

Da Nang AB, Bomb Dump

MAY 6, 1966

© 2014, by by Don Poss
35th APS, Da Nang AB, K-9, 1965-1966

"Da Nang's Bomb Dump was always a very Dangerous place to patrol."

At Da Nang AB K-9 Kennels, Growl Pad, Blackie and I were again assigned the bomb dump, along with several dog-teams, and Blackie was ready to patrol.



By Friday, May 6, 1966, I had patrolled the Da Nang AB ammo-bomb dump dozens of times. It was always potentially dangerous as every dumb-bomb possible was stored there, including the Daisy Cutter bomb which weighed in at 15,000 pounds and destroys anything in a 600-yard radius, and is dropped by a parachute tugging it out the lowered ramp of a C-130.

We loaded our war-dogs into the AP K-9 trailer and climbed in the back of the Kennels truck and headed out to the Bomb Dump. The truck was the same one Air Police SSgt Jensen took cover behind on 1 July 1965 and was KIA by sappers. SSgt Jensen was credited with saving 25 lives in a bunker and was awarded the Silver Star. Airman Al Handy followed Jensen's orders and has been credited with causing the 15 men sapper team to prematurely break off their attack.

K-9 teams patrolling the huge bomb dump were first dropped off at the entrance. We jumped out of the back of the truck and unloaded our dogs.

As usual, before entering my post I gave Blackie a drink of water from his canteen (we carried two). Each handler had his routine giving their Sentry Dog a little fun-time before entering the no-nonsense zone.



Looking east, across the field from the bomb dump, was the under construction second runway, the active runway, taxiway, and flightline areas. To the S/E were some old French bunkers and towers, long abandoned, and an unused railroad tressel that were all perfect sites for the enemy to hide at.

In daylight, the S/E post didn't look too bad. At night, it was seriously dark with shifting shadows, *walking trees*, and fence posts that talked to each other. Rows of ammo and missile storage bunkers, each covered with hundreds of yards of dirt, stretched over a dozen acres in that sector. The very last row of bunkers in the N/E corner narrowed to a single bunker, and bordered a jungle-like growth of tangle-brush, trees, and tall grass. There was also a creek that was dry during the summer, and very wet during monsoon.



We didn't know it then, but that area above the creek and between the bomb dump perimeter fence contained tunnels irregularly used by VC for observing and reporting what was happening in that area.

As dusk approached, it was time to make our way in to the interior of the



bomb dump. Blackie and I were once more patrolling the N/E area and as the first hour was still daylight we did a quick check to see what activity might be happening. Sometimes the MMS guys would be working on or moving missiles in or out of storage bunkers in anticipation of the next morning's air strike north, or for future air support needs.

For the most part, there was little activity, with only a one yellow low-riding fork-lift still moving around near a storage bunker with its doors being closed.

Daylight was quickly slipping away, so I went directly to the N/E corner of the bomb dump. Foliage in the area outside the fence could have changed since our last post there, and it was a good idea to check it out, not wanting to get spooked over a walking-tree later. There was some activity on the far side of the creek, which was a part of the bomb dump that looped around it, and there were some large power generators already running that would lite up the work area for MMS.

The generators powering floodlights were a potential danger as it could destroy night vision and cover sounds of sappers trying to penetrate the post.



Night fell suddenly and it was apparent it would be a very dark and clear moonless sky. A dark night at Da Nang was like a black-hole that sucked the lights from the heavens.

Aircraft take-offs and landings seemed to be at a minimum, which was unusual, considering in 1966 Da Nang and Tan Son Nhut Airbases were tied as the world's busiest airports.

The far side of the creek was still lite up for an hour after sunset, and then the area went dark. Blackie and I had completed a counter-clockwise patrol of our area and ended up back at the N/E corner. MMS was working noisily in the last bunker with doors open and the area flood-lite. I avoided that bunker area until they finished their work.

By midnight, there was no MMS activity in my post, although neighboring sectors were fully lite up. Fortunately, they were far enough away that I could maintain night-vision as long as I didn't directly look there.

