

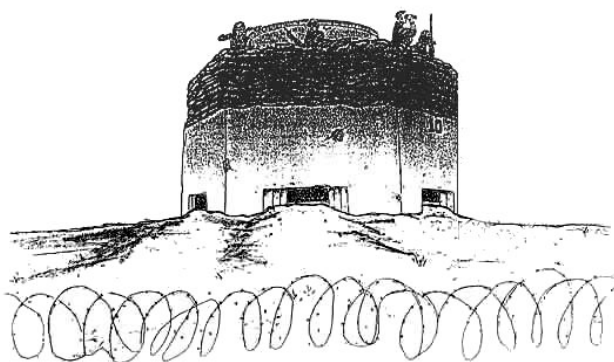
VIETNAM

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT - TET 1968

Tour-2: July 1967-July 1968

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Biên Hòa AB, Vietnam
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A HARD DAY'S NIGHT



This story starts in April 1967, when I was stationed at Clinton-Sherman AFB, OK and received my orders to go TDY to the Air Police Combat Preparedness Course at Lackland AFB, TX for five days of AZR (Shackelford special) training before I went PCS to Vietnam again.

So in June 1967, I then departed Clinton-Sherman AFB, OK for the 3rd Security Police Squadron at Biên Hòa AB, Vietnam. When I arrived in Vietnam in July 1967 at Biên Hòa AB the weather was very hot and the uniform I was wearing got very wet fast-walking from the plane to the MAC Terminal. Then a NCO from the orderly room came over and picked me and several other SPs up and walked us to the squadron area on the East End of the MAC flight line area.

Short history about Biên Hòa AB, it was the busiest airport in the world during this time with all the flights coming and going. The base also had the 145th Aviation Battalion (choppers), 23rd VNAF Fighter Wing, Army Hawk site, Ranch Hand wing, III Corp operations center, ARVN Ranger Battalion and just northeast of the base was the 101st Airborne base camp just to name a few

things.

So in July 1967, I started my tour of duty at Biên Hòa AB. I was assigned to "C" Flight Security (midnight shift) and worked mainly SAT teams on the west and north sides of the base, patrolled the perimeter, bomb dump, and MAC/Ranch Hand flight line areas of the base. Each SAT team had three SPs and a QC (VNAF Security Police interpreter) assigned to it.

Now the Commander (LTC. Kent Miller) and OPS Officer (Capt. Reginald Maisey) were working on making the 3rd SPS prepared for any type of attack against the base by VC/NVA forces. They had each shift conduct training on SAT team deployments, *QRF blocking forces*, how to use *clear and sweep* methods for both on and off base areas, and how to go out into the field aboard choppers check out the movements of the enemy before they attacked us, just like the Army -- did only better.

Now the base had a firing range that was between the USAF bomb dump and the Army Hawk site (to protect Biên Hòa AB from a Mig attack). The range was mainly used almost nightly to show us how to fire our weapons as a team. Everyone got their chance to fire and deploy as a team.

Then one day I got picked to work with the field-testing of an infrared radar system being tested for use on an M-151 jeep to spot people at night in hot and rainy weather. This was something very different for me and the other guys that were picked. The system gave us a chance to look at some of the ways we could help stop the VC/NVA.

Then one night Capt. Marty Strones, "C" Flight Commander for our flight called me into his office and asked me if I would like to run the flight Resupply teams. I accepted the task and became an ammo, flares, food and coffee runner.

Now being the NCOIC of the Resupply teams was fun, that is if you liked working early and getting off late each day. We worked about 10 to 12 hours a day to get the vehicles and ammo ready for our flights coming on and getting off the next morning. In between we ran from one end of the base to the other, and sometimes off the base too.

The 3rd SPS guys had worked very hard to defend the Air Base and the command level folks felt that we needed to relax and feel our oats. So on 25 January 1968, "C" Flight Security held a party at a club on base. We had a band from the Philippines and a red headed Italian-Australian female stripper who come up from Saigon to put on a show, and for everyone to relax and have fun for all the hard work we had done.

Again Capt. Strones *volunteered me* to watch over the female stripper to ensure no one got too close to her before, during, and after her show (hard duty if you can get it). Needless to say, it was one hell of a party and the 3rd SPS again showed that we were the best in Vietnam at anything we did. You could say this was the beginning of the "Hard Days Night" that was to come in a couple of days.

