

Vietnam

3rd Security Police Squadron Biên Hòa

Not Always Authorized

by [Dave Ware](#),
Biên Hòa 1967-1969
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I can still hear my teachers, parents and other mentors in my life always asking *why I could not be more like my younger brother*. He was a K-9 handler in Cam Ranh Bay AB in 1968 and "by the book" and a squared away troop. He arrived when I DEROSed back in 1967 from Biên Hòa.

I always had a nose for trouble or adventure and had been known to push the envelope when it came to the rules. I also did the job, but always figured there was a better way to do it and did not always follow the "yellow brick road." Unfortunately, or fortunately, guess it depends on your perspective, I ran into Jimmy Mac Strange while in Vietnam. We were peas in a pod and the two of us together made for an interesting combination.

Mac and I were always seeking to do the unusual and we were both extroverted enough to manipulate our way into situations that might impede others.

I had a first cousin who was an Army aviator and Captain and through him I was able to acquaint myself with other aviators, both Air Force and Army. I spent lots of time over at the Stalag 13 compound bar which was the billet for Aviation officers at Biên Hòa. Mac also had made some connections and we both finagled some unusual trips and adventures. My cousin would later be seriously wounded with burns to sixty percent of his body while TDY with some Marines around Đà Nẵng. He went on to become a Full Colonel and do another tour in Vietnam.

In one particular situation I actually left the country and spent two days in Bangkok. I am sure Colonel Miller would have admired my boldness, but I dreaded the consequences if he had caught me. While sharing a few beers with a USAF Major (Hobensack), who flew C-47s and flew *ass and trash* trips to Bangkok, and I was invited to join him and his crew on a layover. It basically was a no-brainer as I wore a flight suit and was listed on the manifest as a crew member. The other caveat that I had in my favor was a US Passport in my possession. As an English born citizen with an American father, I had to officially become a naturalized citizen of the US upon turning 21. I had spent a tour in Korea and had orders cut for Thailand, but could not go unless I had an American passport --something to do with the Thai government and diplomacy in Southeast Asia. Anyway, I got a US Passport, but decided I would rather go to Vietnam (more action) than Thailand and subsequently volunteered for Vietnam.

Having a passport was all I needed in lieu of orders to enter Thailand, although they never actually checked or asked any questions. I just followed the other crew members and acted like I knew what I was doing. It worked like a charm and I enjoyed a two day R&R. My biggest worry was an attack while I was gone and my not being there for duty if all off-duty personnel were called for Guardmount -- but I was willing to take the chance. It helps if you are young and bold, but not necessarily wise. : >)

On several occasions Mac and I flew with an Air Force "Bird-dog Pilot" and were involved in some airstrikes and got a birdseye view of the airwar in 3rd Corp. We befriended a young Captain who had fell out of graces with his Squadron Commander. He had previously flew F100s with the 3rd TFS, but had been bumped down to flying the L-19s. *Something to do with alcohol and saying the wrong thing to a superior*. Mac and I both got a close up view of napalm drops and heavy ordnance. It was high adventure. I even tried to check out a M60 from the Armory, but the Armory Sergeant would not hear of it. He said he did not care if I got my butt shot down, but I was not doing it with a weapon that he was responsible for.

The rear windows of the L-19 folded up and in and made a great firing position for ground targets. The young Captain said that several of his buddies would sometimes ride along with a sixty hanging out the back as they made runs up and down the river in the free fire zones of 4th Corp. Mac and I had to settle with our 16s and I did fire a few rounds at an "alleged" VC pushing a loaded bicycle. He disappeared off the trail and sought shelter in the undergrowth and the young Captain tried to muster up some "fastmovers," but the target did not justify the mission so operations denied the mission. He fired a couple of WP rockets in the vicinity and I emptied two clips as he made low passes. We never saw the cyclist again. I was an aspiring pilot and he even put the duel-controls in once and gave me some stick time. I have since flown an L-19 that was restored by a friend in Georgia and often think of my first flight lessons in one.

