

DON'T SHOOT—I'M LAUGHING.

VUNG TAU AIR BASE

1969

We were all set. The Loadmaster on Wallaby zero, zero, six had accidentally mixed up the routine film canister deliveries so that some Yank outfit up near the DMZ were watching a two week old Rugby League game whilst we had in our possession a new release Hollywood movie. Day shift had visited a local fishing village to purchase a truck load of green prawns (cooking them ourselves was safer) and we had crammed an extra pallet of beer into the cool room. All of our aircraft were home safe and serviceable; no night shift tonight, the long planned function was on!

The Prawns and Fosters were going down nicely and about 300 of us were crammed into the Ettamogah Club and movie annex. There was a solid kathump quickly followed by another, a hundred or more people yelled "Incoming" in unison. Bloody rocket attack! For some reason we all had another place to be at that moment. Then...another series of kathumps followed by a major explosion complete with fire, "s-----t that felt close!"

What we didn't know was that the big explosion we heard and felt was a direct hit on the base fuel farm and the whole base including our RAAF compound was now bathed in the glow of the resultant fuel fire. At that point we still thought it was a direct hit on our compound. Lights off, stay down until things stop going bang is the drill! It was strangely quiet for a long moment but then a loud voice rang out, "Hey you c----t's in the boozier, switch off those f----k'n lights" More silence followed until yet another voice from inside the club called out "You're so f---k'n brave, get up and switch them off yourself". Well, what started as a ripple of laughter across those lying prone outside the club became infectious and turned into hysterics. The Yank lying on the ground next to me was laughing fit to pee himself!

A facsimile of John Wayne (back lit by the glow of the fire) suddenly appeared yelling "**condition red**". To the uninitiated that means Duty Crews report for immediate transport to the flight line, the rest report to previously allocated bunker positions and await either an invasion or roll call (whichever arrives first). My allocated bunker was on the edge of the compound and was separated from the main highway by a barbed wire fence and a bank of flood lights. These were still switched on and...as always.... pointing inwards at us...a design feature that had always intrigued us??? So...there we were, sitting on top of the floodlit bunkers waving back to the Lambro (motor scooter taxi's) drivers motoring past on the highway, waiting for the all clear, when three guys walked past carrying huge plates of prawns. "Any of those left?" we asked, "Yeah, heaps, in the club on the bar. Just remember to switch off the f---k'n lights".