fire. In a phone interview from Oklahoma City, Piazza, 64, a retired senior master sergeant and secretary of the Oklahoma Heartland Chapter of the Air Force Security Police Association, recalled that night with clarity, providing details that shed more light on Captain Maisey's final moments. Sergeant Piazza's report was a mundane portrayal of the heroism that earned him the nation's third highest award for valor. His inherent modesty and professionalism must have prevented him from saying more than he felt necessary about the chaos and death surrounding him and the small band of 3rd SPS defenders at Bunker Hill-10.

At a time when bravery was common, Captain Maisey's bravery under fire was uncommon and contagious. Though the small band of men did not know it, their position at times was

surrounded by VC. Captain Maisey and the other men continued firing. They kept the enemy pinned down not too far from their original point of penetration. No one knows how many enemy were killed by the men defending Bunker Hill 10. After the battle, over 60 dead VC were found nearby.

The bravery of the men in Bunker Hill 10 was matched by the incredible valor of other men of the 3rd SPS. Sergeants William Piazza and James Lee did the impossible. Through a withering field of enemy fire, they drove a truck back to the base armory, loaded it with needed ammunition, and returned to their exposed position on the north perimeter road. From there, they proceeded to drive south across what would seem an impassable field, a field alive with VC. The men dauntlessly drove right up to the besieged Bunker Hill 10, and under constant enemy fire resupplied the defenders of the bunker with enough ammunition to enable them to continue the fight. When one knows the terrain these men passed through, and remembers the confusion at the time, and the danger of their cargo, he stands in awe at their courageous feat. It seems impossible. But brave men made the impossible possible.



*News Article - In a story headlined, "Biên Hòa Defense Likened to Famed Fight at Alamo" in the March 30, 1968, edition of the New York Daily News, Capt. Marty E. Strones, who also earned a Silver Star for his heroics at Biên Hòa, said, "The bunker would have started running out of ammunition, but one of our ammunition drivers, SSgt William Piazza, heard they were in trouble and drove through enemy positions to supply the beleaguered bunker. This made it possible for them to hold out.*

*Biên Hòa AB: Bunker Hill-10 was manned throughout the Vietnam War by the 3rd Security Police Squadron, USAF.*

At 4: 30 a.m. that morning of the 31st of January, while Captain Maisey was outside the bunker, a direct rocket hit ended his life. He fell on the field of battle. But his men fought on. They never gave up. When the battle ended around noon, the men of the 3rd SPS still held Bunker Hill 10. The enemy never overran this pivotal point of the base's defense.

Some men have asked whether an Air Force installation has ever before been exposed to such a sustained and severe ground attack. That question is best left for Air Force historians to answer. Unquestionably, it was a brutal, savage fight. Because of the valor and courage of a few uncommonly brave men, the fight never progressed beyond a few hundred yards of Bunker Hill 10. The 3rd SPS suffered only two men killed in action, and 14 wounded.

**Capt. Reginald Victor Maisey, Jr**  
3rd Security Police Squadron,  
Bien Hoa Airbase  
3rd TAC, 7th AF, USAF  
TET, 31 January 1968,  
Panel 36E Line 023



*Biên Hòa Air Base, Captain Reginald V. Maisey, KIA  
Tet 31 January 1968. Awarded the Air Force Cross.*

What would have happened if Bunker Hill 10 had fallen? Would the enemy have gained control of a part of the base, or penetrated the center cantonment area? I don't know. I don't think anyone really knows. Thanks to the bravery and courage of men like Captain Maisey, we shall never know the answer to that hypothetical question.

The courage under hostile fire of the men of the 3rd Security Police Squadron at Bien Hoa Air Base, under command of Lt. Col. K. D. Miller –and especially the valor of the men at Bunker Hill-10, is known to only a few. I doubt whether future military history texts will devote many pages to this episode. It will never have the dramatic impact of the American assault on Heartbreak Ridge during the Korean War. But the battle of the 32nd of January will be long remembered by those of us who were at Bien Hoa that fateful morning.

Was Capt. Maisey a particularly religious man? I don't know. "Greater love that this no man has, that one lay down his life for his friends. (Jn. 15, 13) If Christ measures all by charity, then Capt. Maisey was too big a man to stand measuring. I wear my Air Force uniform just a little more proudly these days because of men like Capt. Maisey.

