



# 377<sup>TH</sup> SECURITY POLICE SQ.

PROVEN IN COMBAT



Newsletter for the 377th Security Policeman

Volume 1

2014

## Air Force Times

### War Zone Report

#### On Guard Against Charlie

SAIGON --- Somewhere along the defense perimeter at Tan Son Nhut Air Base a security police machine gun post reports possible enemy activity.

A slap flare is sent aloft ... then another.

The guards scan the area. Darkness returns without incident. The Viet Cong aren't there ... not now anyway.

Meanwhile, MSgt George F. Wise sits in Central Security Control (CSC), the nerve center of the 377th Air Police Sq. Wise is night flight commander. He works on some reports, has a cup of coffee and goes back to his work.

With him are 1st Lt. John K. Smith, assistant Security operations officer and MSgt Edward W. Battoe, assistant flight commander.

The three men are all veterans of a previous VC attack on the base. Battoe received the Bronze Star "V" device for valor during the action. The three talk --- about home, the job and Vietnam.

It's a quiet evening now. Should anything happen, these men would be speeding to the trouble area within seconds.

In another room of the CSC building, other security policemen operate a communications network,



Keeping a close watch on activities spanning the entire base.

In another base sector, A2C Leroy E. Marsh and his K-9 sentry dog KING walk a distant post. A2C William H. Robbins watches over an aircraft parking area, and A2C Roy M. Mendivil scans an area from a bunker position, while others guard key points around the base.

It's early evening now. Things are beginning to settle down --- the start of another night of waiting to see if "Charlie" shows up.

The 377th APS at Tan Son Nhut is typical of Air Force security forces used to protect large vital areas of essential materials and people.

Similar scenes prevail at Seventh

*SENTRY DOG* post is checked by a security alert team (SAT) for possible enemy activity at Tan Son Nhut AB. The jeep SAT Teams are quick reactions forces that roam base defense areas. Members of the team are, from left, A1Cs Freeman Tilden, Francis A. Jasinski and Joseph A. LeBlanc. K-9 handler A1C Leon E. Senecal and his dog REX are in the first line to detect enemy attempts to infiltrate the base.

AF bases throughout Vietnam where security police units defend against VC attacks by employing quick reaction and mobile forces.

Him over. Arrant remained on the line for at least an hour after his injury.

The security police force smashed the attack.

There were others cited for bravery that day. The attack started at 1:10 a.m. with a series of mortar hits on the flight line from a weapons position about two and one-half kilometers north of the base.

Other rounds were launched by the enemy from a second position four kilometers west of the base. Approximately 40 rounds hit within the base perimeter, inflicting minor damage.

Sporadic mortar firing by the enemy continued until withdrawn from the base.

Armed helicopters, AC-47s, A-1Es and O-1Es joined forces to silence the two enemy positions. Flareship crews dropped 763 flares during the pre-dawn attack.

Security police reaction teams met the enemy penetration attempt with small arms fire.

By daybreak, the reaction teams battled the enemy troops into the north-west section of the base and mopping up operations continued until 8:40 a.m.

During the encounter, 28 Communists were killed and four captured.

Throughout the battle, Tan Son Nhut-based U.S.

### No Warning

"There is no warning when the VC strike," says Maj. Roger P. Fox, squadron operations officer.

"Instant communications, quick reaction forces and close coordination between all the services is necessary to successfully repel an enemy force."



*SPOT CHECK of items carried by a Vietnamese worker in one of the Tan Son Nhut AB housing areas is made by A2C Vernell E. Robertson. Members of the law enforcement section man guard posts throughout the base during their tour.*

Major Fox asserts, "One man in 10 minutes is worth 1000 in one hour."

He has geared his security forces to this concept --- quick reaction.

The major won the Silver Star for heroism during a VC strike last year.

Job of the 377th APS is to meet and turn back any penetration of the base inter-perimeter.

In addition, the squadron handles law enforcement, customs inspections and other related air police activities.

"The law enforcement section is a little different than Stateside," says CMSgt Luther C. Latham, security police superintendent. "Besides issuing tickets and handling traffic control, the section is at least 75 percent a security force in itself."

Quan Canh (QC), Vietnamese guards directly under the control of the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF), assist in law enforcement activities.

