

Memories of **Vietnam** **NHA TRANG - 1969**

14th Security Police Squadron

© (1998) by **Bruce Thompson**

Nha Trang, December 1968-November 1969: I arrived in Vietnam December 1968. The flight from Mc Chord AFB, Wash. brought me into the Cam Rhan Bay, Air Base. That was an experience in itself. When I stepped off that plane at Cam Rhan, I first noticed right the stifling heat. It was hot... hot... hot, and very humid. The terminal at Cam Rhan was full of Air Force, Army, Marines and a number of Vietnamese workers. There was an overwhelming mixture of odor of sweat, urine, and other undesirable smells of Vietnam.

I was at Cam Rhan only a short time. I boarded a C-130 which transported me to Nha Trang Air Base. Nha Trang was only a short flight up the coast and over the Dung Bo mountains. The Load Master didn't even raise the hatch door to the C-130. On the way into Nha Trang we flew over a small island just off the coast. The island, Hon Tre, was unusual in that it had three separate large circles of lights on it. I thought to myself: what could that be?

I was met at the Nha Trang terminal by a member of the 14th SPS who took me to the SP barracks where I signed in. The Security Police were some of the lucky ones at Nha Trang. Nice barracks constructed of concrete. Didn't require sandbags for protection. They were close to the B.X., Mess-hall, Open Air Theater, Swimming Pool, etceteras.

Nha Trang was a very nice base, with the beach just outside the Main Gate. It was a very beautiful beach, palm trees, white sands, the water was aqua blue. One could walk to the beach from the SP barracks in just a few minutes. Downtown Nha Trang was very alive with numerous clubs where an Airman could go to drink and socialize with the ladies. There were lots of ladies. Of course they wanted you to buy them drinks. Lots of MPC were spent on the ladies in Nha Trang. Nha Trang City was somewhat of a beautiful place with its French villas and architecture, and friendly people. You could tell they enjoyed our presence, and money.

Lots of local civilians worked at the base. Mamasans cleaned our barracks, construction workers repaired buildings, and others worked in the BX, Snack Bars, Mess Halls, NCO Club, Officer Club and Barber Shop. I still remember the first haircut I received in Vietnam. After the barber was through cutting my hair he grabbed my head and gave it a quick snap to the left, then to the right. Popped my neck! I came unglued, only to find out that was one of the customer perks. Almost shot that barber!

My first duty in Vietnam was in Security, usually at guard towers, Security Patrol, and perimeter posts. We had a large squadron of Security Police at Nha Trang. Most served duty as base security. The Air Force did not have enough barracks on Nha Trang Air Base so they leased a lot of villas and hotels in downtown Nha Trang. We were also responsible for the security of those off base facilities. We used private guards, mostly of Chinese descent, to guard the hotels and villas. The Chinese hated the Vietnamese and would not let them get a way with anything.

Nha Trang Air Base was a fairly secure base. We were hit by mortar and rockets quite frequently, with little accuracy and little destruction. Nha Trang Air base was backed up by the 5th Special Forces which had a camp just outside the base. They passed through our base to get to theirs. We also had the C-47, and C-119 Gunships with side-firing gattling guns. It was an awesome sight when ole' Spooky & Shadow cut loose with those gattling guns, and one I remember to this day.

I worked Security for a few months and decided to volunteer for duty on Hon Tre island. Hon Tre was the island just off the coast of Nha Trang I had flown over earlier. The three circles of lights turned out to be security perimeter lights. The first one was the cantonment area where the Air Force and Army 5th Special Forces had their barracks. The second was the Armed Forces Radio and TV station, which was run by the Army. The third was a radar site run by the Air Force and Army. The Air Force provided security for the cantonment area and the radar site. Army MP's secured the radio and TV station. The lights on Hon Tre could be seen from not only Nha Trang but also Cam Rhan, and th. We could set on top of Hon Tre and watch aircraft landing at Cam Rhan and Nha Trang. We could also see rocket and mortar attacks from there.

Duty on Hon Tre was a little rougher than Nha Trang. Roads were all dirt, the barracks were little more than wood-frames, and the latrines used overhead tanks of rain water for showering. We were somewhat isolated from the night-life of Nha Trang. To get to Nha Trang you had to board a ferry boat. The boat made three or four trips a day to the main coast. The ferry took a pretty good to cross the channel so you needed to be off duty. I will never forget those quiet sailing times.

Hon Tre Guardmount for the security shift was conducted at the Central Security Control on the lower cantonment area. After post assignments, we boarded a 2 1/2 ton truck for the trip up the mountain to the third area on top of Hon Tre. Once, on the way up the mountain, we met a huge snake which was on the way down the mountain. It was definitely the largest snake I've ever seen! The K-9 dogs went crazy, and it was a good thing they were muzzled. The snake was about 12-14 feet long, and as round as your thigh! He passed us without much trouble, and the dogs settled down. Never saw another snake after, that but you can bet that I was looking close at the things that go bump-in-the-night!