Rather than patrol a predictable pattern, I looped around behind the some bunkers, and between others. Approaching the N/E fence area again, it was almost too dark to see anything. Runway and flightline lights to the east could be useful and help spot any movement, should the lights start to blink. As I passed close to the front doors of the last bunker, Blackie stopped and assumed his Alert stance. He was very quiet and so was I, straining to see what he was seeing. We moved pass the doors and turned immediately left to the north elongated side of the bunker, and entered a clump of bushy grass about waist-high, but with a view toward the creek and fence line. I knelt beside Blackie, who began to huff and inflate his cheeks silently. I had him 'down' and I lay beside him listening, and trying to see movement or anything.

Blackie suddenly alerted and an AK-47 started firing spraying wildly. VC knew K-9 teams patrolled the bunkers and must have seen us approach, but I don't think my position was known for sure. A second AK started firing in my direction and up the side of the bunker. 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 they might be trying to cut the wire. Blackie was alerting to whatever they were trying to do, but was not barking. I knelt and returned fire where muzzle-flashes had come from, and where the metal sound was at, then quickly moved to the back of the bunker for cove.

I released Blackie to attack and he sped away silently. I knew if the VC were inside the fence Blackie might be killed within seconds, although at least one of them would be missing a pair gonads or have his throat ripped out. Blackie hit the fence and I could hear the wires banging around as if he were trying to climb. I fired another magazine clip but there was no return fire.

I radioed Central Security Control and reported shots-fired and that I had received incoming fire from the N/E corner bunker fence line. and creek area. The Quick Response Team was notified to respond with caution. I withdrew to the next bunker south, hoping the outside area might be back-lite from base lights.

It was dead quiet. The radio clicked and CSC announced the Control Tower had broadcast to approaching aircraft that Da Nang was under fire.



Then I heard a loud whisper--"Don." It was Gary Eberbach with Bucky. Blackie made a quick glance toward Gary and Bucky, then back to the N/E area. Gary moved up quietly and asked if there were three VC as he had heard three weapons fire. I quickly told him that one of the weapons was mine, but that when they fired from two different positions I thought I saw a third VC, who did not fire, at the rear fence and to the right.

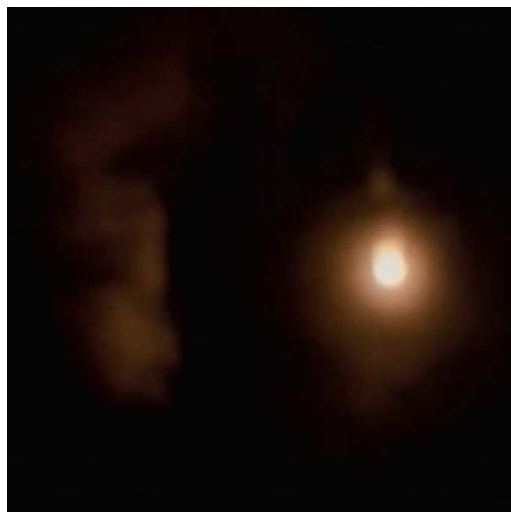
We were quiet for a moment, then hashed a quick plan and agreed Gary and Bucky would move back toward the area's entrance for cover and block any attempt to bypass Blackie and me. Gary moved off and disappeared. There were no lights behind me so I moved to where I could see the front of the N/E bunker which had a single light-bulb burning above the vault-like double-door. I needed to see that in case The VC wanted to blow the door or blow the entire bunker. Blackie alerted toward the same fence area, and I loosed him and he charged like the silent killer he was. For some reason I thought that I was glad not to be on the receiving end of Blackie's K9's. I radioed quietly advising Gary and CSC that Blackie was loose.

The QRT arrived on the North fence line (running E/W along the service road) near the front entrance of my area. I warned them to stay out until I got my dog back, that Blackie was still loose, and that a second K-9 team was in their immediate area. Gary had spotted the QRT but remained where he was so that Bucky could focus on anything along the rear of the bunkers, knowing the QRT would soon move forward outside the wire and toward the creek.