"Three VC came over a knoll about 100 yards in front of me --- they didn't see me in the shadows," he said. "They seemed to be coming right at me but ended up going east and west along the knoll. I was scared but didn't have time to worry about it and called in the alarm to CSC."

Although law enforcement section people are primarily used for traffic management, guarding bullets and general security during daylight hours, when the VC strike they are right in the thick of battle. That's the way it was that time.

A2C Wilbert B. Arrant worked a day shift. He was in bed when the VC mortar attack began. Later, he was wounded when a grenade exploded five yards away lodging a piece of shrapnel in his left thigh.

"I was among the first group of quick-reaction forces sent to the perimeter," said Arrant. "There was a lot of shooting going on when we arrived."

About an hour later, a VC tossed a grenade behind him. "I saw the flash out of the corner of my eye," he recalled. He moved quickly. The explosion knocked him down.

Arrant never knew of his wound until

Army troops and Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces were on standby and guarding various areas.

The Security police forces alone engaged and defeated the enemy penetration force.

Security police are trained to do a job, and they do it well. Equipped with handie-talkie radios plus other portable and mobile radio sets, air policemen manning posts around the base can contact the control center instantaneously.

When an emergency call comes in, trucks loaded with quick-reaction forces are on the way to the scene.

Normally first on the scene are security alert teams (SAT) which roam the five base defense sectors. "We move around checking posts --- when the VC hit we're at the trouble spot in less than a minute," stated TSgt Thomas L. Henson, a SAT team leader. The team is equipped with an armor-plated jeep with radio, weapons, grenades and slap flares.

SSgt Luther W. Boone Jr. handles an M-60 machine gun mounted on the jeep. He is assisted by A1C Sam B. Lankford.

Many Defenses

Security Forces use all types of defenses. A1C David P. Scott and A1C Byron G. Martin are stationed in a key machine gun bunker.

The men are armed with an M-60 machine gun, M-16 rifles, M-79 grenade launcher and slap flares.

Another position valuable in thwarting enemy infiltrations is the 40-foot tower post, one of many strategically placed. A2C Raymond O. Calhoun, armed with special night observation equipment, keeps searching for the enemy from one of these perches. He was another who met the VC attack December 4, 1966.

"I had eight hours sleep in three days during the attack and mop-up operations," he remarked, "And I was one of the lucky ones."

"Sentry dogs are invaluable in Vietnam," stated TSgt Scotty A. Lin-

ney, 34, K-9 section head. Dog and handler teams are posted from dark to daylight, immediately inside the base perimeter. These teams are the first line of detection.

Following the April 13, 1966, attack on Tan Son Nhut, the Military Assistant Command, Vietnam, made a study of the defense of the base," Major Fox said.

Many improvements have been made since the study was completed. New perimeter lights have been installed, and key points re-fortified.

Another aid has been the spare-time project of the security police in clearing waist-high elephant grass along the base perimeter.

They bulldozed, mowed and burned more that 700 acres of the dense, reed-like growth. Destruction of the grass has robbed the VC of a place to hide and has made it easier for K-9 and post patrols to observe anyone approaching the base perimeter.

One of the busiest places in the security police area --- day or night --- is the armory. SSgt William R. Adkins, armory chief, pointed out the importance of the section. "The M-16 rifle and other weapons form the difference between life and death," he said, "Each man takes much care of his weapon, including the meticulous cleaning of it. He knows that he may need it at any moment.



Fox, Roger P.



TSgt Scott Linney and NEMO A-534



Charles Bleile Copyright 1999

Typical Base Police Helmet Liner



Typical Slap Flare



## 3rd Sq, 4th Cav, 25th Inf Div January 31 - February 07, 1968



### My account of Tan Son Nhut 1-31-1968



Ross, Jim

By: Jim Ross, Bravo Troop, 3/4  
Cav, 25th Inf Div

I was in Bravo Troop, NCOIC of ground surveillance unit (radar) which consisted of two tracks.

Saber Bravo-40 and Saber Bravo-41, 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, on the morning of Jan 31, 1968. (The first day of the Tet Offensive).

Our assignment was to be on alert for any infractions the enemy was to break for the cease fire at hand, agreed to by the Communist and South Vietnamese forces.

