



REVETMENTS

SPECIAL EDITION

Please excuse the fact that there is nothing else on this page.

I have decided to publish this longer article I have received as a SPECIAL EDITION, due to it's length, and it would take up so much of a "Regular" Revetments Edition.

Sometimes when I take an article and transfer it to a monthly Revetments edition "Master" I am working on, things get a little discombobulated.

To keep that from happening with this Special Edition, I am just adding a new front page to the original article itself, and VOILA!! No problem!

Soooo, here you have a one article edition, courtesy of TSNA member Larry Blades.

Larry

My Memories of The Tet Offensive By: Larry E. Blades
Echo Sector: Call Sign: "Echo Special Post" November 1967 - November 1968

Many articles by individuals have been written and read by various people who experienced a complete night of terror during their survival and memories of "The Tet Offensive".

What you are about to read are "My" memories of the day before and the morning hours of the Tet Offensive, Jan 31, 1968, at Tan Son Nhut AB.

In the morning hours of the 30th of Jan. 1968, I remember hearing about the possible attack on Tan Son Nhut and the Saigon Area. To my knowledge there wasn't anything that I can remember that restricted us to the base at that point.

My friend, Eugene Gilbert, and I had been hearing about a nice BX down in the Cholon Sector of Saigon. The base buses were still running downtown, so Gene and I hopped on one and headed downtown to the Cholon district, not having any danger signs or fear at that point.

That was abruptly changed in a short few seconds upon our arrival at our destination in Cholon. As we arrived and stepped off the bus, we were both struck by the scene around us. We immediately noticed that there were no women or children walking the streets as the crowd all around the immediate area were just men, in groups from 5 to 10 all around the area of the bus terminal there.

I don't think I ever let go of the door of the bus as we stepped down, we just looked at each other and realized, this isn't right, and got our back sides on the bus and got the hell out of dodge.

You could feel the glare of the men just going right thru you, and knew that we had made the right decision by getting when we did.

Upon our arrival back at T.S.N. there was a lot of activity going on. When we arrived back at the barracks, we heard for the first time that we were being put on alert for an imminent attack and to get our gear ready for notice of posting positions.

Things were, to say the least, getting rather hectic in the 1300 area, the barracks for the 377th S.P.S. I don't remember the exact time, still daylight, the base siren started sounding, what a god awful sound it was, then things started really moving.

I remember Roger Mills (KIA 051) came running out of the shower heading for his bunk to quickly dress, grab his gear, and head out to our armory, and guard mount location. Roger Mills and I got to know each other for the fact that we were both from the state of Maryland, and only lived approx. 25 miles apart.

It seems troops become friends easier when they meet people from their home state. I still remember laughing, seeing Roger running around and falling in his haste to get ready for what ever was coming our way.

Never did I think at that time the fate that would befall Roger and the other fellows from the 051 Bunker.

It was later in the evening now, I don't remember too much from our guard-mount that evening.

I do remember receiving my posting position along with another fellow that I did not know very well. Little did I realize at that time, this unknown gentleman's name would stick with me for the rest of my life, his name is Sgt. Wade Lemon.

I was relatively new to the squadron, as only being in country for just two months prior to Tet. I arrived in Vietnam on the 28th of November 1967, and upon arrival I had to go thru the in-country training, a follow up to the AZR course that everyone had to take prior to going to the Nam.

So, I only got to meet and know a small number of my fellow squadron members before Tet 1968.

Wade and I received our posting that evening, to a position called, "Echo Special Post".

We were being assigned as a two team member to a South Vietnamese post along with two South Vietnamese Rangers that were manning a 2 1/2 ton truck with twin 20 millimeter cannons mounted in the back of the truck. They had already been posted out in Echo Sector and we had to jump on the posting truck which was taking our people out to the Tango post and the 051 Bunker.

Since Wade was the higher ranking of the two of us, he was assigned to carry our communications radio.

I remember the ride out to Echo Sector on the back of the posting truck, dropping off the fellows who were going to be manning the Tango post, then we got to the 051 Bunker, and I waited on the back of the truck as :

The 5 members manning the 051 Bunker, got off the truck to man the 051....

