

# NIGHT FLIGHT

By Bill Page



This is a story that only I can remember. I had hoped that someone else may have recalled this. It would appear that it was Fox and I have not communicated with him. This is a story about one of Bill Page's night missions in Vietnam. "Nothing would prepare me for the tension of that night"

All of our low level intercept missions were flown in a Huey for two (2) hours. The team consisted of a Vietnamese linguist, an ARVN counterpart, and myself as team leader. Our personal firearm was a 45 Cal.

We carried a Zenith all band portable radio receiver and a UHER three (3) inch reel to reel tape recorder.

Each time we boarded the Huey, it was my job to present the flight crew with a topo map, showing our operations area. I would reaffirm the length of the mission, which was based upon the limits of the Huey endurance. I would also confirm that we would be at 3000' AGL (Above Ground Level). As we were never in a hurry to get anywhere, we were never at cruise speed. Here it is forty (40) years later and I think I just realized why when I saw tracers arcing across the sky, it was always in front of us. I now believe the

VC were accustomed to the cruise speed of a Huey, as seen during the day. We always flew with exterior running lights off.

### **Now the story:**

On this particular night, we had to meet with the Huey at a non-secure area. After receiving our briefing, we had to exit the perimeter of the Command Post, which was established in a rubber tree plantation, walk out to the highway, which was about fifty (50) yards from the perimeter and proceed down the highway another fifty (50) yards to the field hospital.

It was located on the other side of the highway and had no secure perimeter. As we had never experienced leaving the perimeter on previous missions, I talked with two of the foxhole positions on the perimeter nearest a straight line position from CP HQ to the highway. I indicated that we would be returning shortly after the Huey lands in about two (2) hours. I double verified the password before we headed for the highway. As we started down the highway in the dark, I tried to make note of the terrain, ditch, rock, or bush that would be in front of the foxholes.

I'll mention it now, there was no moon that night. And it was dark. I don't know what my team members thought, as there was no talking. We located the hospital tent, by the sound of a generator and no security. I went inside and advised them of the inbound Huey. They said "It's on the way".

During the entire mission, including seeing tracers arcing in front of us, knowing there were other bullets usually between them, I worried more about finding the exact spot to start inbound from the highway to the CP perimeter. After we gathered our information and returned to the pad, we made a quick, but cautious return to what we thought was the spot on the highway. I knew how the perimeter guards would feel, about someone entering from outside their perimeter. Now, here I was with a South Vietnamese uniformed soldier behind me.

To the perimeter it was the longest fifty (50) yards that I have ever walked. In a hushed, but nervous voice I kept saying, "Hey, you guys". Luckily we got a response from one of the two foxholes that we had collaborated with, "I was glad the mission was over and we didn't get shot by our own people".

I will never know how the Huey crew located the hospital tent in the pitch black of night.