Sometime on the morning of 30 Jan 1968, we were called to CSC and were briefed about the VC/NVA rocket attacks going on in the northern part of South Vietnam against USAF bases. I just mentioned that if they were getting hit tonite then tomorrow night would be our turn. Well, that afternoon, on or about 1500 hours, my resupply team members and I reported for duty to start picking up vehicles from

the motor pool to use for posting and QRF teams that night. We did everything as if it was a normal night on duty except we were in Security Alert *Condition Yellow* because, of the TET New Year.

It was nearly midnight of the 30th when both resupply teams were called to CSC. Once there we were told to pickup some more vehicles and issue out more ammo to the teams coming on duty because 7th Air Force HQ had placed all USAF bases in Vietnam on Security Alert *Condition Red* (attack is imminent). My team members and I got the additional vehicles and ammo ready to issue. Then we split up into four resupply teams.

The start of the "Hard Days Night" began at 0300 hours, 31 January 1968. I was driving on the perimeter road from the bomb dump towards the FDC for the Army hawk site when the rockets (forty-five 122mm) were reported coming inbound. After the rocket attack, I checked with the three SP Augmentees I had and then started towards the main part of the base, when I heard CSC calling Defense-6 (eastside resupply team).

They wanted Defense-6 to go to Bunker Hill-10 on the eastside of the base for a resupply, but Defense-6 called back and said they were stopped at the 101st MP checkpoint by sniper fire from the east. I took my team and drove up to the MP checkpoint from the west side. Upon arrival I found Sgt James Lee (Def 6 Ldr) and his team under cover. I then told A1C Simmons (Def 6 SP rider) to take charge of his team and my augmentees.

I then took Sgt Lee with me in my vehicle after we picked up some more slap-flares from his vehicle. We then drove back towards the bomb dump and then turned south to about half way down the new runway. We then started back towards the east end and turned south, again towards the aircraft run-up area and then back on the road to come up behind Bunker Hill-10 from the west side.



Photo: Bunker Hill-10,
Biên Hòa Air Base.

A K-9 unit told us that Capt. Maisey did not want any more vehicles up at Bunker Hill-10, at stopped us. So Sgt Lee and I took the box of flares and walked up to Bunker Hill-10. After giving Capt. Maisey the flares we went back and drove the vehicle up to Bunker Hill-10 for safety reasons.

At approximately 0330 hours, 31 January 1968, the VC/NVA hit Bunker Hill-10 with RPG's rounds, plus small arms fire from the north, east and south sides of the bunker. That put them on base (north and east sides). Everyone hit the ground and setup to defend the bunker area. VC/NVA's first round took out the M60 on top of Bunker Hill-10.

At the time we had one SAT team, one QRF team, one resupply team, one NCOIC of a Sector, Capt. Maisey and a Lt. from the 145th

Aviation Battalion who was to help us with chopper support from CSC and one base fire department team with a fire pumper truck. I would say about forty people in all.

I took cover behind Bunker Hill-10 as the fire truck drove back towards the main base area after several RPG rounds near-missed it. During this time, I am not sure why I was counting the number of rounds being fired at us, but I did. The Army Lt. behind Bunker Hill-10 had a M16 with a M-148 (40 mm) and he did not know how to fire it so I gave him my M16 and took his weapon. I then started firing at the VC/NVA troops that were firing at us from the QC position just east of Bunker Hill-10.

I can remember as a child playing war with the other guys in my area, but now I was playing in the big game of life. As it turned out the VC/NVA would fire one RPG round at us and then I would fire one 40mm round at them. It was like a western movie where two guys used the buildings as cover and fire at each other. Well, they fired a total of thirteen rounds and I returned fire with ten rounds. Then we heard a big explosion and looked to see at least three VC/NVA troops flying thru the air.

My last round must have hit the ammo in that position and exploded. During all this firing I was yelling at Sgt Neal Tuggle who was inside the old French bunker with other SPs and augmentees. He told me they were all right, but someone was dead but did not know who it was. It was later found out to be Capt. Maisey who was hit in the back by one of the RPG rounds.

As I checked around the south side of the bunker I saw a large number of NVA troops moving west towards the main flight line (F-100 parking ramp area). I called this information into CSC and a few minutes' later Cobra and Huey gunships arrived from the 145th Aviation Battalion and started firing at the NVA. As enemy firing came close to me, I jumped inside Bunker Hill-10 for cover. That is the sad part in that is when I tripped over the body of Capt. Maisey. That is when another SP in the bunker, and I, moved Capt Maisey's body outside and placed it on the steps leading down to the bunker.

