

# **Terrorist Bombing of U.S. Embassy – Saigon, Vietnam**

By **Tom Brannon**

I arrived for duty in Saigon, South Vietnam on March 7, 1965. When I arrived at the airport I noticed that it had been bombed, and wondered if this is what I could expect for my assignment. NCIS was then known as the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI). I was one of the first five ONI agents to arrive in country. Upon my arrival, SA Maynard Anderson was the SAC of the office. Prior to Anderson's assignment SA Bob Kain served along with several military agents assigned to him. Those military agents at the time were known as 9592 agents; most were active duty Chief Petty Officers. I had gone through the basic ONI academy with several of them in 1962 in Washington, DC.

My duties included conducting major investigations for numerous U.S. Navy commands assigned throughout South Vietnam. In April 1965, the U.S. Marine Corp landed on the beaches in Chu Lai. Our office would eventually serve them and I was the first SA assigned to open and operate the office in Danang, Vietnam. Shortly after opening this office the Provost Marshal's Office (PMO) assigned SSGT Dan Buckle to assist me in the conduct of multiple investigations. Later, 1<sup>st</sup> LT Mike Anderson was assigned to also assist. Dan Buckle was later commissioned and retired as a LTCOL in the Military Police Corps. LT Anderson left the USMC and returned to Chicago, IL.

Our duties also included the conduct of counter-intelligence investigations as well as investigations of terrorist activity involving Viet Cong. The Viet Cong were South Vietnamese aligned with the Communist North Vietnam government.

In Saigon I reported to my unit and met my roommate Milt Stephen, a former Chicago Policeman. Milt told me that he and I would share a villa which was located at 98 Phang Dinh Phung, Saigon. The villa was quite nice. It had been confiscated from France after their government fell in 1954, following their loss at the Dien Bien Phu battle. I noticed the presence of weapons and inquired why they were in the villa. Milt went on to explain terrorist activity was common in Vietnam.

He explained that shortly before our arrivals U.S. military dependents were allowed in the country. However, after numerous bombings of hotels, restaurants and areas where Americans frequented, the U.S. dependents, for their own safety, were ordered out of the country. I did recall the bombing of a hotel in Saigon in December 1964. I recalled Bob Hope the USO entertainer was in the hotel when it was bombed by Viet Cong. I later was told Maynard Anderson, the SAC of our office in Saigon, was also living in the hotel at the time of the bombing. Fortunately, he along with Bob Hope escaped without serious injury.

Later on I met Paul Carr, a SA who had served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War. Paul was born and raised in Indiana and had attended the University of Indiana. Paul's inclination was to work in the intelligence arena. He was very good in that area and had a handle on the activities of the dissidents in the country, of which, there were many. Demonstrations were frequent and the Buddhists were constantly demonstrating about one thing or another. Later they went so far as to set themselves on fire in public in their opposition to the government. Another area of concern for U.S. forces was the advent of coups which were common place. Years previously the President of South Vietnam, Diem, was assassinated and a ruling military force took his place. In the following years, many of them were overthrown and another of the military generals took the place of governing the country.

Maynard Anderson was the SAC of the Office. Maynard had attended college in Iowa as I recall. He was very intelligent, smooth, organized and easy to work with. He was also an excellent writer with vast knowledge of the intelligence side of the business. The Supervising Agent at the time was Jack Donnelly, who was located in Sangley Point, Philippines with the Commander Naval Forces Philippines.

On March 30, 1965, Maynard Anderson decided to visit the U.S. Embassy in downtown Saigon and asked me to accompany him. Minutes prior to arriving we heard an explosion in the distance. We arrived at the location and were amazed at what we saw. The Viet Cong had placed C-4 plastic explosive in an old French automobile which was parked in front of the embassy. The vehicle blew up; dead and mutilated Vietnamese bodies were in the street in front of the embassy.

Later, I was at the main door of the embassy when the wounded Deputy U.S. Ambassador U. Alex Johnson left the building accompanied by a U.S. Marine security guard. In total, seventeen persons were killed, and 151 wounded, including 45 Americans. Little did I know in the years to come that this would be my introduction to terrorism. On April 30, 1965, U.S. President Johnson labeled the bombing of the embassy a "wanton act of ruthlessness that will only strengthen the American determination to help the Republic of Vietnam". Ten years later it all came to an end when the North Vietnamese occupied the entire country and seized the embassy.