The only dead VC I saw in Vi was on Hon Tre Island. The 5th Special Forces used Hon Tre for a training and instruction area. There were numerous reports of VC activity on the island and one day they met up. A firefight between 5th Special Forces and some VC occurred--three KIA VC. Their bodies were brought back into the cantonment area for identification and removal. Of course the SPs had to check them out too.

After my duty on Hon Tre, I returned to the main base at Nha Trang where I was placed in general Law Enforcement activities such as Main Gate, RMK Gate, L.E. Patrol, and checking the Chinese guards downtown. There was one incident at the NCO Club where the Army 5th Special Forces and the Marines got into a large fight. We had to call in the K-9 section to break it up! Neither Special Forces nor Marines wanted to mess with those bad a-- dogs!

Overall, duty at Nha Trang was good! I will never forget Nha Trang and would like to return there someday! We were harassed by the VC from time to time, but to my knowledge they never tried to come on the Air Base. We were ready for them, and they no doubt were aware of this and never really tried. Base security was tight, the K-9s was ready, and we had ole Spooky and the Shadow--baddest two asses in town to help us out!

Security Police Squadron: A complex Security Police network is maintained at each U.S. Air Force installation in South Vietnam; captured prisoners have related that because of the high cost they would have to pay to break through some heavily guarded base perimeters, they were forced to seek more vulnerable targets.

In addition to constant security patrols on foot, by vehicle, and by dog accompanied sentries, U.S. Air Force Security Police also furnish base support in numerous other ways, including pass and identification, traffic control and both criminal and accident investigation.

(Photos: A Sentry and his dog team make their nightly rounds in dark-silence. Normally indiscernible, a Security Police perimeter patrol are illuminated by slap flares, and the photographer's strobe light as they fire on a target.)

Since the 1968 Communist Tet Offensive, many Seventh Air Force Security Police have found themselves, on occasion, performing in a role usually reserved to an Army's infantry---that of a defensive rifleman, holding off an opposing force until reinforcements and tactical air support could be brought in to deal a knock out blow to the enemy.





02) Nha Trang AB, Security Police barracks on left, BX right, Open Air Theater on the right.



03) V-100 APC in front of SP OPS building.



04) SP, OSI, OPS building.



05. (above) Nha Trang Air Base Operations control tower.



06 (left) Contoument area at Hon Tre Island, 5th Special Forces on LE Air Force barracks on right.



7) A Honda repair shack on the outskirts of Nha Trang City, Hwy# 1.



10) Kim Thien in traditional Vietnamese dress, she worked at Nha Trang Air Base NCO Club, and was a good friend.



8) Main Gate Nha Trang Air Base. Sgt Thompson, Sgt Robinson.



11) Sgt Anderson, Sgt Gadue, Sgt Thompson, RMK Security Po we spent the entire 4 years together in the Air Force. Very good buddies!!!



9) RMK Gate, Sgt Thompson searching Vietnamese civilians prior to entering base to work (their day jobs?).



12) Sgt Thompson in V-100 APC equipped with .50 cal and 7.62mm machine guns.



13a) Convoy Escort on Hwy.#1, North of Nha Trang (Sgt Thompson).



15) Sgt Thompson on Law Enforcement (L.E.) Patrol. My little buddy, George, visited me just about everyday at the K-9 Area gate.



13b) Convoy arrives in Nin Hoa military site, North of Nha Trang.



16) Little Bud George wanted to be a Air Force SP when he grew I wonder where he is today. Good Kid!



14) Main Gate, Sgt Thompson, Sgt Ky, a Vietnamese Q.C. (Military Police).



17) Sgt Thompson talking to a Q.C. Patrol were military police on the Vietnamese side of the base.



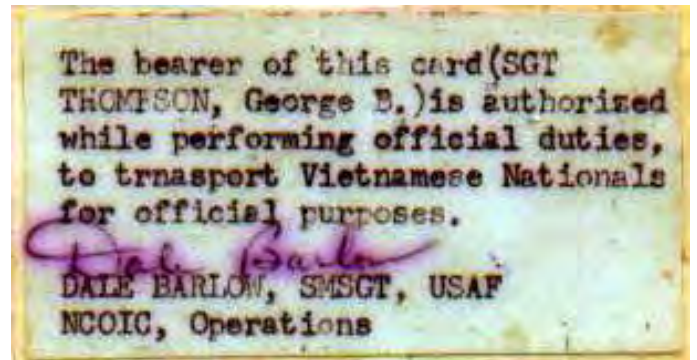
18) L.E. Patrol, Sgt Thompson, Sgt Gadue.