We were pulling perimeter duty, right off Highway-1, near Trang Bang village, which was approximately 15 kilometers, from the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Base Camp, located at Cu Chi.

The night of Jan 30, 1968 was uneventful, the start of the next day was a beautiful morning. The CO

ordered me to Cu Chi, to take back some items.

While I was preparing to leave, a Lieutenant came walking across the rice paddy and asked me, if I would pick up some wire and a Playboy magazine. Of course, I said yes.

As my driver and I pulled out onto Highway-1, we proceeded South and right off, I noticed there were NO Vietnamese anywhere at all.

Every other morning, they were everywhere.

I had no idea, that at that very moment, Charlie Troop was already in contact with the enemy, at Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

I told the driver to push the pedal and not to let up until we got to Cu Chi base camp.

We approached the town of Cu Chi, and still no Vietnamese were to be seen anywhere.

Off to our right was an ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) compound. The soldiers inside it were motioning to us, that they were about to be attacked.

We had to take a sharp left, into the town of Cu Chi, going approximately 40 miles per hour. Which was as fast, as the APC was designed to go.

I was scared, that our APC (armored personnel carrier) would throw a track.

Fortunately, it didn't. We didn't see any Vietnamese, except for the ARVN soldiers all the way back to

base camp. I'm forever grateful that our one little track wasn't ambushed.

When arriving at base camp, the XO (2<sup>nd</sup> in charge) was gathering all remaining forces, so they could react to the Attack On Tan Son Nhut.

By this time, Bravo Troop had already arrived on scene. We hadn't even turned off our engine, when we and four other APC's were headed south, to help reinforce Charlie Troop.

Approaching the battle, already in progress, we pulled off to the right side of Highway-1, in an open rice paddy, just south of the Vinatexco Textile Mill and immediately engaged the enemy, who was firing various weapons, from that mill and a wood line near Highway-1.

I think it was by accident, that we became a blocking force, preventing the enemy trying to retreat off of Tan Son Nhut.

They were coming out of the mill in intervals of five. I tried to fire on them, with my M-79 grenade launcher. It didn't have the range, so I fired on the enemy with my 50 caliber machine gun.

My attention was on the wood line and the mill, as well as the battle, going on around me.

At that moment, four prop aircraft appeared in the sky, which belonged to the South Vietnamese Air Force. The aircraft looked like A-1E Skyraiders.

It was one of the most incompetent things, I witnessed during my

military service.

They were supposed to bomb the textile mill, but totally missed it and bombed a rice paddy instead, doing absolutely no damage to the mill.

The battle went on for several hours.

I had no idea what was going on with Charlie Troop or Bravo Troop. Everyone thought the battle had subsided.

I dismounted my track, to retrieve some ammunition, I had dropped during the battle, about 40 meters away, near a wood line.

As I was picking it up, I heard a noise behind me. It was three enemy soldiers looking at me, face to face and I had nothing to defend myself with.

I let out a blood curdling scream, which in turn scared them and we ran in different directions.

They headed for a rice paddy dike and me toward my track.

The Captain came on the radio and asked me what the situation was and asked if I needed help. I said "affirmative."

He sent an M-48 tank, to take out the three enemy soldiers, which they did. After firing their main gun, nothing was left, but a crater. No visible sign of the enemy.

To this day, I'm still friends with the commander of that M-48 tank.

It was approaching nightfall and we were still receiving sniper fire from the textile mill but proceeded into the wire at Tan Son Nhut to pull security.

We were set up beside the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry (1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division).

Around 1900 hours, two F-100 air-

craft showed up and as I remember it, to attack the Vinatexco Textile Mill.

To do a job, the South Vietnamese Air Force was incapable of.

After their bombing run (which seemed to consist of 500 pound , high explosive charges. The F-100's had pretty well destroyed the mill.

Later, I read that American taxpayer funds were used to totally rebuild the mill.

The next morning, Air Force personnel visited us on the perimeter and told us where we could get some hot chow and a shower, but we didn't have time.

We were tired and dirty and already received orders to proceed to Hoc Mon, where the enemy was very well entrenched for staging attacks around the Saigon area.

It turned out to be the longest and worst battle of my experiences, in Vietnam.