- 1.Sgt Cyr, William Joseph**
- 2.Sgt Fischer, Louis Harold**
- 3.Sgt Hebron, Charles Edward**
- 4.Sgt Mills, Roger Bertha**
- 5.Sgt Coggins, Alonzo**

Then we set off to approximately 300 yards just around the corner to meet up with the two South Vietnamese Rangers who were manning the Twin 20 millimeters, which was referred to as Echo Special Post.

Wade and I disembarked from the posting truck, and walked over to and took our position along with the two South Vietnamese rangers.

There wasn't much talking between us, as the South Vietnamese fellows spoke only broken English. Wade and I jumped up on their truck and were looking over the 20 millimeter Cannons, we looked at each other, and realized that this weapons system was just a total wreck, they looked like they hadn't been cleaned since WWII, and from the looks of the huge magazine, we didn't think it had even been test fired since WWII.

I honestly think it would have been impossible to even charge the weapon system, and I would have been afraid to fire them, even if by some act of God, you were able to get rounds in the chamber.

So all sat down on the back of the truck, just watching each other, nobody saying a word, it was well into darkness by then, and we began to settle down just watching the choppers and Spooky's working out in the distant night.

The Spooky's were fun to watch. You couldn't see the plane, just the long stream of firing tracers from the sky to the ground. Then depending on the distance that they were away from you, you would hear the roar or steady hum of the mini guns firing a few seconds after each burst.

Around midnight we started hearing chatter on the radio about enemy activity in downtown Saigon. We could hear explosions off in the distance. And as long as it was off in the distance, the better.

About 0100 in the morning, the skyline towards Saigon was just a maze of explosions and flashes that we could see off in the distance, it was quite a show to say the least, even then, not realizing how much danger we as a base were in.

The show and sound effects just continued as we watched the sky line light up, and the occasional departure of what we called "Freedom Birds", taking fellow soldiers home after their tour of duty was over, and they made it out alive...

It was during this time that we heard chatter over the radio from the 051 Bunker and Tango 1, stating that there was activity or people moving about just off of the 051 Bunker and across the road, known as highway # 1, in the wooded area, and adjoining rice paddy area.

So our focus of attention switched direction 180 degree's from the downtown Saigon area, to our own sector in front of the 051 bunker which was only approximately 300 yards from our position.

The radio chatter became more active, more concerning, more fearful, while listening to the radio. We could hear the roar of jet engines screaming to lift off. A Freedom Bird, was making its departure in the midst of all this radio chatter, flashes, and explosions in Saigon.

Our vision turned to watch the plane lift off (a Boeing 707, I believe it was). Within seconds it was directly over the 051 bunker.

At that instant, **time stood still**, as a barrage or a wall of tracer fire, from the ground just across highway #1 in front of the 051 Bunker, from the ground straight up being directed at the departing aircraft.

All you could hear was the whine of the jet engines, and the deafening sound of hundreds of automatic weapons being fired in an upward angle directed towards the plane.

I remember thinking to myself, what's happening here? At that very moment, the 051 Bunker opened up with their M60 machine gun, and M16's. Whom ever was manning the M60 just laid down a spreading left to right pattern of deadly fire, the tracers bouncing off the road (Highway #1) and scattering the tracers in all directions. It was obvious that the Vietcong and NVA were extremely close to their position.

I remember looking back to the departing aircraft that was being shot at, and expecting to see it aflame and going into the ground, but it kept climbing, climbing, no signs of fire from it, or it being in distress. It continued to climb and fading out of sight in the distance.

I remember thinking that the people on that plane would have many, many presents in their luggage in the form of spent bullets.

By my watch it was exactly 0315 hours in the morning of Jan 31, 1968. I was only 20 years old, thinking what the hell have I got myself into.

The South Vietnamese tried loading the twin 20's, it took both of them to lift the big round ammo filled canisters, and they realized they couldn't make the system work. They then called into their people at JDOC, explained the situation, and were told to pull back another 200 yards to the curve in the road known as the dividing line for Echo / Alpha Sector, just approximately 200 feet from, I believe was Tango 7.

