

# ***Đà Nang Air Base, Bomb Dump***

***May 6, 1966***

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**35th APS, Đà Nang AB, K-9, 1965-1966**

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



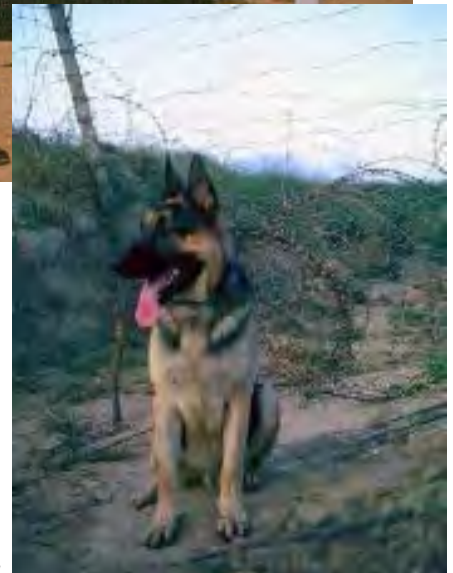
*Photo above: Gary Knutson removes Eric 218E from Air Police K-9 trailer. Towed by K-9 1 1/2ton truck.*

*Photo right: Don Poss mugs for camera in front of the Đà Nang AB Growl Pad sign. 1965-1966.*

K-9 Teams board 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 posthumously 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.

At Đà Nang AB K-9 Kennels, Growl Pad, Blackie 129X 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 Đà Nang AB ammo-bomb dump dozens of times. It was always potentially dangerous as 30-40,000 tons of every dumb-bomb possible was stored there, including the infamous Daisy Cutter bomb which weighed in at 15,000 pounds, and could destroy everything within its 600-yards blast-radius.



*Photo: K-9 Blackie 129X.  
Bomb Dump, NW post.*



As usual, before entering my post, I poured Blackie 129X 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.

Photos:  
Entrance to the Bomb  
Dump Storage Bunkers.  
*Don Poss and Blackie 129X.*  
1965-1966.



As dog-teams scattered throughout the huge bomb dump, Blackie 129X and I started the long walk to the **NW Bunkers post area**. I wanted to take advantage of what little daylight remained to check foliage growth outside the N/W 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.



. For those K-9 who remember the bomb dump, and for clarity of location, I want to emphasize my bomb dump K-9 post was in the "**NW**" Bunker Area. So, when I later state a compass-point reference, I'm still in the "**NW**" post area of the huge bomb dump.

I surveilled a wide area of the Air Base and Bomb Dump from a slightly elevated berm in my post. By daylight, the S/E area didn't look too bad. At night, it was seriously dark with shifting shadows, walking trees and MMS worker's voices wafting around like whispers. Rows of ammo and missile storage bunkers, each built and 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 ended with a single bunker against the perimeter fence, that was up against a jungle-like growth of tangle-brush, trees, and tall grass. There was also a dry creek winding through that was very wet during monsoon.

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

*Photo: Rail Road Trestle (never saw a train), left-center. French Tower, right-center.*





**Photo (Day): NW Bomb Dump K-9 Bunkers Post.** *The last Ammo Bunker at access road's end, next to the perimeter fence, was closest to the creek, heavy scrub brush and trees, and where VC would later attempt penetration of the area, then vanished.*

We didn't know it then, but the area near the creek and between the bomb dump perimeter fence contained tunnels irregularly used by VC in that area.

Daylight was quickly slipping away, so I went directly to my K-9 post in the NW 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. It was just as uninviting as I recalled.

As dusk approached, floodlight generators were firing up. Blackie 129X and I were once more patrolling the NW area. 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 one yellow low-riding fork-lift still chugging in and out of storage bunkers.



