

Edward A. Twiford

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
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Subject : 28 - 29 April 1975 in Saigon - Edward A. Twiford.

On 28 April 1975 I departed from the Air America Finance Office between 1715 and 1730. I walked to the Ground Transportation Office and requested transportation to my quarters in the Air America compound located at 8 Truong Quoc Dung.

Mr. Keller, Security, arrived at Ground Transportation Office prior to our leaving the compound and asked if we could drop him at 195 Cach Mang where he was supposed to be in a conference already in session. The driver dropped off an indigenous passenger on Cach Mang street and then proceeded directly to Mr. Keller's destination. Since there was a large crowd and Mr. Keller was unsure of the exact location of the building in which the conference was taking place, he requested the driver to delay departure for my quarters until he entered the correct compound. The driver complied with this request.

After Mr. Keller entered his compound the driver took me directly to my quarters where we arrived at approximately 1750. When I entered my quarters I found that I had a visitor Captain Nguyen Van Cu, of the police. Captain Cu had lost his entire immediate family at Danang and on 28 April 1975 his fiancée and family had suddenly departed for the United States. Since I had been a friend of Captain Cu and his fiancée he came to request any possible assistance to depart from Vietnam for the United States. I informed him that I could be of no assistance in this matter.

Captain Cu and I were talking when at approximately 1820 there were several loud explosions. This was followed very quickly by the sound of small arms fire. I advised Captain Cu to depart quickly for his unit or home and immediately got my weapon, a Swedish K, and loaded it. Captain Cu was excited when he heard the small arms fire and explosions. When he saw me arming a weapon he seemed to become more excited. At this time Al (last name unknown), my next door neighbor, came to the door. Upon seeing Captain Cu he departed without saying anything. I advised Captain Cu to go to his unit or home and proceeded to the roof of the building in which I lived. On the roof I found Al and Jim Roberts knocking down the four foot masonry wall surrounding the patio. This patio was to be used by helicopters as an evacuation point and was designated as "India Pad". I assisted them in leveling the wall and cleaning up the resulting debris. At this point we were joined by Ed, a pilot TDY from Hong Kong, and another Ed, who later broke his hand when he hit a Vietnamese who was interfering with an aircraft, Tolliver who had been securing the front gate with Ed (broken hand) by placing cars against it joined us on the roof also. ADAMS (L-4)

We cleaned the pad and then watched the shelling of Tan Son Nhat Airport. At this time all persons on the roof were armed.

It became apparent at this time that this was not a minor incident and at this point Armed Forces Radio announced a coup. Inside of an hour it was apparent that more than a coup was in progress. It was decided to bring food that needed no cooking, water, communication gear and personal baggage to the roof. Al and I went down to his apartment and prepared some boiled eggs and bacon to be taken to the roof, while we located other items. We carried some beer, bourbon-whiskey and vodka also but during the evening no one had more than two drinks. All weapons, ammunition and hand grenades were also taken to the roof.

At this time Captain Roberts brought his wife, daughter and mother in law to the roof. We all had food and continued to observe the shelling.

Suddenly we saw a group of people inside our compound. We could not identify the individuals and we barred the roof door and picked up our weapons. The people came to the pad house and up the stairs. We asked for identification and one of them identified himself as a friend (possibly brother in law) of Captain Roberts. We opened the door and one man and four girls came in. They wanted to remain with us for evacuation. There was some discussion on this and Captain Roberts asked all others on the roof for their opinion. Since there were already nine of us on the roof they were advised to go to "Pad 259" for evacuation since our pad was a minor pad and Pad 259 was a major evacuation point.

They departed for Pad 259 and Captain Roberts went with them to assist them getting over the fence as the gate was barred by vehicles.

At approximately 2000 Al volunteered some mattresses he had in his quarters as beds. They went down and brought these to the roof. The rest of us settled down to sleep on the tile. Shelling continued all of that night and was a spectacular scene from our vantage point. No one on the roof appeared to be nervous and Captain Robert's small daughter, 3/5 years old, was exceptionally calm under the unusual circumstances. All were up bright and early the next morning.

