

We were just below a very thin layer of stratiform cloud, perhaps at around 1100 feet above ground level in a sort of incandescence with bright sunshine penetrating the cloud layer. I then noticed that we were surrounded by golden dots and my mind drifted back to pre-deployment training for 2SAS at Wewak PNG when we parked the standby aircraft adjacent to a sandy shore with a radio on the sand and flopped around snorkelling among myriads of tiny

golden tropical fish circling untouchably just beyond arm length. Then reality dawned: *'Shit; tracer!'*

My momentary thought was to penetrate the cloud, but we just eased a little higher as the groundfire was near its apogee. **Then suddenly, a gigantic black shadow flashed over us, judging by size and speed possibly a C-130.**

Fixed wing traffic between Saigon and Vung Tau normally transited at or above 4000 feet; but this guy must have opted for low level cloud surfing on a bright sunny day, blissfully unaware of happenings beneath the thin layer of cloud. **Had we overreacted and penetrated the cloud, chances are we may have collided.**

Next a radio call: *'Albatross this is One; the enemy has now broken off the engagement and much appreciate the help.'* *'Roger One, go carefully.'*

We headed back for Nui Dat and the direct track was the gunline for an earlier artillery fire mission that had not eventuated. Flying conditions were silky smooth as indicated by the stratiform cloud layer.

**As we got within maybe half a kilometre of Nui Dat, a severe thump shook the aircraft and we looked at one another wide-eyed across the cockpit.** Then, very belatedly: *'All stations this is Nui Dat Arty, artillery warning, firing from Yankee Sierra xxxx into Yankee Sierra xxxx'.*

**A volley of big 155mm artillery shells had missed us by a whisker.** We scuttled into Kangaroo Pad, fresh out of courage for that day!

An obvious message was 7.62mm fire support from the air against targets without overhead protection can be very effective, even from up to 5,000 feet AGL as demonstrated by USAF 'Spooky' Dakota gunships.



*USAF AC-47 Dakota Gunship - 'Spooky' Mk 1*



*Time lapse image of USAF 'Spooky' 7.62mm minigun fire*



BRIAN DIROU, DFC  
Wing Commander RAAF (Retired)  
Rockhampton, Queensland  
November 2025

