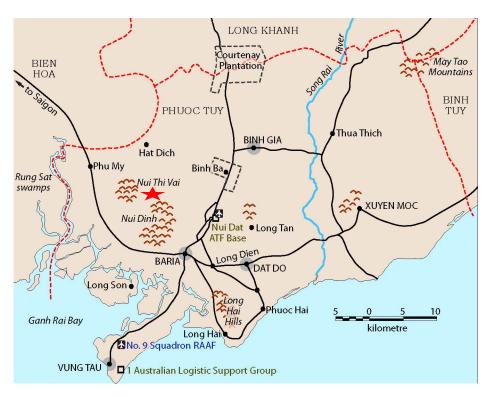
THE VALUE OF DOORGUNS By BRIAN DIROU, DFC

Timeframe for this action cannot be precisely recalled but may have been 1968 and it involved Alpha Company of one of the 1ATF infantry battalions.

I had been following my usual practice of 'reading the battlefield' and monitoring unit comms nets when they were operating where I thought they might encounter enemy. I heard a contact report over near the Nui Thi Vais hills and decided to drift in that direction so we could respond quickly if assistance was required.

The contact location was beyond range of 105mm artillery from Nui Dat and the US Army 155mm battery was engaged on another fire mission.



As we neared the contact area, I called up the Company Commander to inform him that we were nearby if needed. He advised that the enemy had them pinned down and they could not move and had no idea of delay before US Army 155mm artillery support would be available. I suggested to him that we could give him some limited airborne fire support from doorguns which might help and he welcomed the offer.

We decided to set up a dumbbell firing pattern paralleling the demarcation between friendlies and enemy so we could alternate between doorguns. When the Company was ready and had remarked their forward location, we began firing passes into the enemy positions.

After maybe 4 or so passes, I asked the Company Commander: 'Is that doing any good?' and he responded: 'There is a lot of yelling and screaming going on; they have stopped shooting at us and are now all firing at you.'

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 predeployment 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.

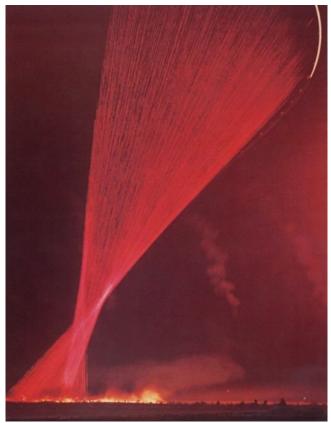
As we got within maybe half a kilometre of Nui Dat, a severe thump shook the aircraft and we looked at one another wide-eyed across the cockpit. Then, very belatedly: 'All stations this is Nui Dat Arty, artillery warning, firing from Yankee Sierra xxxx into Yankee Sierra xxxx'.

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