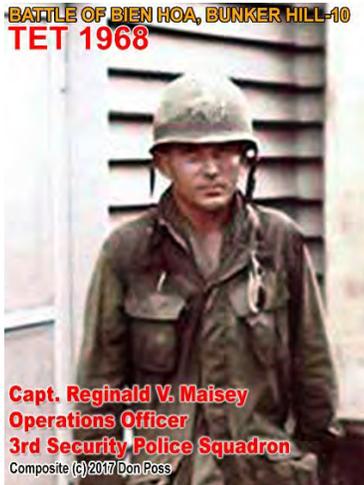
Ch, Capt, Donald J. Sheehan  
Bien Hoa Air Base

### **Ch, Capt. Donald J. Sheehan, Biên Hòa Air Base**

Five men are known to have died as a result of the TET 1968 attack on Biên Hòa AB, 31 Jan 1968. They are:

- ❖ **Capt. Reginald V. Maisey** - 3rd SPS - AF Cross - Purple Heart **SSgt**
- ❖ **Ralph T. Berry** - 303<sup>rd</sup> Munitions Squadron - Purple Heart
- ❖ **Sgt James Des Rochers** - 19th TASS - Purple Heart
- ❖ **A1C Edward G. Muse** - **3rd Combat Support, Group**  
(Augmentee, 3<sup>rd</sup> Security Police Squadron) - Purple Heart
- ❖ **SP5 William J. Steffes** - **US Army** - 520th Personnel SVS CO  
(Augmentee, 3<sup>rd</sup> Security Police Squadron) - Purple Heart

**BATTLE OF BIÊN HÒA**  
**Known KIA List & Photos:**  
**BIÊN HÒA AIR BASE, BIÊN HÒA ARMY POST, BIÊN HÒA PROVINCE**  
[\(KIA Casualty List & Photos](#) of 34 Airmen and Soldiers)



[\(Virtual Wall\)](#)

**Capt. Reginald V. Maisey, Jr.**  
Air Force Cross, Purple Heart  
Operations Officer, 3rd SPS,  
Biên Hòa Air Base



[\(Virtual Wall\)](#)

**A1C Edward G. Muse,**  
Purple Heart  
Augmentee/3rd SPS/3rd CSG,  
Biên Hòa Air Base



[\(Virtual Wall\)](#)

**SSgt Ralph T. Berry,**  
Purple Heart  
303rd Munitions Squadron,  
Biên Hòa Air Base



[\(Virtual Wall\)](#)

**Sgt James Des Rochers,**  
Purple Heart  
19th TASS,  
Biên Hòa Air Base



[\(Virtual Wall\)](#)

**SP5 William J. Steffes,**  
Purple Heart  
520th Personnel SVS CO,  
Biên Hòa Army Post

**See the complete list of casualties during the Battle of Bien Hoa (34 NAMES and PHOTOS).** Included are known casualties at Bien Hoa Air Base, Bien Hoa Army Post, and Bien Hoa Province. Compiled by Don Poss (from the Casualty database)

**Partial Decorations awarded to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Security Police Squadron during the Vietnam War**

**DECORATIONS.**

**Presidential Unit Citation:**



**Presidential Unit Citation**

- (Vietnam) 8 Jun 1966-16 Apr 1967.
- (Vietnam) 6 Mar 1968-31 Jul 1969.

**Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V" Device:**



**Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V" Device**

- 8 Nov 1965-30 Jun 1966;
- 31 Jan-5 Mar 1968;
- 1 Jan 1969-15 Apr 1970;
- 16 Apr-31 Oct 1970.
- 15 Feb 1973: The 3rd Tactical Fighter Wing, 3rd Security Police Squadron (PACAF) is awarded the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award (with Combat V Device) for exceptionally meritorious service in support of military operations from 21 January 1970 to 31 October 1970.  
JOHN D. RYAN, General, USAF Chief of Staff

Donald J. Sheehan,  
Chaplain, Capt, USAF

**Vietnam War:**

**[Lineage and History - 3rd Security Police Squadron.](#)**