**Photo (Pre-Dusk): Bomb Dump, berms, bunkers, and tangle brush.** *Freedom Hill 327, about 5 miles west.*

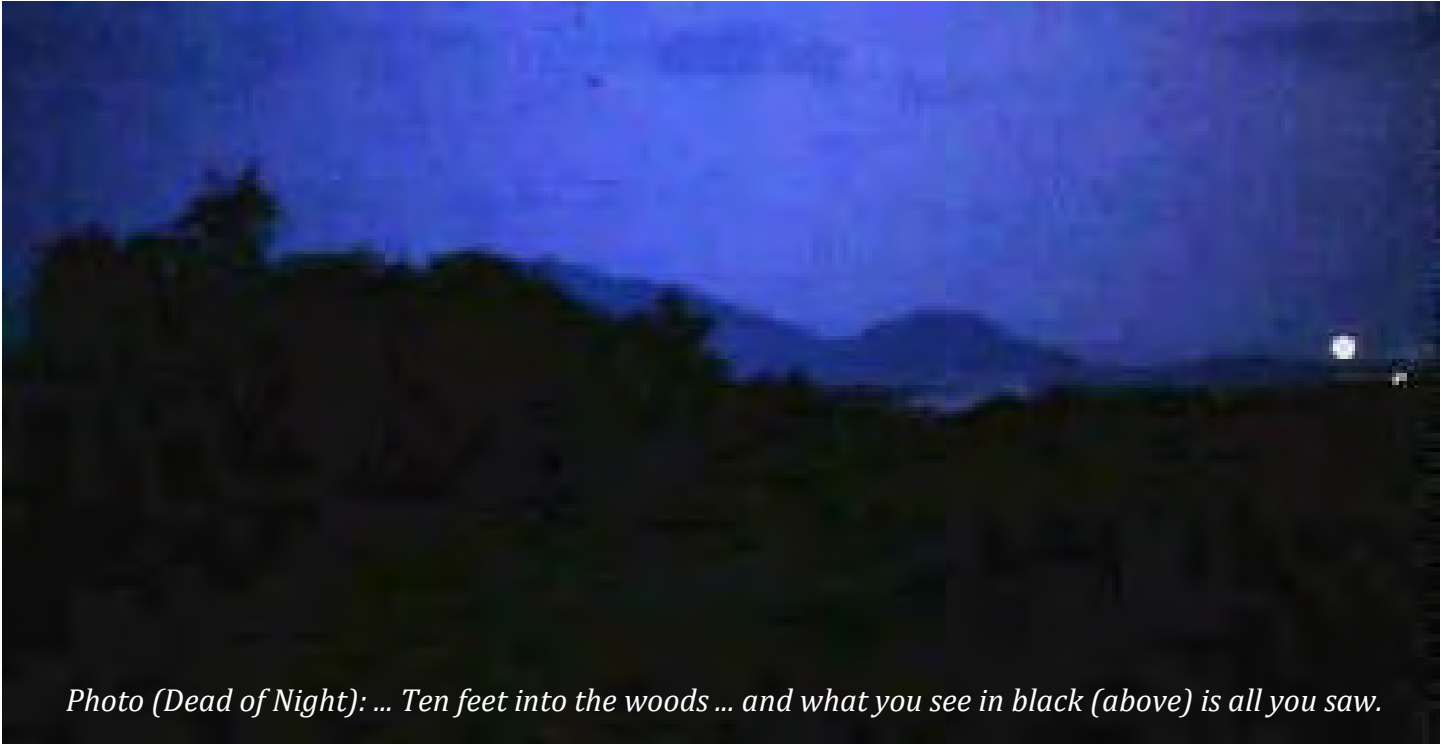
There was some work activity across the creek, which fish hooked inside the woods area. A large power generator was struggling to stay running and gasped at least a dozen-last breaths before giving it up. A string of profanities filtered through the brush. Within a few minutes it was running again and gleefully lighting the work area.

Floodlights were a potential concern for K-9 handlers, as it could destroy night vision with a single glance, and mask potential sounds of sappers trying to penetrate the post. Especially since those glaring floodlights were pointed indirectly toward my bunkers, and strobed dancing shadows skipping through my post.

Blackie 129X and I reversed our patrol, meandering between and around storage bunkers, and bypassing MMS workers doing their flood-lights thing. We ended up back near the entrance to the NW area where MMS was still working noisily—and added them to my *for-now* avoid-list.