After a while we came out of the bunker because we could not see what was going on around us in the dark. Spooky (AC-47) was on the scene dropping flares and we put up slap-flares sometimes too. Sgt Tuggle and I got on top of the bunker and called CSC with information on any movements of the VC/NVA we could see, and directed firepower around Bunker Hill-10.

After fighting most of the night, the daylight looked real good. As I looked over the battlefield I could see a lot of dead VC/NVA bodies. For the rest of that day (31 January 68), Capt. Strones kept me and four other SP's on the bunker to watch over the battle still going on outside the base, and as he lead several sweeps on base to clear out any VC/NVA troops that may be hiding in the elephant grass areas around the east end of the runways.

About 1830 hours, 31 January 68, we were relieved from Bunker Hill-10 and taken back to the barracks area and spent the next 2 1/2 hours in a bunker just in case we got rocketed again. At 2200 hours, 31 Jan 1968, my resupply team members

and I went back to work again doing our job covering the base and supporting the men of the 3rd SPS to help protect Biên Hòa AB. Thus ending my “Hard Days Night” for “TET 68” Offensive.

That night the men of the 3rd Security Police Squadron, along with the augmentees, stopped the VC/NVA troops cold in their tracks from doing a lot of damage to the aircraft and personnel living on the base. We had support from some units with their firepower, and faith from other units that did not have any firepower except prayER. The training we had gone through for months had proven to be our secret weapon (team work and communications). Medals were later handed out to some of us, and the 3rd SPS received an AFOUA citation for its action that night.

Some nights we stayed up longer because of “Charlie.” One time the VC/NVA had attempted to come in around the bomb dump and the 101st Airborne Brigade's area, on the north end of Biên Hòa AB. Capt. Strones wanted to do a sweep of that area (off base). We then got the ammo ready and almost 50 SP's went out the MLR (Main Line of Resistance) after it was cleared through the base, III Corp, and 101st AB units. Once we started our sweep, we found wood blocks that were setup for mortar positions and other fighting positions around that area.

We made a sweep to the highway north of the base, then west, and then south back to the base. Now this may seem like nothing, except we had no tanks, choppers or aircraft coverage. We were carrying only M16's, M60's, and several M-148's. The day shift did have several SAT teams covering us from the MLR with their weapons when we came back on base. Someone was watching over us that day.

The next morning the base received 35 mortar rounds and 60 rocket rounds. You may have guessed it; the mortar rounds came from the blocks of wood we had found the day before. The bomb dumps, towers, and bunkers heard and saw the rounds being fired at the base. They returned fire, but after the attack no bodies were found.

Now this may not seem like a big thing until you look at where the mortar rounds landed that night. All the rounds hit the MLR area just across from the *Ranch Hand* parking ramp on the eastside of the base. The rounds put a big hole in the fence area so that troops may have been pushed through that hole on a ground attack.

Again you may say this is nothing, but the day before a unit from the 11th CAV was doing a sweep northwest of Biên Hòa AB near the river when a RPG round hit one of its APC's. They swung west and ran right into NVA units moving south along the river. The fight was on and it lasted all day.

Well, the Intel folks said those NVA units were coming in for a ground attack on Biên Hòa AB that morning. They were going to come in after the mortar and rocket attack. Sometimes stuff happens and we have no controls on what can be done about it. It is like “Fate Is The Hunter.”

I completed my 2nd tour in Vietnam and felt like I had done my job in an outstanding manner. Sometimes I look back and remember sitting on the perimeter watching silhouettes moving around off base, hit the desk when the rockets land on base, or just sit there waiting for all hell to break loose on a quiet night. During the TET 1968 offensive all the Air Force Security Policemen in Vietnam did an outstanding job. Some of them will only receive a “9” on their APR or a plaque from their flight or squadron for a “Job Well Done”.

Many of our AP/SP's were called upon to perform in “uncommon valor above the call of duty to defend their base.” I would like to remember those who served and fought, and those who died in Vietnam as a part of the history of the Air Police/Security Police and today, the Security Forces. We provided protection of the highest fashion with outstanding professionalism and dedication to duty.

I left Vietnam in June 1968 for Dyess AFB, Texas. Little did I know I would return for a third tour in two years ([that is another story](#)). Like I said in the beginning I think I had a “Hard Days Night on 31 January 68, but so did everyone else that night.

William “Pete” Piazza

SSgt

July 1967-July 1968

3rd Security Police Squadron (PACAF)

Biên Hòa AB, Vietnam

[Pete Piazza earned a Silver Star at Biên Hòa (Logistics Sergeant)].

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