19) F-4 Phantom Fighter crash site, on the beach in Nha Trang. The Phantom was assigned to Cam Ranh Bay and developed problems, then tried to land at Nha Trang, but the runway was too short, so he overshot the apron and crashed into a duce and a half on the road adjacent to beach---killed several army troops, but the pilot ejected and was okay.



20) NCO Club Card, Nha Trang Air Base



21) Authorization card. We transported civilian guards for the hotels and villas downtown. Interpreters were sometimes transported when we needed them.



22) Hon Tre Island coast.



23) Nha Trang Beach.

24) Harbor Defense Area. This was where you boarded the ferry boat to Hon Tre Island. The two large ships are power plants which supplied the emergency power for the area.



25 (below) Sgt Thompson on the ferry boat en route to Hon Tre Island.



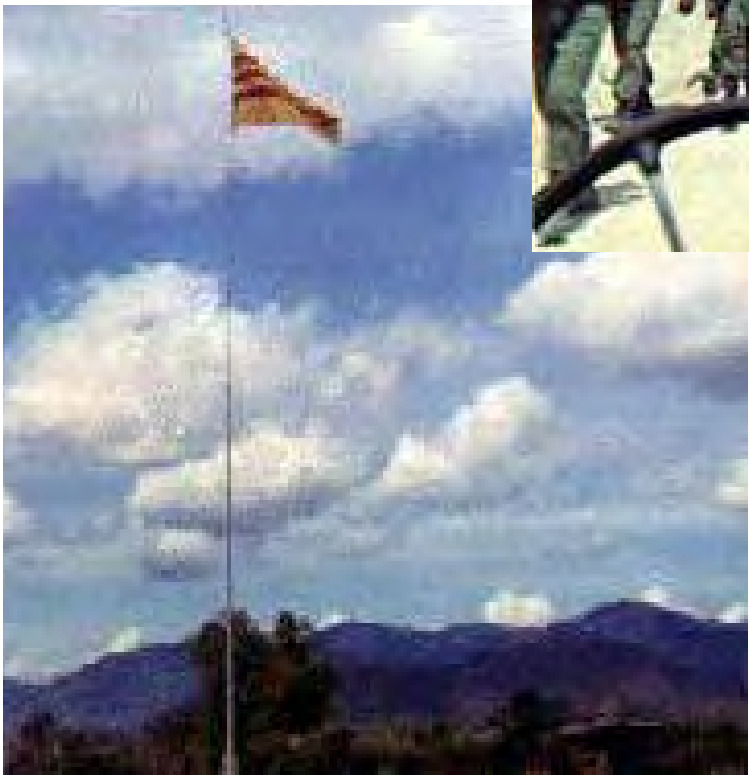
26 (below) Papason plowing rice field with a water buffalo just off Hgy# 1, North of Nha Trang



< 27 (left) Security Patrol with M60 machine gun mounted. Sgt Woodring.



28. (above) RVN Troops on Hwy# 1 North of NhaTrang



29. Republic of Vietnam Flag.



30. Hon Tre Island.



32) Nha Trang City from a distance of approximately 10 miles up North Hwy# 1. Dung Bo mountains in background.



31. above: Fishing Village South of Nha Trang. Villiage on top of hill was for Vietnamese President Ky.

32. left: 5th Special Forces Gate. SP and RVN Army Security Guard checking I.D. before allowing entry.

34) AC47 Gunship (Spooky) equipped with three electric 7.62 gatlin guns. Note: more than 5000 ground attacks on friendly forces were repelled by ole' Spooky. Many Army troops were saved by this aircraft.



35) Inside an AC-47 with electric gatlin guns. The gatlin gun can fire over 100 rounds of 7.62 mm per second.





36) The Business end of Spooky firing on a target!
This was an awesome sight at night from a distance.

Articles regarding the NVA/VC occupying the caves of Dong Bo Mountains Surrounding Nhat Trang AB. Interesting! George Bruce Thompson, NT 1968-1969

How ROKs Kicked Reds Off Grand Sommet

By KIM KI SAM

S&S Staff Correspondent

NINH HOA, Vietnam — The helicopter touched down carefully on the little platform of logs that had been laid over the great rocks. The pilot kept the power on in case the tiny, mountaintop "LZ" collapsed.

More pictures, Pages 12-13

We could hear the gunfire from the caves just under us.

Far below us to the northeast, things looked normal at Nha Trang. You could see the big C130s lifting off the runway and other planes circling, waiting to land. And here we were, standing on top of a communist hideout, just five miles away.

This was "Grand Sommet," a 3,000-foot mountain overlooking the big Nha Trang allied military complex and a fortress for more than 400 enemy soldiers. It was under attack for the first time in the war.

It was Friday morning. The day before, there had been a

series of air strikes with 500- and 2,000-pound bombs. It looked like the NVA had been making a break for it when the bombs hit. The rocks were splattered with blood and 20 yards down from the helicopter lay the lower portion of a man's leg.

