



Phan Rang AB
1966-1967
35th APS - Panther Flight

Night Eyes

by **Robert Claud**,
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Upon arriving in Vietnam, we were told about the dangers of the country. Also we were told lot of *do's and don'ts*. One of the dangers was the types of snakes in that country. One of the don't was at night don't stare at one thing too long. One do was to maintain light discipline.

I was assigned to the Panther Flight, 35th APS, while at Phan Rang. We helped to maintain the security of the base. During my tour several snakes were killed on the base. Most of them by the jeep patrol units, they always carried a M-12 shotgun, mostly just to kill dogs, cats, and also snakes.



Each morning after our night shift was over we were taken to Central Security Control. There we cleaned our weapons before returning them to the armory. On this particular morning when I arrived at CSC, I heard several of the men talking about a snake. Well! my ears perked up right away. I was cleaning my M16 on a shelf outside the armory. I asked one of the guys; " What snake are you talking about? " He answered; "The cobra up on that board." When I looked up on the top shelf, there was a skinned cobra probably nine feet long. I ran backwards a good ways before I could stop.

I asked, "Where did that come from?" Someone said; "At the bomb dump area." I moved to a different spot to finish cleaning my weapon. After I turned my weapon in, I went over to the bulletin board to check what post I would have the coming night. As soon as I saw my name by the bomb dump post I was getting a very bad feeling, I immediately started asking guys to trade post with me for the coming night. I had heard cobras travel in pairs; male and female, and that bomb dump was just not the place I wanted to go to that night.

Even during morning chow I tried to get someone to trade posts, and even offered money. No one would trade with me. I believe most people thought it was bad luck to trade a guard post. Well! I don't believe I got very much sleep that day. As a matter of fact it was hard to sleep over there in the day time. Even if you weren't thinking about a dark night with nine foot cobras around. At guard mount that night I tried again, but no one would trade.

On the truck ride to the bomb dump, I really worked myself up. I guess I was thinking that I wasn't going to make it through that night. The post I had was about thirty meters off the road. It was on the east side of the bomb dump storage area. In this area there were one man bunkers around the perimeter about every hundred meters. As soon as the truck stopped, the guard that I was to relief was there on the road ready to be picked up. As I was getting off the truck, I was trying to ask him if he had seen any snakes, but he just climbed aboard the truck and it pulled away. I got no answer.

I am thirty meters from my post, and there were lots of small shrubby bushes between me and that bunker. I don't know how long, I just stood there. But I knew I had to go to my post. So I did a (no no), from my pack I pulled out my flashlight and turned it on. It took me a good ten or fifteen minutes to reach my bunker, because I was checking the area good. After I reached the bunker, I began to check the area out for the snake. The one that I knew was out there somewhere. I checked inside the bunker and all around the outside. In my mind that was all I had to worry about. If (Charlie) had been around that night and had seen my light, I might not be writing this now.

Well, after checking the bunker out, I stood on the side of the bunker for maybe thirty minutes or more. I even checked inside the bunker and around it probably every thirty seconds or less. I was scared of snakes!! Well, the more I checked the area, the further out from the bunker I was shinning the light. Then I saw it, about fifteen meters

straight out in front towards the perimeter wire. It was moving back and forth. So with flashlight in hand, high above my head, my night eyes were locked on that snake. It was coming towards me. I immediately charged a round into my M16 and blew that snake (root) away!

Yes, my snake was just a root from a bush, which was coming out of the ground, with part of it was broken off. With my night eyes locked on and with the movement of the flashlight, that snake (root) was moving. As soon as I pulled the trigger, and several rounds went off, I knew it wasn't a snake. The next guard down from me was on the radio, and calling in; " automatic firing at post *###*." When I heard the patrol jeep coming up, I jumped off that bunker and began to kick around in the bushes. After the patrol arrived, a Sgt jumped out and yelled;"What is it?" I responded back with, " Oh, just a snake, but I missed him."



Fear; light, and my night eyes could have put a hurt on me that night. I still don't like snakes.

I was stationed at Phan Rang from March 1966 til February 1967, with the 35th APS. I helped form the Panther Flight. I remember we use to go to the outdoor theatre, and we would watch Combat before going to guard duty at 9pm. Does anyone remember this?

I remember the PSP runway, and helped guard it too. I was part of the team that helped build the guard towers around the flight line and fuel storage areas. I also remember the day AIC Sclofield received his medal. I was part of the ceremony with the Panther Flight. I still have one picture, when we were drawing weapons for that event.

Most of my photos were lost in a home fire in 1976. I still have about 30 slides that were at my parents home at the time of our fire.

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