I call it "The battle that would never end." All the parts of the Tet Offensive.

I would like to commend everyone who took part in the "Battle Of Tan Son Nhut." Being associated with such military personnel, is an honor.

In the beginning, I mentioned a Lieutenant who asked me to pick up some wire and a Playboy, as a favor. It was a favor that I was never able to fulfill.

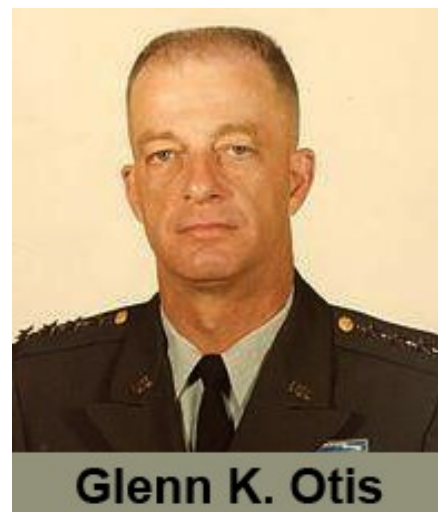
He was shot in the spine during the battle, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down.

Later, in the 1990's, he went in for an operation that was intended to give him his feeling back but it made his condition worse and he committed suicide shortly after

that.

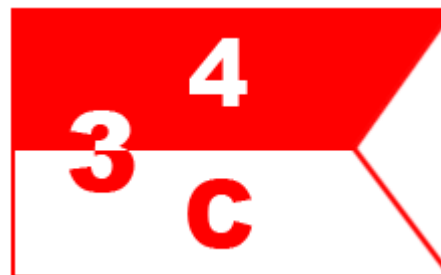
The reason I bring him up, for 45 years, I've had a strange guilt, I was never able to carry out that favor for him. He was one of the nicest officers, I have ever interacted with, in the Army.

The Air Force presented us with a small bible. I still have it and it still bears my writing in it. Where I expressed how I felt that day and you can bet "God" was the main subject.



**Glenn K. Otis**

LTC Glenn K. Otis  
Squadron Commander  
November 1967 – May 1968





General William W. Momyer pins the Silver Star on Major Carl A. Bender

It's April 1967, Major Carl A. Bender, Bellville, IL, was assigned to Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon, Vietnam, with the 377<sup>th</sup> Security Police Squadron, as the Operations Officer, call sign, "Warrior."

The security policemen's mission and responsibility is keeping enemy forces off the air base.

The TET Offensive, January 31, 1968 and the, "Attack On Tan Son Nhut Air Base, began."

North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong forces, launched a coordinated attack around Tan Son Nhut from fourteen different locations.

It became the turning point of the Vietnam War. It arrived with a lot of anger, on the Vietnamese biggest holiday, TET, which is the "Lunar New Year."

At approximately 3:20 a.m., 5-6 communist infantry battalions of more than 2,500 soldiers armed with anti-aircraft weapons, automatic weapons, mortars, rockets, rocket propelled grenades and hand grenades began to fight their way through the perimeter fences and

minefields, all around Tan Son Nhut.

Bender commanded 850 security policemen, 100 security police augmentees and Task Force-35, which consisted of 90 US Army personnel, of the 69<sup>th</sup> Signal BN, broken down into squads of thirty (30) men each. Of the 1,040 defender's on the air base, only 151 of them, plus 60 US Army soldiers faced the main thrust of the attack, that came from the west, located in Echo Sector, near Echo-37 Bunker. Echo-37, was better known as the O-51 Bunker.

This was due to the fact it was adjacent to the O-51 Gate.

Friendly forces at that time were armed only with M-60 machine guns, M-16 rifles and .38 caliber pistols.

When the attack started, communications were jammed. It seemed that everyone started talking on the radio, to and from Central Security Control (CSC,) nearly at the same time.

Unable to ascertain, the battle as it unfolded or to communicate effectively with his men, Bender left CSC, to check on the situation, on the west end of the base.

Almost immediately after arriving in Echo Sector, Bender radioed, "We've been hit by mortars, including myself, there are three casualties laying down here with me." Bender had been hit by a mortar fragments, it had hit him in his left arm. It spun him around. Bleeding profusely but the fragment narrowly missed the bone. He continued commanding the ground defense of Tan Son Nhut.