Just prior to our pulling back we heard the call over the radio that they needed an ambulance, as they had one dead and one wounded. They were acknowledged by CSC, that they were to hold on, as help was on its way. Help never made it, it was at that time I remember watching one of those little taxi cabs that look like old Volkswagens pull out onto highway # 1 and drive out of the little village there and make its way closer to the 051 Bunker, it stopped, the driver got out, and leaned over the hood of the taxi, and fired an RPG into the bunker. It was a luck shot, as the RPG hit the under side of the roof of the bunker, I saw a huge flash, and the 051 fell silent.

The shrapnel from the RPG was forced down from the angle that it hit the under side of the bunker, thus silencing the defenders on the 051.

As we were pulling back to the Echo / Alpha line you could see swarms of enemy troops flowing thru the gate.

Just behind the 051 Bunker was Tango 4, manned by Alan Tucker, just beneath him was a small little hut that a Vietnamese couple lived in with their children.

The enemy flowed in under Tango 4's position and filed into that little hut.

I remember Mr. Tucker calling into CSC on the radio, telling them that they had to destroy that hut, blow it up, call in air strikes, but blow it up, they had to destroy the hut.

The shooting continued through the night, the smell from all the explosions and gunpowder was almost over bearing, it just lingered in the air.

The shooting got extremely heavy towards morning, as the Army was fighting and making its way down highway #1 finally arriving and coming into the 051 Gate, and had their APC and other equipment lined up on the base side facing the enemy across the road and from the factory just up the road from TSN on highway# 1.

As dawn was breaking, our Vietnamese rangers on the gun truck received a radio call to break thru all the stuff going on down in the location of the 051, return to Joint Defense Operations Center (JDOC) and to drop myself and Wade off at the little gate post entrance to Echo Sector. It was just up from Tango 2.

Wade and I both knew what we had to break thru there on the west end.

For all of my 20 years, I had never been so scared in my entire life. The moment of truth was here, there was no where else to go.

Wade and I climbed up on the truck. I was lying down in the back just behind the driver, Wade was lying down just behind the passenger, I remember rounding the corner down by highway #1 and just yards in front of us the Army had set up its firing line.

I remember a couple of the Army fellows turning around and giving us a real good looking over as we approached their positions, because at the time, all they could see was our Vietnamese drivers, and I was hoping that they didn't mistake them as enemy troops and open up on our vehicle.

Wade leaned up, and gave a big wave to the Army dudes, and they turned back around after realizing that we were friendlies.

Now here we were just a mere hundred yards heading straight towards the 051 Bunker on our perimeter road. For those of you who remember, the base of the 051 Bunker was right on the edge of the perimeter road.

My mouth was so dry from fear, it was as if I had a mouth full of dirt.

Closer, closer we got, and much to our surprise, there were still enemy troops in the field and grass just behind the 051 Bunker, and here we are exposed in the open on the back of this truck with no where to hide. I just wanted to pull my helmet down over my body and play turtle. Its amazing how low to the ground, or our case, the bottom of the bed of the truck, that we could get.

There was some firing done from my position at the enemy troops when they turned to fire on our truck. I honestly believe they only saw our driver and passenger, and not Wade and I in the back.

At that point, we were right at the 051 Bunker. I rolled up and looked towards my left to the top of the bunker, and as if in slow motion, an enemy soldier leaned and looked over the top of the bunker down at us with a pistol pointing in our direction. He fired, and I heard our driver scream, the enemy soldier had shot our driver in the hand, he kept driving as his partner wrapped his hand in cloth.

Once we rounded the corner down by the lower end of Tango 3, I was more at ease.

The truck stopped, just past Tango 3 at the little gate area to Echo Sector. We jumped off, waved to the two Vietnamese rangers, and they drove off.

By this time there was a large group of QRT's and personnel milling around.

We were approximately 400 yards off to the rear of the 051 Bunker at this point, we watched as aircraft bombed and strafed the 051 Bunker.

The decision had been made that the fellows on the 051 Bunker had all perished in and during the nights fighting.

We watched as helicopters strafed the bunker, Cobra Gun ships fired rockets into the bunker, F4 Phantoms fired into the bunker. Sandy's, fixed wing slow flying prop planes strafed and rocketed the bunker.

