

### First Person Account

# **Readying the F-4 For Combat**

Sqt Tony Arrigo USAF **Crew** Chief F-4 Phantom 12th Tactical Fighter Wing for close Cam Ranh Bay, Bien Hoa Vietnam

to the Pilot The horn blasted us who taxis the out of our tents, a call air support. Infantry

Alert Pad

The most intense duty in

the 12th Tactical Fighter

Wing was the Alert Pad.

It was designed to offer a

speedy response for Close

Air Support (CAS). The goal

was to have an **F-4** in the air

in under two minutes. When

the infantry called, time was

precious. We drilled to make

it perfect.

heavily engaged, needing help. Our F-4 was prepped and armed. Time to fly.

#### **Readying the F-4 Fighter**

The Assistant Crew Chief climbs the ladder to the rear seat of the cockpit:

- 1. Harnesses up the Rear Seat Pilot
- 2. Pulls the last safety pin from the ejection seat (5 pins already pulled)
- 3. Slides up to the forward seat and harnesses up the Pilot.

The Assistant Crew Chief comes down the ladder, pulls the chock

from the F-4's left wheel. There's no right wheel chock.

The Crew Chief hand signals the Pilot to start engines. The F-4 used a gunpowder cartridge to fire up each engine.

With both engines running, the **Crew Chief** hand signals the Assistant Crew **Chief** to pull the

remaining chocks. Chocks pulled, the Crew Chief gives a Thumbs up

## "We prided ourselves on our speed and accuracy

aircraft to

the runway and takes off — loaded with napalm and bombs, afterburners drowning the night with awesome, crushing power. The entire procedure from the horn blaring to takeoff was less than two minutes. We prided ourselves on our speed and accuracy.

I liked being on the Alert Pad, which was away from the flight line and its own little unit. Watching the afterburners at night heading off to "Kill the Cong" was as close to combat as us Airmen could get. We thought.

# "Rocket City" 3rd Fighter Wing Bien Hoa Air Base In February '67, there was a need

for Crew Chiefs

at Bien Hoa

Air Base. I went TDY (temporary duty). Bien Hoa was the only Vietnamese Air Base in South Vietnam and the Vietnam Air Force (VNAF) flew out of there. It was in III Corps about 15 km northeast of Saigon. They flew the **F-100** Super Sabre.

The F-100 was used extensively for close air support in III Corps and IV Corps. Some friends

American Legion that were stationed in IV **Corps** thanked us years later for, as they put it, the "Huns that killed the VC. "

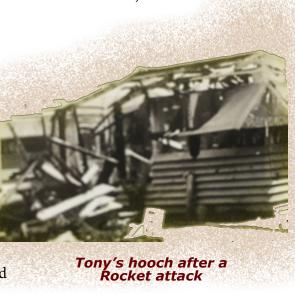
> The F-100, aka THE HUN or Lead Sled, flew more

Rocket City and was attacked many nights. My hooch was hit (see photo below). I lost all my belongings including my high school ring. Bien

Hoa was surrounded by a

7-squaremile rubber plantation owned by

Michelin. The VC would tunnel under the rubber trees and mortar or rocket the base at will, hoping to hit an aircraft which they did too often (see the story on the right about Noel Lovellette getting a Bronze Star). The Alert Pad at



Suddenly one of the Crew Chiefs, Sgt Noel Lovellete, left the safety of the bunker and ran to the burning **Hun**. He kicked the chocks, jumped in the cockpit, and taxied the Hun to a place far away from the bunkers. I heard about this the next day and thought it was cool.

Noel Lovellete was awarded the Bronze Star w/Combat V for his valiant actions that day.

Bien Hoa was a bit hairy since you were away from the main flight line and open to rifle fire or mortar and rocket rounds. If I wanted to be where the action was, I found it at Bien Hoa. *Knowing that our sorties* were in support of ground troops who relied on us lent to the high *morale of the place*. We knew that we were relatively safe on the base as compared to the men humping the boonies.

### End of Tour

I ended my TDY in October '67 and flew back to Cam Ranh Bay for my processing and flight back to the states. My year in Vietnam was exciting, exhilarating, and scary.

F-4 Phantom

combat missions than all of the other Fighter Jets combined. The F-100s flew 360,283 sorties (missions) during the Vietnam war. It is an extraordinary number and unknowable how many American lives it saved and how many enemy lives it took but, trust me...many.

Bien Hoa housed families of the VNAF as well as American GIs and it was an open base replete with stores, barber shops, and cat houses. It was not very secure. It was nicknamed

of mine

at my



# F-100 On Fire

One night in June, during a rocket attack, an F-100 loaded with bombs got hit and caught fire. It was close to the bunkers where we were hunkered down. If it blew, forget about it.

— Anthony Arrigo

I never compare it to the grunts (0311's) and know that they faced death everyday. However, being a Crew Chief in Vietnam and completing over 1,000 sorties to support the ground troops has given me a sense of pride that I still maintain.

We all had a job to do. Whether a ground pounder, a fly boy, or a REMF, it was one team, one fight. I'm 75 years old and as proud of my service as I was when I enlisted at 17.

> Anthony Arrigo Rancho Santa Margarita, CA





Bronze Star w/Combat "V"