I also flew with a Vietnamese pilot in an A1E SkyRaider. That was a "hoot" and we dropped some heavy ordnance near the Ho Bo woods in support of a LRRP team that was being extracted one afternoon. That aircraft was like a flying dumptruck and it was hot and noisy. The pilot was a real cowboy and he loved to show off. Fortunately I have a strong stomach or he would have regretted his hijinks. The amazing thing was when he fired his cannons. The aircraft felt as if it was backing up and the whole thing felt as if it would pop every rivet. I would learn later that he was killed in August 1967. I only remember his name as Hinh. I also think that Mac flew with him on one occasion.

Mac and I flew several trips in C-7 Caribous and was able to see a lot of the countryside and visit some desolate outposts. We landed at a SF base up in 2nd Corp once and I remember that we made a penetration approach to avoid exposure to ground fire coming in from the hills. We literally hung from our harness as the aircraft nosed straight down and then flared with power as it touched on the PSP runway. We spent a short while there and talked to some of the SF guys who had been involved in a firefight the night before. They still had several VC prisoners and thought we were coming for them. I still have a picture of one of "Chieu Hoas" at the base. He had on a pair of Istrouma High School (Baton Rouge) football shorts and was wearing them backwards. I made him turn around and took a picture. Still have it and have often wondered how a former VC got a pair of shorts from Louisiana.

The Caribou was an amazing aircraft and could land on a large football field, but took a little longer to take off. On several occasions we would low level by an outpost and kick out bundles of "Stars and Stripes" and mail. On one occasion we kicked out several rolls of concertina wire because it was too wet to land and the short runway was a mudhole. The wire bounced a half dozen times and the troops on the ground were very unhappy as it was nearly impossible to unstrand in its deformed shape.

Mac and I once flew with some Ranch Hand guys in a C-123 Provider and made a spray run (Agent Orange) up near the *Parrots Beak*. It was wild as we jumped inside a fiberglass box that was supposedly ballistic proof when the pilots dropped down to make their run. Not a job I would want to do everyday.

Once we went out to the Leper colony near Biên Hòa by an Air America Huey. This was an official flight. : >) I later saw the pilot at the Stalag compound and was to later fly with him and his pet pilot to various locations including Saigon and Tah Ninh. Tah Ninh was a wild west atmosphere and Nu Bai Dinh, Black Virgin Mountain was a renown mountain in Vietnam. We controlled the top and most of the mountain and the NVA controlled the rest. We landed up there and I ran into some USAF Radio Techs who were TDY at the Relay Station. They were ready to get off the mountain as someone was always dispensing unused ordnance on it or there was a firefight going on. It was common practice for the Army choppers and Air Force to spend unused ordnance at targets of opportunity on the mountain. They usually just blew up rocks as the NVA were well entrenched. The Army guys said it was the safest place in Vietnam.

I also remember going by C-130 TDY to Phan Rang AB. I think they were relocating some of our fighters while they made repairs or extensions to the runway at Biên Hòa so we went as added security for the aircraft. Phan Rang was nice and the beach was great. I actually can say that I water skied in the South China Sea.

Over time I and some of my "compatriots" developed some connections with the 173rd guys and did some innovating trading. Plywood was like gold to the Army guys as they wanted it to cordon off their living cubicles in their hootches. We managed to "appropriate" plywood and would trade it for New York strip steaks or in one case, 4 grenades. It bugged me that we rarely had grenades except on certain posts or situations.