After all that, it was decided to move personnel closer to the 051 Bunker. At this time tanks (South Vietnamese) were brought up to a firing line.

Rounds were still flying thru the air, its not like anyone wanted to stand up, but this one tank commander brought his tank up to a firing position, which was only 20 feet from a group of us guys lying low.

This tank commander stood up on top of his tank, and directed the firing of several rounds into the back side of the bunker blowing a big hole in the back side.

I thought he had some type of death wish, standing up, and leaving himself open like a giant bullseye target.

He never got hit, but I remember on his first shot, none of us thought or knew that he was going to fire when he did, and when he did fire, I thought my head was going to explode, dust and dirt flying into the air around us due to the concussion of the cannon going off.

By this time, if memory serves me right, about noon time, it was decided that a firing line was going to be set up, and the 377th S.P.S. was going to RETAKE the 051 Bunker.

The firing line was made up of a couple QRT's that had been dispatched to Echo Sector, and of course any personnel that were originally assigned to Echo Sector.

The big question, after all that had been thrown at the bunker, was there any chance of enemy soldiers still being alive either on or around the bunker.

Well the order was given, and we moved out across the field approximately one hundred yards to the rear of the bunker.

If enemy soldiers were still alive, could they fight, and the big question no one knew was, did they have the bunker's M60 machine gun, and was it still in operating order.

No one could answer these questions, and as it were, my position in this firing line, was directly behind the back open door to the 051 Bunker.

We were trained when in a firing line, to fire if you will from the hip. Yea right, my a** was directly in line with that open back door, and if anyone were still alive or that M60 was still in operating order, I felt like, I'm going to be one of the first to be hit due to my position in relation to the back door of the bunker.

Everyone opened fire. It was deafening, but I had made up my mind, there wasn't going to be any hip shooting from me, I shouldered my weapon, and I very carefully placed each and every shot directly into the back of the bunker thru the open door.

I didn't plan on letting anyone take the opportunity to be able to get a clear shot at me, so during a 75 to 80 yard walk firing at the bunker, I very carefully emptied 4 magazines into the open back door.

Someone yelled hit the dirt, and we all bellied to the ground. A couple of the NCO's crawled forward to try and place some grenades into the back of the door, I don't remember the individuals names, but the first grenade was way off to the left, going off, sending shrapnel in all directions over our heads, the second grenade was tossed, going off just behind the open back door, not yet inside the bunker.

In the process of going for a 3rd grenade, a figure bolted from the back of the bunker making a mad dash to hopefully freedom, everyone raised their weapon to take this person out, and someone yelled don't shoot.

That person was Sgt Coggins, who had been hiding in the bottom of the bunker, obviously knocked unconscious from all the explosions and also played dead.

But within seconds of Sgt. Coggins bold escape an enemy soldier came out after him, firing at Sgt Coggins with a pistol, immediately this enemy soldier was cut down in a hail of bullets and red mist.

To this day I often wonder if that was the same soldier that had shot our driver in the hand as we made our own escape past the 051 Bunker several hours earlier.

The rest of the Tet Offensive is history, and for many of us a fading memory, some to forget, others to always remember.

My story is going to end by making a promise to myself that when I got home from Vietnam, I was going to visit with my Maryland friends' family, the family of Sgt. Roger Bertha Mills, killed on the 051 Bunker.

Months later when I did return home, I called the family of Roger, and introduced myself. Unknown by me at the time, Roger had mentioned to his family before his death, that he had met someone from Maryland that lived a short distance from them.

They invited me into their home, offered me coffee, and friendly conversation. I knew what they had on their minds, I was hoping not to have it asked of me, but they did, they wanted to know how their son died.

People, you haven't any idea what it's like to look a mother in the eyes and explain how her son died.

I pulled myself together and as well and gracefully as possible, explained the details of the death of her son as I knew them.

I was the one with the tears in my eyes, the mother "Bertha Mills", simply said, "Thank you Larry", and poured me another cup of coffee.

I don't know if anyone else knows it, but our friend Roger was named after his mother, her first name is Bertha, Roger's middle name is Bertha.

I finished my time with them, we shook hands, and said goodbye, and I left.

