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INTRODUCTION

At 0130 hours on 1 July 1965, hostile forces of the Viet Cong made a commando type attack on Da Nang Air Base. Although the attack lasted only a short time, damage was extensive. A VC force off-base launched a mortar attack, during which a force of approximately 20 VC penetrated the perimeter and placed satchel charges under aircraft. The Security Police and external forces countered the ensuing attack. This SEA Scenario will describe that combat situation and indicate what enemy actions were taken and discuss the counter actions.

OBJECTIVE

The objective in studying and analyzing this attack and friendly counteractions, is to strengthen the students knowledge of some of the basic principles of tactics and other significant factors. This will enable you to relate principles to facts and become familiar with some of the typical problems involved.

To achieve this objective it is desired that students:

Become familiar with the typical enemy threat against Air Bases in V.N.

Be able to recognize basic principles as related to facts and other significant factors in employing Combat Security Police forces.

Become familiar with combat actions involved in defending against an enemy attack.

Develop the ability to evaluate Air Base Defense operations and develop lessons learned for future actions.

SITUATION AND SETTING

Da Nang Air Base is located about 2 miles southwest of Da Nang City in Quang Nam Province. It is an old Air Base (at least 30 years) that was developed by the French and later the Japanese during WW II. Following the collapse of the French in 1955, the Vietnamese Government operated it until the U.S. Forces became involved in V.N. The base which is a joint USAF VNAF operation, is 340 miles north of Saigon and 84 miles south of the DMZ. It lies on a coastal plain with rivers and tributaries. The Da Nang bay is 2 miles north and the South China Sea is about 3½ miles to the east.

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The surrounding terrain is fairly built up, and the density of buildings increases on the northeast side into the suburbs of the city of Da Nang. To the southeast, south and southwest are flat level plains.

Da Nang, which is one of the busiest Air Bases in the world, supports air operations by USAF, U.S. Marines, and the VNAF. The USAF Tactical Fighter Wing operates primarily against North Viet Nam. The base also supports a tremendous logistical system for I Corps in V.N.

The Security Police Squadron at the time had 2 officers and 161 airmen to provide close in security for USAF resources and cantonment areas. The primary internal base defense was the responsibility of the VNAF. U.S. Marines manned defensive positions around the airfield boundary. Outer area defense was the responsibility of I Corps, ARVN.

THE THREAT

Because of the built-up areas around the base, enemy mortar and small scale assaults were feasible at the time. A minimum amount of intelligence was available at the time since the attacking force of approximately 100 men assembled and trained for 30 days in an area only 10 km south of the base. Based on the deployment of external forces, an enemy force the size of a company would run a risk attempting to infiltrate the base. However, the fact that they were able to reach the aircraft, attests to the advantage which accrues to an offensive guerrilla force in terms of element of surprise. (Further information on the size and disposition of VC forces in the Quang Nam Province during July 1965 and items of current intelligence information was not available for this study.)

Proximity of Da Nang to the DMZ and the Laotian border meant that the base was continuously susceptible to large scale NVA action.

FRIENDLY PLANS AND DEPLOYMENT

Up to the time of this attack there had been no recorded infiltration attacks against USAF Air Bases. (The Bien Hoa attack of Nov 1964 was with mortars only). Consequently, Security Police forces at Da Nang were limited in size and external defense arrangements were not fully integrated and coordinated.

Considering outer area defense first, the I Corps ARVN was responsible. Disposition of the ARVN Forces at the time of the attack was unknown. The next inner line of defense was manned by U.S. Marines who

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occupied block houses at the Air Base boundary. Concertina and barbed wire fencing in three fence barriers were emplaced, and U.S. marine 2 man walking patrols covered areas along the fence line. **Inside the perimeter** of the Air Base the VNAF was primarily responsible for internal base defense. USAF Security Police were responsible for close-in security of USAF resources and cantonment areas.

At the time of the attack F-102 aircraft were parked in an un-reveted restricted area. Adjacent to the F-102 area were two C-130 aircraft in fighter revetments and one C-130 parked on an unreveted hardstand.