After a few minutes I called in a normal voice for Blackie. His hearing would pick up my voice whereas anyone close by hopefully would not. Blackie came padding back with a wet muzzle. I couldn't see for sure but it smelled like blood. I gave him a strong hug to reassure him.

At first I thought he might have attacked a VC, but as I had not heard any screaming or firing, I was fairly sure that he may have tried to chew his way through the barbed wire fence. I reattached his leash, moved positions a few yards, and waited ready to fire or send Blackie to attack again.

Blackie alerted to the east just as the QRT advised they were circling outside the nearby fence line in that area and to my right. They were approaching the creek through the same position firing had occurred. Their sergeant radio to me at least three time to hold my fire until cleared as they were immediately forward. The QRT could not see me as they moved through the tangle brush and trees, and remained in place for about twenty minutes, listening and trying to see movement before withdrawing.



When the QRT radioed they were near the area entrance, Blackie and I moved along the south side of the back of the bunkers, as stealthy as possible, to reposition to watch the front of the bunker again. As the QRT moved out through the tall grass along the north fence, they were briefly back-lit by runway lights.

About fifteen or so minutes later, the QRT advised CSC they had found expended brass and a blood trail but no wounded or bodies. The QRT withdrew a safe distance, and the entire N/E fence line area was *lite up like daylight with pop flares* fired over the creek area and away from the bomb dump.

The QRT withdrew to the area entrance. I then moved back with Blackie and as I neared the front area, Gary reported that Bucky was alerting and he warned the QRT to be ready. I radioed Gary and the QRT to watch for me and try not to shoot us. I wanted to get to an area where I could check out Blackie to make sure he wasn't wounded or in need of stitches. He was fine.

My heart continued hammering away until the dawn began its rise.

At daylight, all K-9 were relieved from post. After putting Blackie away, I was told to write an after-action report, which I did. That was the end of that and I had no idea what if anything would become of the incident.