One of his machine gun teams, commanded by Sgt Gerald "Jerry" Sommerfeldt, Janesville, WI, who was currently on Echo Quick Reaction Team, prepositioned in Echo Sector, was quickly running out of ammunition.



Lt. Col. Carl A. Bender

Bender grabbed two cans of M-60 rounds and two additional men, so he could re-supply Echo QRT.

"We were under heavy fire and had to make it across some open field," Bender said. "I told them I was going to run out ten steps and hit the dirt and that they should cover me. Then they should run out twenty steps and hit the dirt while I covered them. It was to have been a leap-frog method.

"They must have thought I was crazy, because I went out there and hit the dirt, and when I turned around to look for them, the two men were not there, where he expected them to be," Bender said.

He got up and ran to the machine gun emplacement. He found, Sommerfeldt, the machine gunner bleeding profusely from his groin, the femoral artery had been hit. The machine gunner's assistant, was shot in the arm and the bone was shattered.

Bender handed his hand held radio, to Sommerfeldt and his rifle to Sommerfeldt's assistant. He told the assistant to fire as best he could with his good arm and provide cover, as Bender dragged them both by the collars of their flak vests, away from enemy fire and back to safety.

He called frantically for a military ambulance. Rescue workers re-

fused to leave their station because of the heavy fire.

Bender finally got the two wounded men, into a jeep, driven by 1LT Mel Grover, OIC Night Shift, San Antonio, TX and sent them off to the base dispensary. He had little hope the machine gunner (Sommerfeldt) would survive his wounds.

As the battle unfolded, Bender lay pinned down by bullets and mortars. He prayed, "Lord if it is your will that I am not to survive this battle, then so be it. My field commander, Capt Carl B. Denisio, Weapons Systems Security Operations Officer, San Antonio, TX and 1LT Grover are surrounded. Please protect them until I can effect a rescue."

As he finished, Bender noticed muzzle flashes to his side.

"With one quick roll and his M-16 rifle extended forward, fired five or six rounds into an old gravestone, which literally exploded. I guess it took out, whomever was behind it, I never drew any more fire from that position.

Mortar fire and rockets, continued all around him. Bender said he made the toughest decision of his military career, that night.

He realized some of the most damaging enemy fire was coming from within his own defensive position. North Vietnamese forces had captured the O-51 Bunker and using it as an offensive point, of their attack on TSN.

Once again on his hand held radio, Bender called for air support. He received information from CSC, that a pair of 120<sup>th</sup> Attack Helicopter Company aircraft were in the air, nearby the ground fighting. Bender, asked the pilots to hit the O-51 Bunker, with all the rockets they had.

Then he asked that the copter's come back around for a second round and hit the O-51 Bunker with machine guns.

"I had five men in there and I didn't know if they were alive or dead," Bender said.

He watched as the attack helicopter gunships pummeled the O-51 Bunker.

"I had to stop the enemy from using that bunker," Bender said. "But I carried that decision for over three decades, until I met the sole survivor of the O-51 Bunker, Sgt Alonzo Coggins, at Lackland AFB, TX, Feb 12, 1999.

Four hours after the battle for Tan Son Nhut started, the US Army, 3/4 Cav, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, made its way to the air base to help defeat the attackers.

The 3/4 Cav, Battalion Commander, Col Glen K. Otis, Carlisle, PA, call sign "Saber-6," was shocked, saying, "You mean to tell me, the security police held off a North Vietnamese Regiment, for four hours?"

In the aftermath of the fight, a single security policeman, crawled from the O-51 Bunker.

Friendly troops raised their weapons, to fire at the person moving on the ground. Someone shouted, "Cease Fire!" The badly injured man had dark skin, he was an African-American, not Vietnamese. It was A1C Alonzo Coggins, Jamaica, NY. He had been a prisoner of the enemy for over eight hours.

Maybe the five Americans inside were still alive, when he ordered the air strike. Maybe his order killed the other four security policemen, the only four security policemen to die, in the "Attack On Tan Son Nhut."

Bender was bleeding profusely

from his left arm and both legs. His right leg was rendered, useless by a mortar fragment, resting up against the bone. He insisted on driving himself to the, 377<sup>th</sup> USAF Dispensary.

