

Da Nang AB, Bomb Dump

MAY 6, 1966

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35th APS, K-9
Da Nang AB, K-9, 1965-1966

Da Nang Airbase, 35th Air Police Squadron, K-9 Sentry Dogs

Da Nang's Bomb Dump was a dangerous place to patrol with rows and columns of large earth-covered bunkers housing missiles, war-heads, ammo, high explosives and other ordinances for aircraft loads. Countless rows and stacks of bombs were, walled-off with large earth-berms, and contained over 40,000 tons of bombs of all sizes, including Daisy Cutters of 15,000 pounds.

The first two Viet Cong attempts to infiltrate and blow up Da Nang's bomb dump were foiled by K-9 Teams. In August 1965, K-9 handler team Tom Baker (RIP 2007/Agent Orange), and Rex, detected the first attempt, and on 6 May 1966, K-9 handler team Don Poss and Blackie X129 detected the second.

Photo: Gary Knutsen taking Eric out of the K-9 Trailer.



On Friday, 6 May 1966, I was posted at DaNang's ammo / bomb dump, along with several dog teams. I had patrolled the bomb dump dozens of times and was familiar with the N/E bunker storage area Blackie and I was assigned. Handlers readied their war dogs for the night's patrols and were trucked from the Growl Pad Kennels to the entrance of the giant bomb dump.

Photo: Don Poss. Wrist Wrap was due to a double-charged pop-flare.



Photo: K-9 Blackie X129 (Best dog at Da Nang)



As dog-teams scattered throughout the huge bomb dump, Blackie and I started the long walk to the N/E bunker post. I wanted to take advantage of what little daylight remained to check foliage-growth outside the north-fence line (meanders roughly E/W). That was always a good idea, mainly because I didn't want to get spooked by a walking-tree later.

Photo: N/E Bomb Dump Storage Bunkers. Don Poss and Blackie X129. Flightline right-center.



Photo: Gary Eberbach and Bucky.

Photo: Gary Eberbach.



Immediately outside the north-fence line, there was some activity in part of the bomb dump that looped around the far side of a small creek that ran dry in the summer and wet in the winter. Some large power generators were being fired up to lite the work area for MMS techies. The generators could reduce hearing of potentially dangerous sounds and the lights could take away night vision.

Photo: Bomb Dump area. Freedom Hill 327 in background.



Photo: Bomb Dump area with rows of bombs stacked. Freedom Hill 327 in background, left.



I moved up into a tall-grass area near where the fence line turned south, becoming the east-fence line (runs N/S). Across the fields to the east, I could see the under-construction new runway, current active-runway, taxiway, and then the flightline with revetments and aircraft parking areas nearly a mile away. Across from the VNAF SPAD parking area were old French bunkers and towers, long abandoned, but perfect for Viet Cong ambush sites. From that slightly raised area I could also see across the bomb dump.

Photo: Rail Road Tressel, left-center. French Tower, right-center./



As night fell, areas across the creek were lite up for about an hour, and then it was dark. Blackie and I had quartered our post, meandering between and around storage bunkers and bypassing those with MMS workers doing their thing. We ended up back near the entrance to the N/E corner where MMS were working noisily, which I bypassed until later.

Photo: Outside Bomb Dump N/E area. Dusk.



By midnight, it was quiet in my area, although neighboring sectors were still lite up like daylight and I pitied the K-9 handlers in those areas. Rather than walk a predictable pattern, I looped around behind some bunkers as the heavy entrance sliding doors had a single bright light above them. Back along the east-fence area again, it was too dark to see very far. I knew that runway and flightline lights across the fields could help spot movement (including mine), should runway blue-lights start to blink.

Photo: Outside Bomb Dump N/E area. Night falls.



As I approached the front doors of the last bunker, Blackie stopped and assumed his Alert stance. Blackie was very quiet and so was I, straining to see what he was seeing. We moved pass the bunker doors, in limited shadows, and turned immediately left, to the north elongated side and rear of that bunker and in to a clump of knee-high bushy grass. I knelt beside Blackie, who began to huff and inflate his cheeks silently. I had him 'down' and I lay beside him listening, trying to see movement or anything. "Watch," I commanded.

Suddenly an AK-47 started firing in my area. I don't think my position was known, but the VC may have seen K-9 was in the immediate area and thought they were detected. A second AK fired up the front of the bunker, spraying wildly. Then it was quiet, although my ears were ringing as we were only about thirty feet from the fence line. I could hear metal scraping metal and thought VC might be trying to cut the wire. Blackie was getting excited but not barking. I knelt and returned fire where I had seen muzzle-flashes then quickly moved to the back of the bunker for cover. I loosed Blackie who sped away silently. I knew if VC were inside the fence, Blackie would probably die within seconds--although at least one of them would be missing a pair of gonads or have a ripped out throat.