The fight had been going on almost two full days. The South Korean White Horse Div. had circled the general area of the caves on Wednesday, then heli-lifted troops onto the mountain peak to move down the mountainside and into the caves.

The first try had to be called off. The NVA were set up in rock crannies and more than a dozen cave entrances, spread over several acres, with nothing but the muzzles of their weapons showing. The enemy fire was so intense the ROKs pulled back and called in the American jets from Cam Ranh Bay.

The planes had hammered the mountainside for hours, finally driving the Reds deep into

SAIGON—South Korean soldiers killed 25 communists Monday near Nha Trang and Phu Cat, ROK military spokesmen said.

Elements of the White Horse Div. sweeping the mountainous Dong Bo Area, overlooking the allied military complex at Nha Trang, reported killing 22 enemy soldiers, bringing the five-day total to 372 Reds slain. Spokesmen said the ROKs destroyed the mountain fortress Tuesday morning with no further contact with the enemy.

No Korean casualties were reported Monday. A team of Rangers from the Tiger Div. killed three Reds about 15 miles northeast of Phu Cat in a clash with an enemy force of unknown size, again with no ROK casualties.

the huge, connected caves. On Thursday the ROKs went in after them.

It was a tough job. Although some of the caves were 10 feet high and big enough to house a company or more, the entrances—even the main one—were tiny. Some were just big enough for a small man to slip through, and the Korean soldiers had to take off their packs to crawl inside. While they removed their gear, enemy snipers popped up from holes in the rocks and peppered them.

The main entrance was about

half the size of a normal doorway. I crouched and followed a platoon from 9th Co., 30th Inf. Regt., inside.

It was a natural cave, a big one, with room for maybe 100 men. In the blackness at the far end was a passageway that led to another room, which in turn led to other caverns. The ROK troops were working through them now. Shots echoed off the rock walls.

Of the estimated 420 NVA lurking in the tunnels and caves, at least 300 were already dead.

As our eyes got used to the

dim light, we picked out a stack of about 15 bodies. The Reds had apparently dragged their dead in after the air strikes.

Near the pile of dead men was a fireplace and some wooden benches. It looked like the Reds had been there a long time. They had. An officer later told me there was strong evidence them the Viet Cong and the Viet Minh, had occupied the mountain "apartment house" caves since the late 1940s.

Most of the dead were mature men, not the teen-agers found in so many other NVA units. They apparently had done little if any ground fighting. This had been their first and last major action.

Back outside, a cordon of infantrymen still ringed the cave area and patrols searched the rocks and forest clumps for snipers and escapees. The night before many of the communists had tried to sneak through the dragnet by twos or threes. Apparently none made it.

One of the last enemy troops killed before we landed was a sniper pinned down in the rocks to the left of the main cave. A Vietnamese interpreter had pleaded with him over a bull-horn, asking him to surrender and save himself. The NVA's reply, as translated, was, "Come and get me."

A ROK soldier did, with a hand grenade.

Just above the main cave entrance is a 12-foot-wide flat rock. On it the Koreans had found an 82mm mortar with a clear field of fire toward Nha Trang. It must have been meant for use Thursday night, but the Reds never had time to use it.

By the time the helicopter lifted us off the mountain the ROKs had gotten to the deepest parts of the subterranean maze. You could hardly hear the occasional bursts of fire, coming from the bowels of the mountain. The Reds had lost their longest lease of the war.



S&S Photo by Kim Ki Sam

KOREAN RECOILLESS RIFLES BLAST COMMUNIST TARGETS DURING BATTLE ON MOUNTAIN NEAR NHA TRANG.

ROKs Continue Push Into Red Peak

By KIM KI SAM

S&S Staff Correspondent

NHA TRANG, Vietnam—Korean 9th Inf. Div. soldiers continued to fight their way through the jungled mountains overlooking this allied military complex

Saturday, hunting down North Vietnamese company bases hidden in rocky caves.

The number of enemy dead in the fighting that has raged through the Dong Bo mountain area since Thursday rose to 305

late Saturday afternoon. Among them were two girls, both described as "hard core" red fighters.

The many caves on and around "Grand Sommet" the tallest peak on the Nha Trang area

skyline, have been Communist havens for years. Those on the mountain itself have been infested with Viet Minh and Viet Cong for 20 years.

An enemy document found Friday indicates that the Dong Bo base camp itself, near the foot of the mountain, has also long served as an enemy hideaway.

Early intelligence reports say the camp was apparently the base of about 250 members of the NVA 5th Div.'s 18B Regt. Their objective was apparently to attack Allied installations in the Nha Trang and Cam Ranh Bay areas.

Korean spokesmen say the three days of fighting has probably destroyed the enemy chain of command.

We Take Care of Our Own

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