

# Da Nang AB

6252nd Air Police Squadron, K-9

## COMBAT LANDING

*... and You're IT !*

November 1965

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Click this [combat-landing](#) link to see what I experienced when a giant C-130 Hercules executed an assault combat-landing (but at night--in heavy ground-fog!) half-off onto the runway's shoulder, with parts flying!

*Da Nang Air Base, South Vietnam, November 1965, saw its share of aircraft crash on landings and takeoffs. Battle damaged aircraft landed daily, even hourly, and like a dartboard's bulls-eye the surrounding fields and marshes were pockmarked where many had cratered in (. Returning aircraft were never safe until touchdown ... courtesy of enemy ground-fire, snipers, missiles over Hanoi, crew-served .50cal AAA in the mountains and hills, or the golden potshot BB from a farmer tending his rice paddies. Consequently, Air Force, Marine, and Navy pilots often performed a maneuver which plunged their aircraft into a steep roller coaster-descent, called a **combat landing** ... like a game of Tag. The above photo of myself with K-9 Blackie provided the graphic image that accurately portrays a late-night close-encounter with a C-130 in search of the runway.*

### Combat Landing, Da Nang Air Base

*You're IT !*

November 1965

*USAF K-9 sentry dog handlers patrolled base perimeters, ammo dumps, dense foliage areas and jungle-areas, and at night along the Air Base runway. At dusk, the K-9 truck could be seen posting handlers along Da Nang's runway. All knew it was never wise to linger near runway's edge, lest a battle-damaged aircraft's combat landing turn into a controlled-crash, or worse a devastating explosive crash.*

**Blackie, X129, and I patrolled** the field area west of Da Nang Air Base's only active runway, I could see sarge beginning his first coffee-rounds for K-9 handlers in a weathered shot-up old Air Police truck. With luck, sarge may have scored some sandwiches from the chow hall for us. That night the handlers along the runway patrolled a thousand-foot box-shaped posts, containing scrub brush, marsh-water ponds, elephant grass, and the graded construction area for the new parallel runway – plenty of concealment for Charlie and critters to hide in. Sarge was still two posts south of us as Blackie and I made our way toward the runway service road (tire tracks in the mud), eager for coffee and a few words about what if anything was going on, but no one ever knew an answer to anything.

The night had been long, with low clouds and patches of heavy fog dropping to ground-level then rising in hover and masking the heavens above. The ground-fog was hypnotic, its rhythmic-undulating like the slow-motion billows of a picnic blanket bubbling in a light breeze. A cloud-blanket of transparent gauze; wet, heavy, puffed above the runway rolling like an ocean swell. At waves' crest, distant starlight could be seen beneath. At waves' trough the fog-mist absorbed the blue colors of runway lights. As the slow moving fog drifted along the runway, it was like watching a fuzzy blue-glowing silkworm scooting along.

I watched Sarge drive off to the next K-9 as Blackie sat at heel knowing there might be a treat or something in the deal for him – if I ate, Blackie ate. No sandwiches, and if I blew on the coffee Blackie would reluctantly settle for sharing a hot coffee with me.

By midnight I had quartered my post twice and was back up along the runway. I knew I was silhouetted by dimblue lights from the runway, taxi-aprons, and perhaps by aircraft revetment lights across the runway. I was anxious to disappear back into the night fog and wet elephant grass that could in a moments carelessness slice an arm or hand unnoticed until you felt a slight stinging-itch.

*During the next few seconds the following occurred:*

Blackie was at heel cocked his head slightly looking up toward a wavering low fog-cloud hovering a few yards above the runway. When puzzled or slightly concerned, Blackie would point his ears up and puff his cheeks, huffing, and bobbing his huge head twisting it curiously until he decided if something was either a stalking Viet Cong or just another flying-bug of some sort.

The heavy fog-cloud suddenly flared into a glowing super nova; Blackie and I were near blinded and hopelessly exposed. It was as if we were inside a 1000 watt light bulb – the fog about us illuminated like the walls in the eye of a hurricane at ground zero!

*What-thhhee* -- and then it was visible -- with zero night-vision, my mind struggled to process what the phenomena was: *Not worlds colliding ... not nuked ... and unless it was the Seconding Coming and Jesus was riding a C-130 Hercules Chariot* – then it was a C-130 Hercules emerging through the cloud-bank diving at an impossible steep angle with high-beam landing-light-talons swooping down towards me!

Banking sharply, hoping for a bite of the runway, the C-130 slammed to earth on the runway's shoulder and careened like a flat-rock on water – trailing an avalanche-tsunami of roiling destruction and death – *there was nowhere to run*. The tornado-like prop wash of earth-clods, shrapnel debris, and dislodged metals sickled and kaleidoscoped toward me, and for a millisecond, I stood entranced in the spotlight of the C-130's landing-lights. In one massive-sledgehammer-heartbeat, I reached the same conclusion as Blackie and felt a sharp pain in my right shoulder as 100 pounds of war-dog cannon-balled to the end of his leash determined to at least drag my arm to safety whether or not the rest of me followed!

The roar of four C-130 engines at full throttle churned the air swirling a maelstrom of carnage within feet from my head and may have muffled the fact that I indeed had a prehistoric death-cry that was very real!

All the above occurred within a few heart-stopping-beats. Blackie had snatched me into the nearby K-9 fighting-hole bunker. A choking dust storm ragged above us caught up in a swirling vortex funnel as I frantically clawed the bottom of the K-9 size fox hole in hope of seeing the bottom soles of a TI's brogans at Lackland AFB, Texas.

Saucer-eyed, we peeked over the sandbags and watched the surreal sight of a careening Hercules wig-wag back onto the runway trailing swirling air contrails of mixed blue-light fog and stars. As the mighty roar of fighting goliaths sounded in desperate reverse-engines, the Hercules disappeared into the fog. The vortex of roiling clouds settled to earth swallowing the world and masking further cataclysmic sounds.

I waited, *I'm still alive, right...?* What had just happened? Brilliant suffused light had supernova as the diving C-130 belly-flopped half on the runway and service road. In its wake lay a plowed furrow with a landing-light cowling that had clanged into the sandbagged bunker and bounced into the furrow carved in hard-clay.

When my constricted voice returned to a lower range of tenor (liberated bass), I radioed Central Security Control and reported that someone should sweep the runway as a C-130 had just hard-landed on the runway's shoulder and left debris strewn for

several hundred yards. Blackie and I then disappeared into the night filled with scrub brush, snakes and Charlie -- *where it was safe*.

*Forty-six years later (2011), when I hear a prop-job aircraft fly over from a nearby municipal airport, I can tense and feel myself glancing up for a C-130 swooping out of the fog at me. And yes ... I still have a death cry that is definitely not a liberated-bass. Too often, dreams can affect my sleeping and at times my daily life.*

*We*

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