He nearly lost control of the jeep, swerving in an out of a ditch by the runway. He planned to stop his vehicle with the hand brake, it did not work. The jeep hopped over a concrete curb and hit the corner of the dispensary building, before coming to a final resting place.

On the operating table, doctors found that Bender, had fifty-four injuries from bullets, rocket, mortars and grenades fragments.

He earned the Silver Star and a Purple Heart for his actions that day.

Back home, many years later, Bender called home to check on the machine gunner so gravely wounded in 1968. He was alive and well.

Bender asked Sommerfeldt's wife (Judy) if they were able to have any children after he came back from the war.

Judy said not only were they able to, but the first one was conceived while he was still in a body cast from his injuries.

Bender, had no news about Sgt Coggins, who crawled from the O-51 Bunker, for more than three decades after the war.

Sgt Coggins, the lone survivor from the bunker, received the Silver Star and Purple Heart, 12 Feb 1999 for his actions during the Tet Offensive. Bender was asked to participate in the official ceremony at Lackland, AFB, TX. Home of the current Security Forces Training Center.

Bender spoke with Sgt Coggins, for a few minutes prior to the Silver Star and Purple Heart presentation.

Bender cried. He apologized for calling in the air strike. Then the two men prayed together.

Coggins reassured him: "You did what you had to do!"

The other four men in Bunker 0-51 were killed before the helicopters arrived, Coggins said. Coggins, badly burned from an explosion and bleeding from severe wounds, survived by playing dead.

The intimate details mattered, to Bender.

It was like a weight was lifted off my chest. I agonized over that decision for 32 years, Bender said.

We gave the enemy a terrible beating, Bender said.

Friendly forces at Tan Son Nhut killed 957 North Vietnamese total. 800 enemy killed, just outside the perimeter and 157 enemy were killed inside the perimeter of TSN, eight of them killed by Bender.

Four security policemen were killed and eleven wounded.

- 1.Sgt Cyr, William Joseph
- 2.Sgt Fischer, Louis Louis
- 3.Sgt Hebron, Charles Edward
- 4.Sgt Mills, Roger Bertha



**Fischer, Louis**



**Mills, Roger**



**Hebron, Charles**



**Sgt. Alonzo J. Coggins  
Sole Survivor, O-51 Bunker**



**Cyr, William**



# President Honors 377th Security Police



U.S. Air Force Photo

General Dixon  
Vice Commander Attaches Streamer to Squadron Guidon



## Air Force News



Vol. 6, No. 15

HQ. SEVENTH AIR FORCE

April 15, 1970

**TAN SON NHUT**—The United States' highest military unit award, the Presidential Unit Citation, has been presented to the 377th Security Police Squadron here.

In a brief ceremony, Maj. Gen. Robert J. Dixon, Seventh Air Force vice commander, attached the citation's distinctive blue streamer to the squadron guidon.

The award, signed by President Richard M. Nixon, covered the period Jan. 31 - Feb. 2, 1968, and credited the 377th SPS for "... extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force."

The citation read in part, "... Tan Son Nhut AB suddenly came under attack from a large, multi-battalion hostile force using rockets, mortars, automatic weapons and small arms. The small 377th SPS, armed only with light weapons, reacted immediately, established strong defensive positions, and heroically held off the attackers during the early, critical hours until Republic of Vietnam and U.S. Army reinforcements could respond."

This marks the second award the squadron has earned for meritorious service in the defense of Tan Son Nhut.

Commander of the squadron during the period covered by the award was Lt. Col. Billy J. Carter. Present commander is Lt. Col. Carl Roy.

## CARTER HALL

### COLONEL BILLY JACK CARTER

—Commander, 377th Security Police Squadron at Tan Son Nhut AB, Republic of Vietnam, where the squadron distinguished itself during the 1968 Tet Offensive. He was appointed Director and Chief of Security Police, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, December 1, 1973. Under his leadership some of the most important accomplishments in the history of the security police career field were instituted or envisaged.

