

Attacks remain the biggest ground assault on a U.S. air base in the history of the Air Force

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502ND AIR BASE WING
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Members of the Vietnam Security Police Association, along with close family, gathered outside the Security Forces Museum Jan. 31 at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland for a ceremony to honor and remember the service members who fought and died on the 50th anniversary of the 1968 Tet Offensive.

Vietnam veterans came from various parts of the country to pay homage to their fellow comrades who fought in the fiercest battle of the Vietnam War 50 years ago, the Tet Offensive.

The Security Forces Academy, which worked in conjunction with the Security Forces Museum Foundation the past 10 months to organize this special event, commemorated the day with a donation of the Security Forces Battle Cross to the museum. Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center commander, Maj. Gen. Bradley D. Spacy, presented the Battle Cross to retired Col. Bernie DeNisio, a Silver Star recipient of the Tet Offensive and the ceremony's guest

Maj. Gen. Bradley D. Spacy (right), Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center commander, presents the Battle Cross to retired Col. Bernie DeNisio, a Silver Star recipient of the Tet Offensive during the 50th anniversary commemoration ceremony of the Vietnam War battle Jan. 31 at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland.

speaker, who accepted it on behalf of the museum.

DeNisio, who spent his 21-year military career as a security police, told his fellow Vietnam veterans in the audience who saw action when the Tet

Offensive began, the 50th anniversary was also a birthday for them as well, given the fact they are alive and survived the enemy assault against them.

"I realize that today is not only the 50th anniversary of

the Tet Offensive, but in a real sense, it is a birthday for a lot of us who were there at Tet, our 50th birthday," DeNisio said.

In his remarks to the audience, DeNisio spoke briefly about his experience as a young

captain assigned to the 377th Security Police Squadron, 900 members within its ranks, when the Tet Offensive was launched.

CEREMONY continues on 15

CEREMONY

From page 13

During the Lunar New Year, or Tet holiday, in late January 1968 — Vietnam's most important holiday — North Vietnamese and communist Viet Cong forces (rebel forces sponsored by North Vietnam) launched a series of coordinated, surprise attacks against a number of targets, cities, towns, and hamlets in South Vietnam. Both the 377th SPS, assigned to Tan Son Nhut Air Base, and the 3rd SPS, at Bien Hoa AB, were attacked shortly after 3 a.m. that morning.

"[Tet Offensive] was the first actual major combat that the Air Force security police fought during the war," said Rudy Purificato, Command Curator and Director of Operations for the

Airman Heritage Museum. The security police, now called security forces, were tasked to handle base defense of the various air bases throughout South Vietnam. "[The security police] took the brunt of the initial attacks."

Purificato noted the gallantry of the 377th SPS who fought and managed to repel over 2,500 enemy forces from taking over Tan Son Nhut AB.

"It was quite a day," Purificato added.

Based on intelligence attack reports and follow-on reports, 5,000 enemy troops were committed to the attack, said DeNisio. Reports detailed 962 enemy killed in action, although after action reports suggested the number was over 1,200. Inside the Tan Son Nhut AB perimeter, 157 enemy killed in action were identified.

The attacks remain the biggest ground assault on a U.S. air base in the history of the Air Force, said DeNisio.

Catherine Jeffryes, course chief of the Security Forces Apprentice Course, attributes the lessons learned from the Tet Offensive and the men who fought in that battle to how the security forces career field operates and has adapted in dealing with global threats.

"In our history books here in the security forces career field, we call [the Tet Offensive] the biggest test of our combat effectiveness in our entire history and that fact stays true today," said Jeffryes.

She acknowledged there are a lot of challenges in the security forces career field but Jeffryes is steadfast when she says security forces members continue to remain battle

tested time and time again.

"These guys in the Tet Offensive set the bar and paved the way forward for us so that we can build on that history by the noble men who fought the battle," Jeffryes noted.

The 50th anniversary commemoration ceremony concluded with the Battle Cross being permanently displayed in front

of the Gold Star Mothers exhibit at the entrance to the museum's Hall of Honor. The significance of the day was felt by many who attended the ceremony.

"It's a day of remembrance for the fallen — the first major conflict in which the security police had to fight in combat, hand to hand," Purificato noted. "The Security Forces Museum is a special

place, particularly for the Vietnam veterans."

"Security Forces Academy is the home of security forces worldwide. It's where everybody starts," said Jeffryes, adding it only made sense to have the commemoration here at JBSA-Lackland. "It's where every one of these veterans at one point in their life started their career right here, at Lackland."