*Photo (Dusk): Near dusk - Outside Bomb Dump NW perimeter.*



*Photo (Dead of Night): ... Ten feet into the woods ... and what you see in black (above) is all you saw.*

**Night fell into the abyss**, and it was apparent it would be another very dark, clear, and moonless night. A dark night in Đà Nang Air Base's bomb dump was like a black-hole that had sucked the universe's starlight from the heavens, all the colors from God's palette, and the Oxygen-atom from H<sub>2</sub>O... guaranteeing a dry mouth all night. In other words—*It was dark-dark; the NW post was genuinely the most butt-puckering spooky K-9 at Đà Nang.*

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

The far side of the creek was still lit up an hour later, and then the area went blind-dark. Blackie 129X and I had completed another counter-clockwise patrol of our area and ended up back at the N/W corner of the post. MMS was working noisily in the last bunker with doors wide open and stark light spilling outside. MMS finished their work shortly thereafter.

By midnight, it was quiet in my area, although a few neighboring bunkers were still lite up; I pitied the K-9 handlers in those areas. Fortunately, I could maintain reasonable night vision, as long as I didn't look directly there. Rather than walk a predictable pattern, I looped around behind some bunkers as the front entrances had a single bright lantern 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 potential movement (including mine), should runway blue-lights start to wink.

As I approached the front doors of the last bunker, Blackie 129X 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, turned immediately left, along an

north elongated side 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 at my area from outside the Bomb Dump's perimeter fence ... I don't think my position was known, but the VC may have seen K-9 in the immediate area and thought they were detected. A second AK fired up the front of the bunker, spraying wildly. Then it was suddenly quiet; 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 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 rear of the bunker for cover. The bunker front was obscenely lit by a hi-wattage lamp above the wide vault-like doors.

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.

I released Blackie with *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 clanging around as if he were trying to climb. I fired a clip into the woods and thick shrub to the left of Blackie. There was no return fire.

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.

The radio clicked, and CSC announced the Control Tower had broadcast to approaching aircraft that Đà Nang was under fire.

Then I heard a loud whisper—"Don." It was Gary Eberbach with Bucky. Blackie snatched a quick glance at Gary and Bucky then focused back, 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.



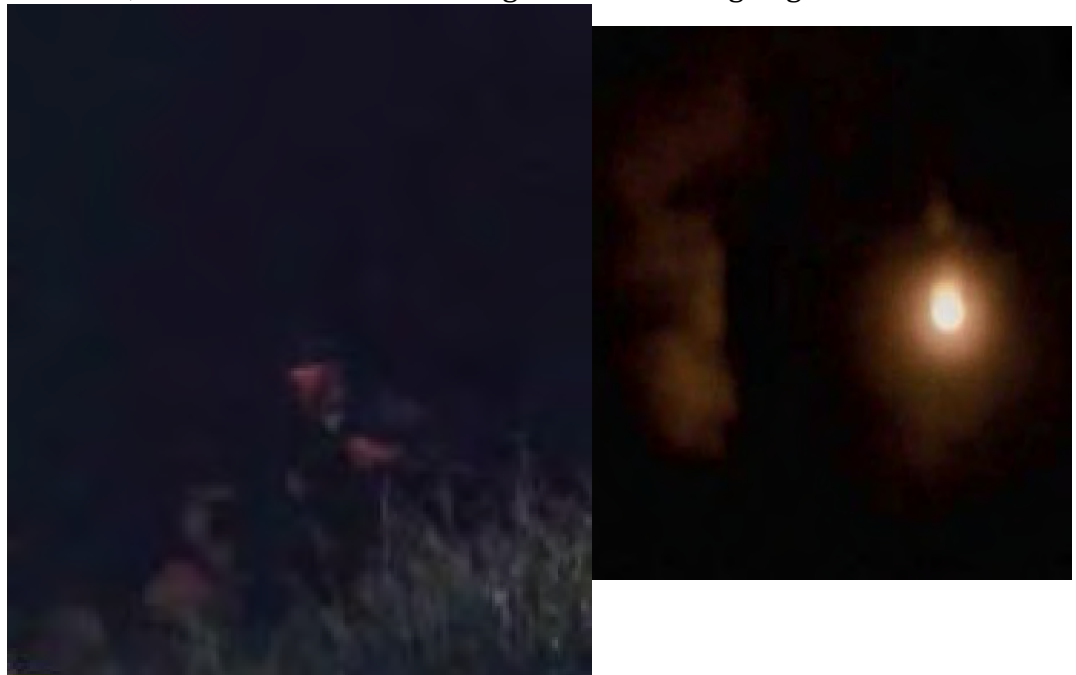
I quickly told him that one of the weapons was mine, but that when they fired from two different positions I thought I saw a third VC, who did not fire, at the rear fence and to the right.

