



ATTACK ON UBON

ROYAL THAI AIR BASE

By Mike Potter

I attended the first Patrol Class ever conducted for all branches of the military in summer of 68'. So when the Patrol dog was accepted after a trial period, it was decided that all AF Sentry dogs would be eventually retrained or phased out through attrition. It was a natural, after I received orders for Ubon and was sent there, to start the retraining of the Sentry dogs there to become Patrol Dogs. This only lasted for awhile, because we were short on handlers and dogs for perimeter duty. I was assigned Duke 56M9 and began night patrol around July 1, 1969. To the best of my remembrance, all care for our dogs; grooming, visits by the vet, training, etc. had to be done on off duty time and I can't remember any dogs being neglected. I believe all my K9 brothers were conscientious about their dog's health and welfare. I can remember spending two hours one day cleaning my dogs teeth, without anesthesia (the vet wasn't available for some reason). We even put demos on for the brass occasionally and some were quite elaborate with simulated attacks by the enemy.

Each night before we went out on patrol, we would receive an intelligence briefing on area suspected enemy activity. I'm sure that some of those reports were trumped up to increase our vigilance, but they still scared the Hell out of you. At this point, they would ask for volunteers for the areas of patrol that were expected to "catch Hell". Anyone gung ho or feeling their oats would volunteer and early on I would even volunteer, until I begin to get short. I can even remember them asking for volunteers to do duty as "door gunner" on a Huey, on off duty time, crazy. That's one offer I never took up, I felt I was risking enough as it was. What made it so risky, was that we were walking patrol, on the perimeter, in front of the bunkers and mortar pits that set back quite away. This is where it really paid to know who was in the bunkers and mortar pits and made sure they knew you were out there. That worked fine, until they would call out the augmentee's because of an expected attack, then you had to worry about some trigger-happy augmentee. On top of that, we didn't have the Army or Marines on patrol outside of the perimeter and no clear free fire zones (had huts almost right up next to the fences in some areas). All we had outside the wire was Thai police and they weren't considered reliable. I understand that after I left that the Thai army did start patrolling to some extent.

On the two attacks that took place at Ubon: The first attack took place on July 17, 1969 and I was on patrol about 3 hundred yards from where sappers penetrated the perimeter and set satchel charges in two C47 aircraft, a mobile ground control unit, and a radar unit. The elephant grass (as we called it) was so tall that the sappers were never detected until they were preparing to exit. That's when A1C Kenneth D. O'Dell and his dog (seemed like his name was Blackie) detected them and opened fire. A1C O'Dell and his dog were both wounded and we don't know if

the enemy suffered any casualties (none were killed). I remember hearing the weapons fire and seeing the satchel charges going off; in fact I remember watching the radar shack going airborne and coming back down. I heard that there was actually someone in it and they were only shook up a little (lucky guy). The two C47's were damaged and satchel charges were still being found by EOD, two days later. It was really crazy that night; the base was not really prepared for that attack, even though us guys were fully trained for it (AZR).

When the attack started, somebody got the bright idea that we should go "Stealth" and turned the runway and apron lights off! Then they sent up Blind Bat flare ships and started dropping flares to illuminate the area, go figure; we already had perimeter lighting, if someone hadn't turned them off! It is a wonder someone didn't get killed. I had an empty flare canister land next to me (about 10 yards away) with a thud and all I could think of was, is that a dud rocket or mortar round waiting to go off? It took me awhile to get the nerve up to check it out. That was one long night, till the sun come up and we made our sweeps to clear the areas. After that attack, the base went through a major build-up: They cut the elephant grass, built new bunkers and installed mortar pits, installed two double rows of concertina wire with a row on top, new weapons, new combat vehicles (APC's, V-100 armored cars, etc.).

By the time the second attack come in January of 70', we were ready. When that attack came in January of 70', we had received an intelligence report that it was going to happen, but wondered if it really would. That question was answered and cost the enemy dearly with 5 of their sappers killed. We had one dog KIA (King, handled by Larry Bridges) and one dog wounded (Jodi was his name), and one handler wounded (Sgt Thomas Cartwright). What made so bad that night, is that we had augmentee's on duty, and through no fault of their own, were nervous as street walkers in church. I shouldn't be prejudice against augmentee's, but to me that is like someone being a part time dentist! This time the sappers didn't get a chance to blow anything. Sgt. Cartwright and his dog Jodi both received the Purple Heart. I was present when our wing commander, Colonel Cummings, awarded the Purple Heart to Jodi. Sgt. Cartwright held Jodi at a close, tight leash, as Colonel Cummings attached the Purple Heart to his choke chain. Even if Jodi had nailed him, I don't think it would have phased him, he was a tough old bird, having two F-4 Phantoms shot out from under him and still going!



Mike Potter & Duke 56M9



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