

## Reflections of a Vinh Long Night Mission Pilot 1967 – 1968

199<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company night operations were performed in support of the Vinh Long Airfield and Vinh Long city defense. The mission was to provide early warning, detection and location of Viet Cong activity during the hours of darkness around or near the city. A single aircraft (usually the pilot was solo) would be in the air to provide the eyes to locate and if possible suppress enemy activity within the Vinh Long area. The aircraft was ideally suited for the mission due to its lengthy four hour loiter time. The aircraft could be armed with 2.75-inch rockets with H.E. warheads, M-60 machine guns with 550 rounds per gun or configured to drop four illumination flares. Flights were scheduled from about 2000 hours to 2400 hours and 2400hours to 0400 hours. Pilots maintained radio contact with the airfield tower and 199<sup>th</sup> operations at all times, and on other frequencies as desired (ADF tuned to AF radio). Secondary radio contact could be made with ARVN operations for artillery support, and contact could also be established with U.S. Navy river operations, and when necessary, with USAF air operations.. Pilots flew 2-4 night missions per week in addition to their other specified duties and other day-time mission flights. The aircraft utilized for these missions were those assigned to the headquarters or those that at the time were at the Vinh Long for maintenance.

The basic night mission profile consisted of the maintenance crew and crew chief arming each aircraft as specified for the mission; i.e., flares or etc. Observation or contact with the enemy at night resulted in the pilot contacting the company operations and the tower to report the type of activity observed and the coordinates of that activity and a request for any support that was merited. In the instance of mortar attack or ground attack against a friendly target, immediate return fire was available from the Bird Dog from its on-board weapons, or by adjusting in-direct artillery fire, while waiting for gunships to come into the target area. The Bird Dog provided various means to counter-attack the detected VC activity. Thanks to the General Support platoon's nightly operations, the single pilot Bird Dog was an economically effective reactive suppressive fire capability against night attacks launched by the VC operating in the vicinity of Vinh Long.

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