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 powerful lantern light burning above the vault-like double-door. I needed to keep an eye on that in case the VC wanted to blow the door or blow the entire bunker. Blackie alerted toward the same fence area, and I commanded *Attack!* to him and Blackie 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 teeth. I radioed quietly advising Gary and CSC that Blackie was loose.

The QRT arrived and moved left 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 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 sure 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. The sergeant (I don't recall his name) radioed to me at least three times 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—neither could I see them, 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 better 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. They withdrew a safe distance, and the entire N/E fence line area of the bomb dump was lit 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.

For some reason, my thoughts flicked back to January, when JB was killed: At daylight, I had put Blackie 129X away in the Kennels ... rushed over to Da Nang's Dispensary ... tried to see his body before he (I refused to think of him as an it) shipped out for home ... the med techs were closing the door to a side room (today I'm sure JB's body was still there).

**26 Jan 1966: JB (James Bruce Jones)** - *At first daylight, the K-9 truck relieved us from post. A dozen handlers and vicious sentry dogs, muzzled, rode in silence to the kennels. I put Blackie away in his kennel, then headed for the dispensary where J.B. was taken earlier, following a TET 66 mortar attack. Still wearing my flack-jacket and helmet, carrying my M-16 weapon, I entered the dispensary. Two medics came out of a back room ... Is that where he is? I asked "... a medic looked at my Air Police patch then pulled the door closed and stood in front of it. I said, "I want to see J.B.'s body."*

*No salutations. No B.S.— The tech replied, "He's not here. He's on his way home ... we put him on a C-130 to Saigon an hour ago." I don't know why, but I accepted that as truth. I turned and walked back to the new hooch hut-barracks we had just moved into. Today, I believe that J.B. was still in that*

*back room, and the medics had spared me seeing his body with its severed limbs.*

*At our new hooch, the single floor was quiet when I entered. We had arranged our bunks and scrap-wood built lockers in to living areas, like circled wagons of friends. I sat on my lower cot took off my helmet and looked up at J.B.'s taped-up locker. There was a large "X" of yellow tape across the front, with a warning not to open it. Maxie Pierce said, "They've been here already," one of the guys had told him that grave registration boxed up Jim's personal belongs to ship to his folks ....*

***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. I remained on post and Gary returned to his. I think it likely the VC withdrew when Gary and Bucky arrived. 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: Back at our tent, it was already too hot to sleep. James McNall I was returning from a lukewarm shower after hiking a hundred yards to and from. Jim was one of the APs I went R&R to Tokyo with.**

I went back to my tent and opened my wooden locker and crossed off another day on my FIGMO Calendar. I also marked that day on the calendar in red, with the notation: **May 6 Never Too Short.**



**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.*

I DEROS'd from Đà 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.*



Photo: Take bout a mile from the bomb dump, as 2,000-pound bombs cooked off.

< ---- For scale, note the Guard Towers (about 30 feet tall) - see *below Closeup*.



From 1965 to 1969, two attempts to penetrate Da Nang's bomb dump were both 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.

So that you will understand how dangerous patrolling the bomb dump was for K-9 handlers and dogs, and Gate Access Control posts, 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:

**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. Đà 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 Đà 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-4: Đà 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.

For weeks, EOD unearthed and disarmed unexploded bombs that had like a macabre statuette 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 Đà 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 Đà 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.*



Decades later I would learn the very spot the NW K-9 post was located, in Da Nang's bomb dump, was where K-9 patrolled, and AP Access Gates were manned, and Agent Orange was stored.

Compare the following two photos: Note (photo right) photo taken of the flightline across the field and through barbwire fence, 1965 — Is the same location as the below photo taken in 2011. Don Poss and Blackie 129X.



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