

366th SPS,

Đà Nẵng Air Base, "Rocket City"!

September 02, 1972

Purple Heart

by **John Cassidy**
CRB, 12th SPS; DN, 366th SPS
1972-1973
© (2004)

Đà Nẵng was nicknamed "Rocket City" due to the large number of attacks by 122mm and 140mm rockets. These rockets had a range of several miles and were deadly. Not every attack was recorded officially, even some with WIA casualties.

Don; good to hear from another Đà Nẵng Camp Swampy/Dog Patch rat.

I originally was assigned to Phù Cát AB with the 483d SPS as a M-113 turret gunner assigned to Quebec Echo, and covered the south end of the base and POL area. Funny thing is I volunteered for RVN to get out of humping bombers at Ellsworth AFB in -40 below. First night in Cam Ranh we got hit and I said to myself, "What were you thinking?"

Had a good talk with Steve Ray yesterday about Cam Ranh, as we were there at the same time, and he recalled the bad incident that occurred over on the army-end ordnance dump. We were busy that night and it was real bad.

You asked about my Purple Heart award... was not really much to talk about at the time, my recollection is this ...

When we closed up Phù Cát AB, half of us went to Đà Nẵng AB, some went to Saigon, and some off to Thailand RTAFBs.

At Đà Nẵng AB, I was assigned to *Peacemaker* # 4 M-706 (*Phantom*, we named the damn thing). Usually I was the top M60 man or the XM-174 grenadier, as it was not unusual to swap off on our team assignments. On the night of September 2, 1972, we were posted out by the old bomb dump that faced directly at Dog Patch Village, and Freedom Hill 327. During the night we were told sappers had penetrated the off-site ARVN ammo storage area that was either on the backside or slightly left of Freedom Hill 327.

The ARVN ammo dump was cooking-off and there was concern that the ordnance would cook-off and spread to the AF off-site bomb dump. I think that was north of Dog Patch about 1-2 clicks out from the Dog Patch gate. We used to run the escorts and periodically posted the bunkers and towers out there if the threat level was higher.

Peacemaker units worked dusk till dawn and usually we got every 9-10th day off. On this night CSC advised the Pig Commander to leave the fire team (MG, Asst. MG, M79/rifleman and the leader) at the primary area in place as a blocking force, as it was feared sappers might use the ARVN storage dump explosions as a diversion.

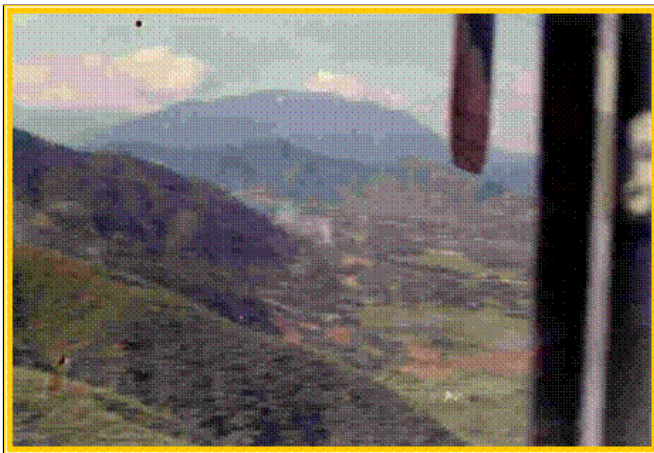
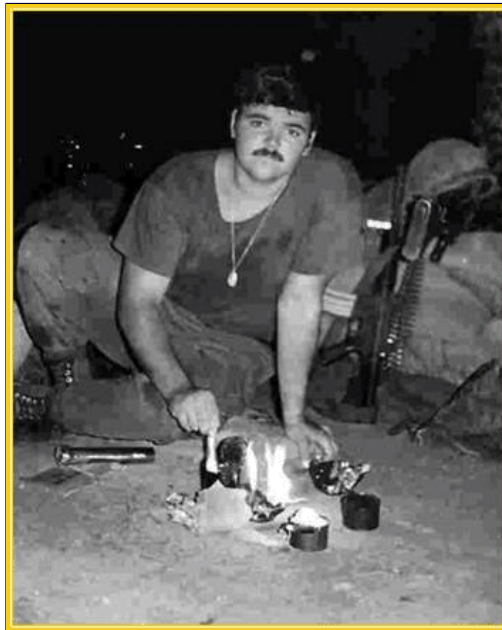
The Driver and the top gunner (me) were to proceed over to the Bomb Dump and standby to pull the people out in the event the AF area started to go-off due to ordnance cooking-off in close proximity. Myself and the driver, who I think was another buck Sgt named Emerson, had just pulled out when the PRC 25 and CSC radio started indicating incoming rockets. What I recall is that we both unassed the Pig, to get over in a nearby culvert, when the rockets started to fall on base. Can't remember how many, but at the time it seemed like a lot.

One 122 mm rocket landed about 40-45 yards from us, which put the explosion half way between us and the team that was in place. Next thing I know my hip and leg are burning like hell and I'm trying to brush off the burning shrapnel. Must of it blew right over our heads, but I must have caught a couple of pieces on my right leg, hip and the back of my flack jacket. What really got me later was the shrapnel burned a couple of holes in my only decent set of cammies and flack jacket (old Marine Corp model). After the incoming rockets stopped, CSC told us to proceed over to the off-site dump. We spent the night watching the ARVN area explosives cook-off, and were relieved later in the next morning.

Didn't think much of the incident at the time, although it burned like hell at first, but only required first-aid later in the next morning. I went over to the hospital (*lack of nookie inn*) for the burns on my leg and hip. My leg had more of a long scratch than a burn. Could have been worse if we had been standing up when the rocket hit. Funny thing was that had we kept going we would have been a good 250 yards away, but the M-706 with the high profile and little armor were not the place to be in a rocket attack.

Like I said, wasn't much of a wound to speak of, and I was very lucky. We had a lot more closer calls during the year, but luckily all went well.

My Đà Nẵng area photos



You take care and thanks for all your help with the organization feels good to talk to guys who understand our "involvement" People hear AF and think everyone is either a pilot or gas jockey. Another think that's good to see is all the good feelings and welcome that the troops are getting now when they return, seems like they always had us returning in the middle of the night, freedom bird, grab a flight stateside get home and then off to stateside duty. SAC was a major culture shock after Vietnam.

All in all would not trade my experiences, friendships, and memories of the guys served with for anything. Not a day goes by when I don't think about someone or something from that time. With all the crap going on at the time in the states the people I served with were truly America's best -- bar none. No bases were overrun due to one major reason: the AF infantrymen... AKA AP, SP, and CSP. Take care and again much thanks for your hard work for the VSPA.

John Cassidy

We Take Care of Our Own

[Click to Report BROKEN LINKS or Photos, or COMMENT](#)