On 29 April 1975 the Air America Office at the field was contacted and they advised us to remain where we were. They advised that the Vietnamese Air Force was not allowing them to operate at that time and they would begin picking up flight crew as soon as possible. We remained on the roof and continued to observe the shelling and a Vietnamese gunship working over a target in the Vietnamese Government Compound adjacent to Tan Son Nhat airport. This plane was shot down 0830/900. We heard over the radio that the "mission warden" was to take a convoy to the airfield. Al and Ed (broken hand) decided to try to join this convoy. The rest of us remained on the pad.

During the morning it was necessary for the members to leave the roof for various reasons. Captain Roberts was called by the compound guard on two occasions and went to the front gate. I furnished back up arms support. My maid asked me to come down and I went and dismissed her to go check on her family after paying her \$60.00 of the last hundred I had on me. Others went to the bathrooms etc.

At approximately 1000/1030 we were lifted by helicopter, piloted by Captain Chauncey Collard, from India Pad to Pad 259. Here we set down and off loaded due to congestion at the DAO evacuation points. Capt. Collard was having some radio problems and took off with a radio to see if he could have it adjusted.

Just prior to being air lifted we determined we would have to abandon most weapons, hand grenades and communication gear. We returned these downstairs to rooms and secured them in cabinets. The others had side arms but I did not, so I retained the Swedish K. I do not know when any specific person departed.

When the helicopters started to move again various individuals grabbed whichever one was available. Since the helicopters were on roof tops all around, no one was concerned about a ride. There was a priority in movement from Pad 259 stated to me by Ed Boyce of USAID. First was Air America employees, second USAID employees and then DAO. Americans and their families were given first choice in all cases. I had surrendered my seat on one helicopter to move some FCC employees since I was still of the opinion that Captain Collard would return.

Finally Captain Collard returned. I observed that he had individuals aboard but the USAID loader knowing that I was the last Air America American employee motioned for me to board. I grabbed my personal effects and started to board but the Vietnamese officers in the aircraft said "no" and when Captain Collard also said "no" I got off the aircraft. I assumed it was on a special mission and did not want to delay it. The aircraft departed for the SS Blue Ridge, I later learned from Captain Collard, with it's special load of passengers. He had been required to carry the VNAF Staff to safety.

Since I was on the roof and helicopters were again not moving, Ed Boyce invited a DAO man, a FCC man and myself for sandwiches in his apartment on the second floor of Pad 259. We had a quick sandwich and returned to the roof as it was expected that passenger movement would begin at any time.

At this time I decided I could not be of help at the main DAO evacuation so I would remain on this pad and assist them. Since I had the largest weapon I was to attempt to control the three access outlets to the roof. I walked around among the Vietnamese and talked to them and asked them to help control the lines leading from the passenger side of the roof through three hallways to the loading zone. The Vietnamese complied willingly and were of invaluable help in controlling the passengers to the loading zone. I also had the problem of controlling the three elevators and three stairways.

When I decided to remain on the roof I contacted the Air America Operations Manager and told him that I was still at Pad 259 and would depart with the others. Ed Boyce departed from the pad at approximately 1500/1530. I decided to remain until around 1800. However, at about 1700/1730 an Air America helicopter came in and asked that I board before any of the other passengers. I complied and then we loaded as many Vietnamese as the aircraft could carry. I was ferried directly to the DAO evacuation area where I surrendered my weapon to the US Marines. I then assisted in controlling the Vietnamese in the evacuation hallway until I boarded a US Marine helicopter at 1930. I was flown to the SS Vancouver, which went to Subic Bay. From there I proceeded to Manila and Hong Kong.

June 5, 1975.


Edward A. Twiford

Note : It will be observed that I did not know the names of the individuals throughout this narrative. This was due to the short period of employment and the fact that I was never formally introduced, except to the top Staff of Air America, to the other employees or echelons of the American community.