

# The 'Quiet One' Is Rocket's Sole Fatality

SAIGON (UPI)—It was well before dawn when Mac McMahon made one final round of the dispensary near Tan Son Nhut Air Base and said goodbye to everyone. He was going home.

The ambulance driver who drove him to the big air terminal outside Saigon kidded him about the increasing Viet Cong attacks and said he was lucky to be leaving.

The same ambulance brought Mac's body to the Air Force's 377th hospital dispensary. Of the 200 men at the airport, he was the sole fatality.

Sgt. William L. McMahon, 23, of Fredericktown, Ohio, was waiting in the line for the plane to come and take him out of all this when the Viet Cong 122 mm. rocket slammed through

the roof and burst with a bright flash of light and a loud noise.

Mac, as his friends called him, had completed his year. His plane was to take off at 7:45 a.m.

Sgt. L. D. Lee, 25, of Jackson, Miss., had gone along for the ride with Mac to the airport.

"Mac was worried all night something was going to happen to one of our men," Lee recalled. "He was feeling real bad about leaving in the middle of the attacks."

"He was a real quiet, conscientious guy, not the sort who jumps around about going home. He came into the dispensary to work during the big attack, after he had got his separation papers," Lee said. "He was that sort of guy."

Only the day before Mac had worked for 12 hours helping treat victims from the first rocket attacks on the airport. He was recommended for valor under fire two weeks earlier for treating wounded from the first major Communist attack on Saigon.

"It was a quiet drive. We were all tired. We were kidding Mac and Smithy (Flight Surgeon Robert O. Smith of Honea Path, S.C.) who was getting out too," Lee said.

"You're just getting out in time, we told them."

It was exactly 6:43 a.m. when Mac stood in line at the ticket counter. Only an hour and 42 minutes until departure.

The rocket ripped through the roof of the terminal and exploded. Twenty-one persons

were injured in the explosion.

Smithy was standing just behind Mac. He took six jagged shrapnel fragments in his chest, one of which ripped into his lung.

Mac got one—in the head.

"Smithy did what he could for Mac," Lee said. "He knew there wasn't much. He's a surgeon."

It was Mac's friend and bunkmate, Staff Sgt. Paul Pinkham, 25, Mt. Clemens, Mich. who lifted Mac's body and gently laid it in the ambulance.

In three days time, Pinkham's tour will be up and he will fly home to Mac's funeral.

Back at the dispensary, they were just learning about the rocket hit at the passenger

terminal.

The word came by radio to McMahon's emergency room unit.

"One KIA (Killed in Action). It's Mac. The KIA. It's Mac."

Mac's commander, Capt. Joseph Begin, 31, of Hamilton, Ontario, recalled the scene.

"We didn't realize what they were saying. They kept repeating it, but we went on talking."

"Suddenly somebody realized and said, 'Hey, Mac and Smithy were out there.'"

"There was just a silence," Begin said.

Mrs. William L. McMahon recalled at her home in Fredericktown the last letter she had received from her son. It arrived Saturday.

The last line in his last letter said: "See you all soon."