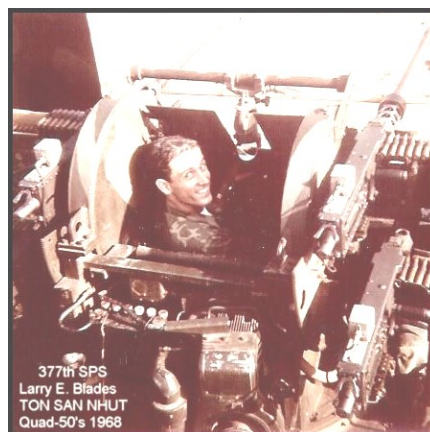
Roger is buried on a Military Base here in Maryland, known as Aberdeen Proving Grounds. I photographed Roger's Grave and forwarded it to Mr. Charles Penley who has placed it on the TSNA website with all the others lost on the 051 Bunker.

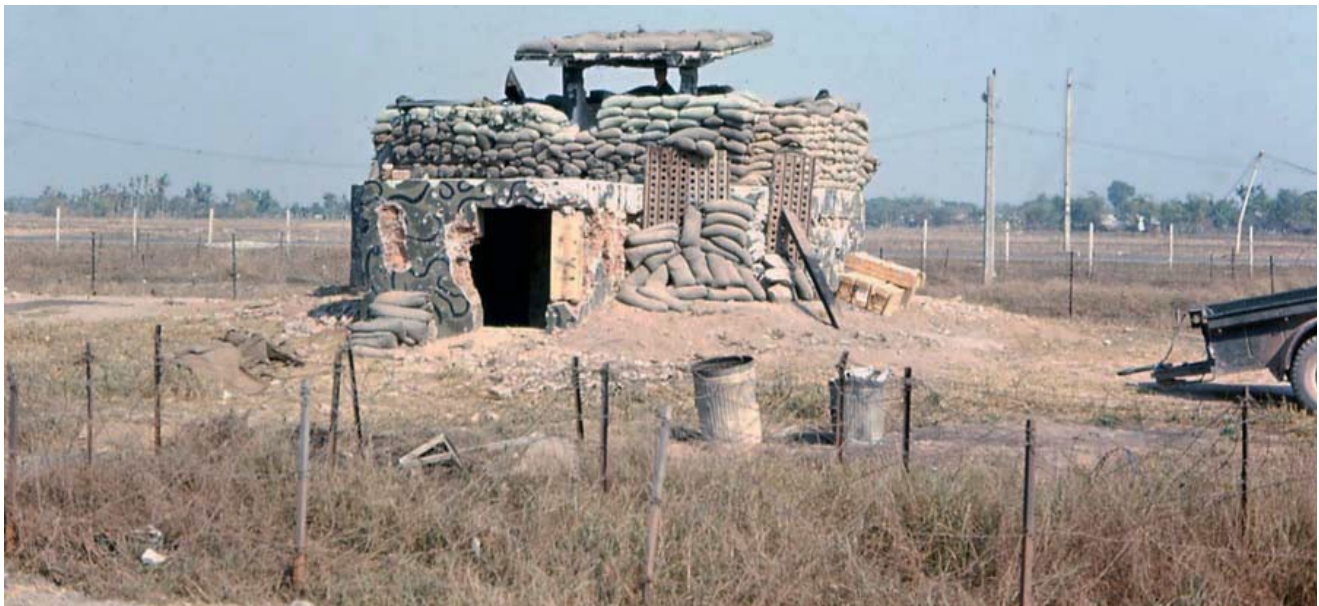
I have always been able to speak freely about my experiences in Vietnam, and that I think is what has kept me from suffering from PTSD.

It has been a pleasure bringing you this story, my memories of the "Tet Offensive" .

Sgt. Larry E. Blades 377th S.P.S, Tan Son Nhut Air Base Nov. 67 / Nov. 68

After the Tet Offensive, we developed a heavy weapons section. The photograph below is me sitting on one of the Quad50's.





(THIS PICTURE AND THE ONE ON PAGE 7 ARE FROM LARRY BLADES.)

(THE PICTURES BELOW ARE FROM TSNA MEMBER TERRY LOVE, AND WERE TAKEN DURING TET)



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