One Security Policeman was posted in the north side of the C-130 area, another Security Policeman was posted on the south side. One augmentee was posted in the center of the area. A Security Police mobile patrol was covering the area.

Strength of the Security Police unit was 2 officers and 161 air-men.

ENEMY ACTIONS

The Viet Cong force, from a position immediately outside the southeast corner of the base established two mortar positions outside the base. These were used to fire at the aircraft parking area. Two enemy rifle platoons established positions to cover the assault team. At 0130 hours a Security Police motor patrol in the vicinity of the C-130 parking area observed the assault team inside the perimeter fence. This team had penetrated the three fence barriers at a point approximately 1300 feet from a Marine bunker past and approximately 700 feet from another.

The assault force exchanged small arms fire with the Security Policeman on motor patrol, who had discovered them and also with the Security Policeman at the north end of the C-130 area. The enemy team then ran toward the C-130 area throwing hand grenades and satchel charges under aircraft and into tents.

Within 5 minutes the enemy withdrew under covering fire from the mortar squad and their support platoons off-base.

Mortar fire in the F-102 area was from a position approximately 2500 feet south of the air strip.

FRIENDLY COUNTERACTIONS

When the Security Policeman on vehicle patrol observed the VC force inside the perimeter he took cover under his vehicle and fired four rounds from his .38 caliber pistol. He was killed by return fire.

The Security Policeman posted at the north end of the C-130 area also exchanged fire with the V.C. He expended about 40 rounds and then withdrew.

The actions by these two Security Policemen denied the VC an opportunity to place demolition charges without being interrupted. After quickly throwing grenades and a few satchel charges, the V.C. withdrew.

The VC mortar attack was detected by Marine countermortar radar and Marine artillery was directed on the mortar position. One company of Marines in conjunction with SV River Forces swept the area between the airfield and the nearby river.

ARVN units swept the area for several miles south of the Air Base the following morning.

One VC was captured.

TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Security Police forces were not responsible for securing the base perimeter.
2. The enemy was not detected until they were inside the perimeter fence.
3. External defenses were loosely coordinated.
4. VC prematurely launched their attack.
5. All but one enemy were able to escape.
6. There was no advance intelligence concerning the attack.
7. Although attack was brief considerable damage was caused.
8. Security Police disposition and armament was minimal.

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OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

1. Da Nang is a joint USAF VNAF base.
2. Attack was well organized and rehearsed by VC.
3. Alarm was given by Security Policemen on vehicle patrol.
4. Off-base mortar fire was not sufficient to pin down friendly forces.
5. Statistics in the attack were as follows:

STATISTICS OF DA NANG ATTACK (1 July 1965)

Personnel Casualties:

KIA 3 Friendly (Including 2 Marines)

Aircraft and Equipment:

Destroyed 3 C 130's

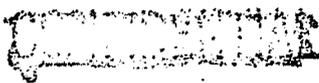
3 F 102's

Damaged 4 F 102's

One member of VC attack force captured.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This Viet Cong attack was a typical guerrilla type assault on an Air Base. The attackers were well organized and well equipped although the attack lasted only a short time considerable damage to aircraft was experienced. By using the element of surprise and making a quick withdrawal the base was disrupted, 6 aircraft were destroyed. Fortunately casualties were light. Immediate resistance by Security Police on duty caused the enemy to attack prematurely and decreased the effectiveness of the enemy actions.



Some of the conclusions which can be drawn from analysis of this attack concern:

1. Intelligence
2. Areas of responsibility
3. Deployment of forces, enemy and friendly
4. Firepower, enemy and friendly
5. Size of forces deployed
6. Timeliness of reaction forces
7. Friendly artillery reaction

Using the principles learned to date and the data described in this scenario, examine and objectively analyze the significant points of this attack. Discuss the friendly and enemy actions taken. Relate principles to the facts as shown and determine what actions (other than those which occurred) that could have been employed to counter the attack.

It is not necessary to determine the one best solution (there may be a number of alternatives which would have achieved sound results). The objective is to develop a better understanding of the problems involved and to improve student abilities to employ Security Policemen in combat security operations.