Blackie hit the fence and I could hear the wires clanging around as if he were trying to climb. I fired a clip into the trees and thick shrub to the left of Blackie. There was no return fire. I moved again quickly and called CSC on my hand-held radio, reporting I had received incoming fire from the N/E corner of the bunker area. CSC radioed the QRT to respond with caution.

It was dead quiet and Blackie was still rattling the fence. Then I heard "Don" whispered loudly. It was Gary Eberbach with Bucky, who came up from a K-9 area adjoining mine. Almost at the same time, the QRT arrived on the east-fence line near the front entrance to my area. I warned them not to enter the storage area as Blackie was still loose, and that a second dog-team was also in the area.

After a few minutes I called in a normal voice for Blackie. Considering my ears were still ringing, and likely the VC's were too, Blackie's hearing could pick up my voice whereas anyone close by might not. Blackie returned, padding back with a wet bloody muzzle. At first I thought he might have attacked a VC, but as I had not heard any screaming or new firing, and guessed he had tried to chew his way through the fence to get outside the wire (K-9 would chew their Kennels chain-link doors). I reattached the leash and we held our position.

Blackie snatched a quick glance at Gary and Bucky then focused back to the N/E area. Gary and Bucky moved to the bunker's front area where he could watch the fence line for blinking lights.



Photos left: K-9 with Sentry Dog patrolling. Pop-flares float down.

The QRT moved out cautiously through the tall grass along the east-fence outside the bomb dump. About ten minutes later, they radioed CSC and advised they had found expended brass. A few minutes later they reported a blood trail, but no wounded or bodies were found. The QRT withdrew a safe distance, and the entire N/E fence line area was light up like daylight with pop flares fired over the creek area and away from the bomb dump.

Gary and Bucky withdrew to the front entrance area. As I moved back with Blackie and neared the front area, Gary reported that Bucky was detecting us and he warned the QRT to be ready. I acknowledged and advised Gary and the QRT to watch and try not to shoot us. I wanted to get to an area and check out Blackie for wounds or need for stitches. Blackie was fine.

The rest of the night was uneventful.

At daylight, all K-9 were relieved from post. At the Growl Pad Kennels, after putting Blackie away, I was told to write an after-action report, which I did.

Photo below; Back at our tent, James McNall was returning from a lukewarm shower after hiking a hundred yards to and from.



Photo: Don Poss' FIGMO Calendar: I entered our tent and opened my wooden locker/ that I had built, and made a notation on my FIGMO calendar: *May 6, Never too short.*



Da Nang Airbase: 1969 Bomb Dump Explosion

In 1969 the bomb dump was set fire by a Vietnamese civilian worker's son, by "accident", and over several days Da Nang AB was rocked by the explosion of 38,000 tons of bombs. So you will understand how dangerous patrolling the bomb dump was for K-9 handlers and dogs, I want to show you four photos from the 1969 explosions. The below summary for three Viet Cong attempts to penetrate the bomb dump:

Photo-1: Notice the Guard Towers (center and about 30 feet tall). This is important so that you will see the scale in the next photo.



Photo-2: Notice the Guard Towers at the bottom of the mushroom cloud! Photo was taken about a mile from the bomb dump.



Photo-3: A 2,000 pound bomb cooks off!



Photo-4: Da Nang AB Rock'N Rolled for three solid days!



In the photo left, you can see the mushroom from a single bomb towering above barracks roofs--more than a mile away.

Aftermath: The Bomb Dump was obscenely pockmarked with scooped out craters and cooked-off cannon shells. In many places craters festered like opened sores and steamed like Yosemite Valley in California.

For weeks, EOD unearthed and disarmed unexploded bombs that had like a macabre statuettes of broken men.

The world's busiest Air Base was closed during the calamity. The control was evacuated when 2000-pound bombs began exploding.

Take offs were at pilot's discretion only. Parked aircraft were quickly shuttled to far ends of the flightline for safety.

And all the while, Charlie wisely kept his distance, unwilling to tangle with a wounded animal uncertain as to what caused his pain. --

I DEROS'd from Da Nang Air Base in 3 July 1966. My four years Air Force enlistment was over. But my war was not over. A week after patrolling with Blackie in Da Nang's ammo dump ... I was cruising my old high school hang outs in California believing I could pick up where I had left off. It was not to be. I was fini Vietnam...but Vietnam was not fini me.

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