SEPTEMBER 1993



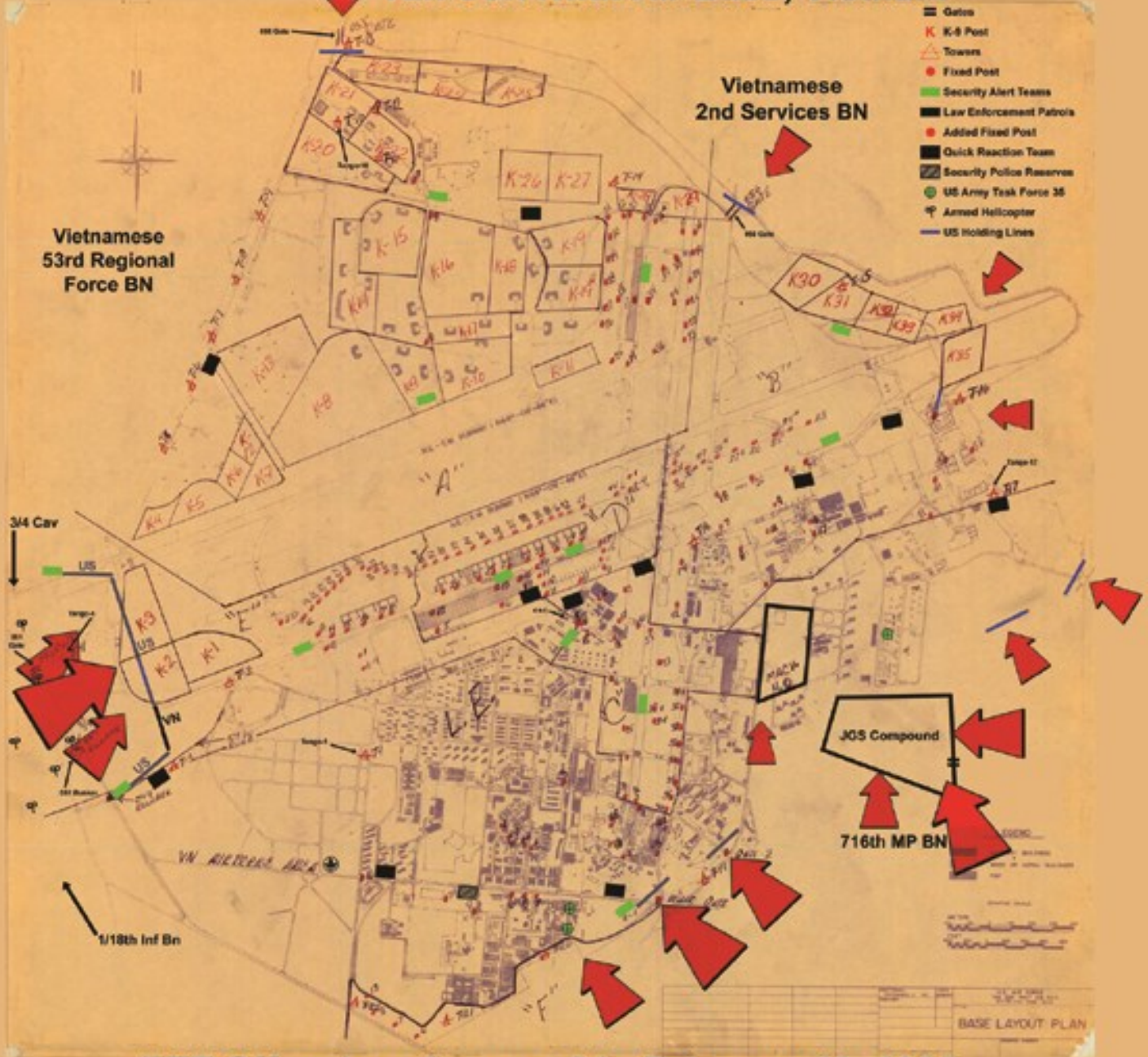
This photograph was taken during the “Memorial Ceremonies” at the O-51 Bunker.

L-R: Maj Carl A. Bender, Lt Col Billy Jack Carter, Capt Carl B. DeNisio, 2Lt Gerald E. Ingalsbe

Standing on top of the bunker, facing the camera, is Sgt Larry E. Blades



# Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Vietnam



**TET Offensive: January 31 - February 18, 1968**

