

Biên Hòa AB...

PROJECT SPECIAL EXPRESS

34th Air Police Section - 1966-1966

by Steve Thimlar

(Mike Evans also added to the story)

Photo Right: AIC Thimlar, front passenger seat, AIC Ron Pounds, driver with M-3 grease gun, and A2C Fin Futch on the M60. The jeeps were new and clean that day.



PROJECT SPECIAL EXPRESS An ammunition's convoy with nine air cops, truck drivers, and Air Force Boat Handlers, out of an old French sea plane base at Cat Lai. I was also one of the first group of five Air Police assigned from the 34th Tac Gp to Qui Nhon.



"Thimlar, report to Operations." The thought was, *what did I do or not do?* In 1965 it was not not a long walk from the hut to Operations. When I got there I found a total of eight other Air Police standing around. We were told we were picked for a classified project. Okay! It sounded like a way of doing something different. We soon found ourselves in some beat up pick-ups headed for an old French Sea Place base at Cat Lai and our job was to escort 300 tons of aircraft munitions per day. That was every day there were ammunitions ships in the bay, including Sunday, and holidays. Our days off were when there were no munitions to be off-loaded. Some of those off days found us doing vehicle maintenance or other convoy duty.

(Photo Left: Click on Orders for the first group of Air Police to Qui Nhon AB. We went on TDY)

How we did this was something else--the pick-ups were soon replaced by jeeps on long term *loan* from the 716th MP Bn in Saigon (Note the photo right, the hood is stenciled "U.S. ARMY, and the windshield "AIR POLICE").

We upgraded weapons to M60s which were Army write offs, and the vehicle mounts were parts from wrecked choppers and other parts were locally made by our Civil Engr people at Biên Hòa AB. Contact with the forward air controller was by radios that various Army units could spare. Spare vehicle parts came from the MPs in Saigon and from the 1st Inf Division's Supply Platoon which was headed up by an old time Warrant Officer.



A normal day? Well there never was one. We started before dawn departing from Biên Hòa AB before the mess hall opened. We headed down the big highway to Saigon and would stop part way there and pick up the Air Force Boat handlers. I never knew it before then, but that was another Air Force skill, and they wore Navy work clothes and Air Force Stripes. Upon our arrival to Cat Lai the LCM-6s were checked out, and the first one down the bay would carry an Air Policeman with his trusty M60 as the local VC always wanted to take a few shots at the first boat. We were very friendly and they would get a burst in reply.



We had another group without us, III Corps QCs, approximately 6 to 9 of them in jeeps with .30 cal Air Cools. Some times they would have a weapons carrier that would replace two jeeps They were good as the country was under martial law and we never stopped if we hit someone. A few times an individual driver would play *chicken* without us in his old car or scooter, but would come out on the short end. One guy came up over the hood of an AP jeep and found a .38 revolver placed up against his head. Two others got their life's terminated by trying to take on a tractor trailer full of munitions at 50 MPH. (Photo Left: AIC Ron Pounds)

The number one question I get asked about my tour was did you get shot at. YES! I was at the end of the convoy where we would get the radio call about small arms fire or see the bullets

striking the ground. Another morning we were land mined. On one convoy we received an **RED ALERT** that MIGs were on the way, but they never made it. The US Navy stopped them out over water.

What did a convoy look like, well there were two Air Police Jeeps with three Air Police each, then came a QC jeep or weapons carrier, four to eight tractor trailers of munitions, another QC jeep and one more jeep of Air Police. The greatest thing in our favor was the VC had not caught on to *leading*. From time to time a munitions truck would take a hit but the drivers never got hit.

(Photo right: A2C Fin Futch)

As my tour was ending and it was Christmas Day, we went to Cat Lai on an alternative route. I got the turkey or chicken loaf that day, but I am not sure who got the ham and lima beans. When we got to Thu Duc we noticed a large amount of ARVN troops in town. We soon found out that Charlie had paid a visit on Christmas Eve and killed the local village leaders.



My time in-country ended and on Jan 4 1966, the Air Police moved to Tân Sơn Nhứt Air Base to be with the truck drivers and boat handlers. I got on a DC-8 on 6 Jan 1966 and headed home. It was a year to remember: we were mortared; had a short-round by our own 155s from Long Binh; and on 16 May our entire flight line went up in smoke and a BANG! Some who served that I can remember were: TSgt Darrell Tucker, TSgt Dickson, SSgt Portier, SSgt George Graham, SSgt Jim Britt, A1C and A2C Ron Pounds, Fin Futch, Bob Sharpe, Don Weiland, Mike Evans, JD Rucker, Holland and Whitt.

(Photo Left: AIC Thimlar)

The following is added by a VSPA member Mike Evans who was also on Special Express

I remember getting notification from A2C Fin Futch (Photo right) who got into Special Express... I remember the road being land mined, and that a rock had hit one of the truck drivers, who was then air lifted out of Cat Lai. Also, one time after a convoy we went back to where we were shot at by automatic weapons and dared the guy to do it again--*we were crazy!*

I remember the Army Lt Col who said we shot over his jeep when he would not yield. Seems like he went to Operations and got our Base CO involved. The Base CO was a Col Martin who had just come in, what the LtCol did not know was that Col Martin had been an old time Air Provost Marshal. The Lt Col got chewed out in front of us. And told we had violated our orders by *not* shooting him. Then he ordered him off the base. Col Martin then told us *Good Job* and walked away.

We also traded lumber from the munitions ships for goggles, grenades, C-Rations and MREs. Often the mess hall was out of most everything. One week we had nothing but hash!

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