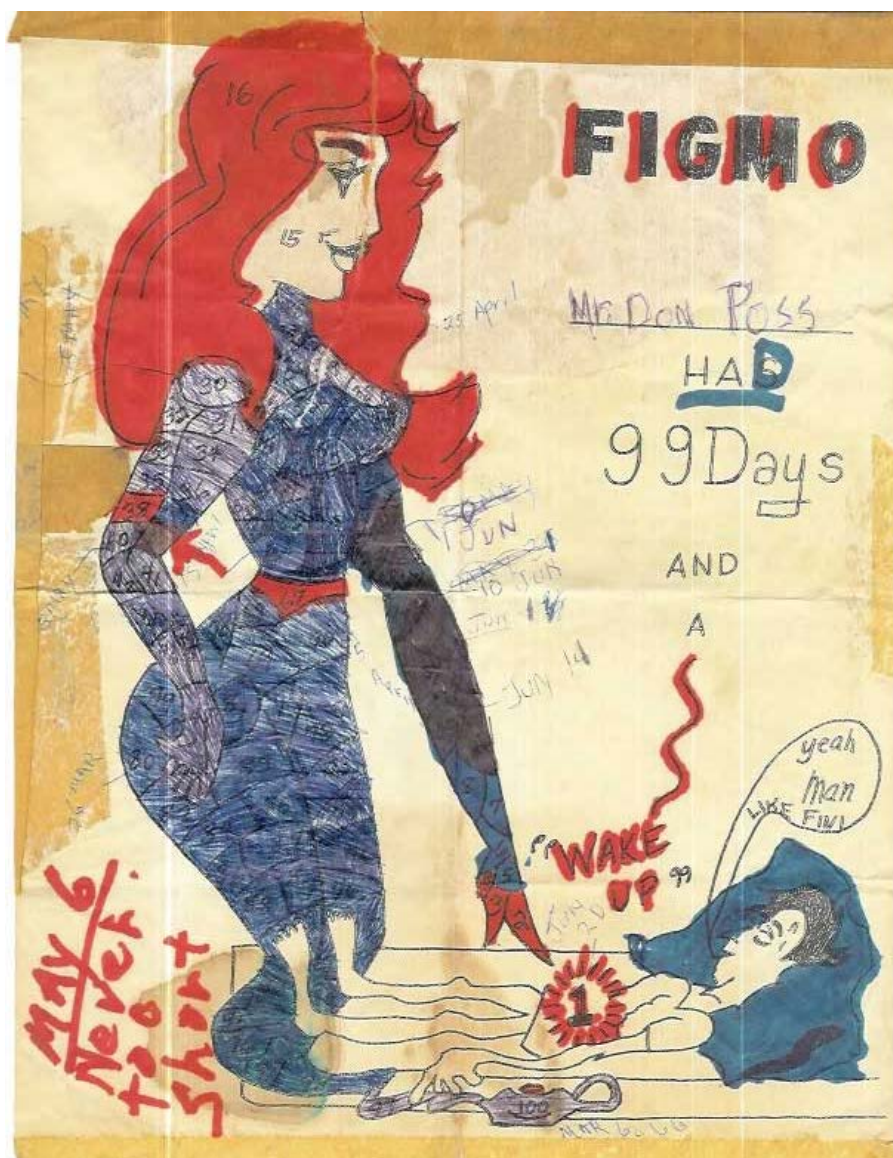


Back at our tent, James McNall was returning from a lukewarm shower after hiking a hundred yards to and from. A shower sounded good but I was beat and just wanted to crash on the cot.

I opened my wooden locker I had built...stood there a moment and realized there was one thing left for me to do.

I picked up a red felt-tip pen and made a notation on my FIGMO calendar

May 6, Never too short.



From 1965 to 1969, two attempts to penetrate Da Nang's bomb dump were both were foiled by K-9 teams. The third occurrence was "supposedly" by a Vietnamese kid who just happened to be playing with fire, torched off a piece of paper into the grass, which quickly spread in a strong wind into the bomb dump.

1. August 1965: USAF Ammunition & Bomb Dump probed. After Action Report: US KIA, 0. Enemy KIA, 0. Penetration of Ammo Dump repulsed by USAF Sentry Dog Handler Tom Baker and K-9 Rex, 6252nd APS/K9.

2. 6 May 1965: USAF Ammunition & Bomb Dump probed. After Action Report: US KIA, 0. Enemy KIA, 0. Penetration of Ammo Dump repulsed by USAF Sentry Dog Handlers Don Poss/Blackie, and Gary Eberbach/Bucky, 35th APS, 366th APS/K9

3. 27 April 1969, 1030am: Vietnamese "workers" were on the perimeter of the bomb dump and a "child" started a fire that spread by a *very strong wind* and destroyed the bomb dump.

So that 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 following 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!



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 fallen from the sky like rain and embedding in hard-packed red earth, like a macabre statuettes of broken men.

The world's busiest Air Base was closed during the calamity. The control tower 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.

-- Don Poss

~~~~~





Decades later I would learn the very spot the N/E K-9 post was located, in Da Nang's bomb dump, was where Agent Orange was stored.

*Compare the next two photos.*

**Compare the following two photos:** Note the flightline across the field (center-right), 1965. Is the same location as the next photo taken in 2011.



**Below photo:** Note the same flightline area as above, across the field (top/left). In 2011, concrete was poured over the entire area where N/E post was located at Da Nang AB bomb dump, AND is where **Agent Orange** was stored at Da Nang AB during the war.



**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. One week after patrolling with Blackie, once more in Da Nang's ammo dump ... the next week 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.*

**Gary Eberbach looked me up a couple of months later** when he DEROS'd. Only time I ever played cupid and introduced him to his future wife. They celebrate their 47th anniversary this year (2014). *I prize Gary's friendship above all.*

© 1995-2014 by Vietnam Security Police Association, Inc. (USAF). All Rights Reserved.

*We*

[Click to Report Broken Links or Photos](#)