As a former quarterback and pitcher I had a good arm and liked the idea of being able to drop one down Charlie's shorts if the opportunity presented itself. When I went through AZR I astounded the Range Officer on the grenade course as I threw the grenade over the berm and off the range. I even continued standing to admire my handiwork until he slammed me to the ground. : >) He did compliment me on my arm, but told me the objective was to throw it at the enemy, not his village. Any way, unbeknownst to my superiors, I carried four grenades in ammo pouches for a long time and felt reassured if Mr. Charles decided to run in my direction. I was to later learn that others had developed their own resources for acquiring grenades. Knowing Col Miller, I suspect he probably had a few stashed away himself. : >)

It was while I was on one of these "trade routes" up to the 173rd that I last saw Robert E. **Bridges**. I came by in the jeep as he was in the tower on the west end near the perimeter road. We yelled at each other and flipped each other off and I noticed the darkening sky and hoped I could make it to the 3rd before I got drenched. I did make it and on the return home and saw the ambulance as it was parked below the tower. It was then that I learned that Bridges had been struck by lightning and killed. I was heartbroken. I was probably the last person to speak to him and we were close friends. He too, was English born and we hit it off immediately. He had a great sense of humor and reminded me of the Dudley Moore character, especially when he had a few beers. Just a super guy. I have an old photo of him and I where he is holding a puppy. I am sure some of you that came later remember the mascots. Well, Bridges was the one who kept bringing puppies. If memory serves me correctly, he was a wealthy kid as his Dad was President or Vice President of Pratt and Whitney Aircraft. He didn't have to be there, but he volunteered. Said he would complete his schooling when he returned home. He was a city kid and I always have believed that if he had grown up in the south or country that he would have been more aware of the dangers of lightning in a thunderstorm. On several occasions I and others bailed out of those towers during an approaching storm. They were nothing more than a lightning rod. I just don't think Bridges understood the danger.

One of Bridges closest friends, Sokolowski, I believe or something like that, went berserk in grief and went to the tower and shot it up with his M16. We never saw him again and figured the Air Force sent him home. He was a good guy, but just reached his breaking point. They were really close friends.

I and Murray, and I think Fieldstien, were assigned to oversee some Article 15s from the Army. We had a 2500 gallon tanker and were spraying and burning parts of the perimeter to impede the cover for zappers. We sprayed the blue, white and occasionally the orange defoliant along with unusable Jet A fuel. I still tell my wife that I am probably suffering from Agent Orange poisoning, so she should excuse any abnormal behavior. On one occasion the Army 15s showed up near the Counter Mortar compound with a full tanker as instructed, but failed to fill up the vehicle tank and it was almost empty. I sent them back over to the POL and told them to hurry up as the sun was baking us and we needed to get this area sprayed and move on.

As I sat in the jeep and smoking a cigarette I heard a loud "thump." I looked up and the tanker was about 300 meters in the middle of an open area that was an old mined area and posted as such. These mutts had decided they would take a short cut rather than drive the perimeter road and ran over an antipersonnel mine and blew out the front right tire. I could see them doing side straddle hops on top of the tanker trying to get my attention. Needing some type of help or guidance I motioned for them to stay put and hoped they would have enough sense to stay on the truck.

I quickly drove over to the 173rds CQ and borrowed their landline to 3rd Corp. No one would answer the door at the Counter Mortar Compound. Our detail was working under the direction of a full Colonel who I believe was in charge of the whole 3rd Corp complex around Biên Hòa. As I finally got past the gatekeepers and spoke directly to the Colonel I explained the situation. Having meet him on several occasions he knew who I was was and asked me point blank as to how far I estimated they were from me. I told him that I believed they were probably 300 meters or less. He then asked me if I was a good shot and could I hit them? I told him that I scored expert. He then paused and told me to return to the area and he would get a chopper to rescue the wayward soldiers. After about a half hour a Huey showed up and plucked them to safety and later a Rome Plow came and drug the vehicle back to the road. A tire and rim were replaced and we were back in business. All our help disappeared and we had a new crew the next day. Maybe they shot them. I know the Colonel was pondering the idea.

As I stop and reminisce about the year in Vietnam I remember mostly the good and filter out the bad. The guys you soldiered with were the best of the best. Many of us were young and brash and foolhardy, but survived in spite of ourselves. It still brings a smile to my face when I think of some of the funnier moments we encountered and some of the characters.

Hope I wasn't too long winded, but all the events kept coming back and figured I would write while I was in the mood.

Waredog

I currently live near Atlanta and fly EMS Medevac helicopters.

We Take Care of Our Own

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