



ATTACK ON DA NANG AIR BASE, RVN, BY MONTY MOORE

Da Nang AB was nicknamed "Rocket City" due to the large number of attacks by 122mm and 140mm rockets. If we went a week without a few rockets coming we knew something was in the works. These rockets had a range of several miles and were deadly. The VC had learned that artillery and/or air strikes would be called in on the launch sites. The rocket attacks were on a random basis but usually occurred in the middle of the night. This gave the VC a few hours of darkness to set up the rockets, place them on timers and be miles away when the rockets were fired. Originally designed to be fired from a launcher, the VC fired them from earthen ramps. They would plant two sticks in the ground lined up with a suitable target. The dirt was piled up to make a ramp. The angle of the ramp was determined by the estimated range to the target, The earth covered with a smooth layer of mud and the rocket placed on the ramp. A timer with battery would allow their escape from the area prior to the launch of the rockets. The novice would just place two crossed sticks in the ground, point it the general direction of the base and fire it off.

Towers on several hilltops (Hill 327 was one location) were manned to spot rocket launches. The exhaust from the rockets could be seen for miles. The shout of "Rockets" over the radio net would allow you to be either on the ground or fast approaching ground level before impacts. If we went a week without a few rockets being fired we became more than little concerned. Only the rockets that fell short or the ones that overshot their targets normally landed on the perimeter. We had posts near both the on base bomb dump and POL tank farms, These areas were high on the VC's "Wish List." Rockets attacks were not taken lightly, they resulted in much damage and several fatalities. One handler was killed in the barracks area during a nighttime attack..

Most of the dogs displayed a specific behavior pattern or alert whenever there were incoming rockets or mortars. We realized our dogs' superior senses were picking up on something but there was still an aura of mystique about it. I now know that it was just a case of pure Pavlov conditioning. Those few seconds of early warning were greatly appreciated!

The dog would hear a rocket going overhead or on either side of our location and anticipate the excitement (one does become a little hyper when rockets are exploding around you). Then the handler would always do strange things, dive into bunkers, crawl on the ground, etc. Repetitive attacks caused the dog to anticipate and react-bingo! You have a "Rocket Alert." Observant handlers always paid close attention to the dog behavior patterns. One dog (Sugar) would jump up and snap at the air! My dog, Kobuc, would start pulling to the closest bunker (always knew he was the smartest member of the team). I only had to crawl he would navigate.

Feb 23, 1969 Attack

The area of the silk factory was the scene of sapper and sniper activity in the Tiet of '68 and '69. Some of us had to low crawl from our posts during those attacks because of sniper fire. There was a lot more crawling in 1968 than the 1969 offensive. Feb 23, 1969, I was posted on Kilo 1 (my favorite post). I was talking with the Marines on bunker 1, when we all heard over my radio the call "Rockets, Rockets, Rockets". We turned to watch the interior of the base for impacts. A few rockets hit and then suddenly a rocket hit close. I

mean real close. My dog was standing between the door to the bunker and the group of marines. In the same split second several things happened. The dog made a dash to the bunker. I tried to pull him away from the door. Four marines decided that a dog bite would hurt less than shrapnel and pushed me along. The dog, four marines, and myself with through the same door, at the same time, and no one was bitten. As I recovered the slack of the leash, I remember seeing blue sparks flying through the air. The sparks was shrapnel from the exploding warhead. Kobuc (my dog) acted very passive, at any other time he would have nailed the closest marine. He was smart enough to be a gracious guest for the next few minutes. I remained close friends with those Marines for the remainder of my time at Da Nang.

The area was hit with well over 100 rockets that night. After the rockets stopped I started sweeping my part of the perimeter. We could here gunfire in all directions. The VC attempted to overrun a Vietnamese military camp located off base. The Spooky flying overhead dropped a few flares, and circled the camp firing it's minguns. It was a very impressive light show, with what appeared to be a laser beam emitting from the aircraft and the sound of a million bees roaring. Then appearance of a solid beam of light was caused by tracer rounds (every 6th round in the ammo belt).



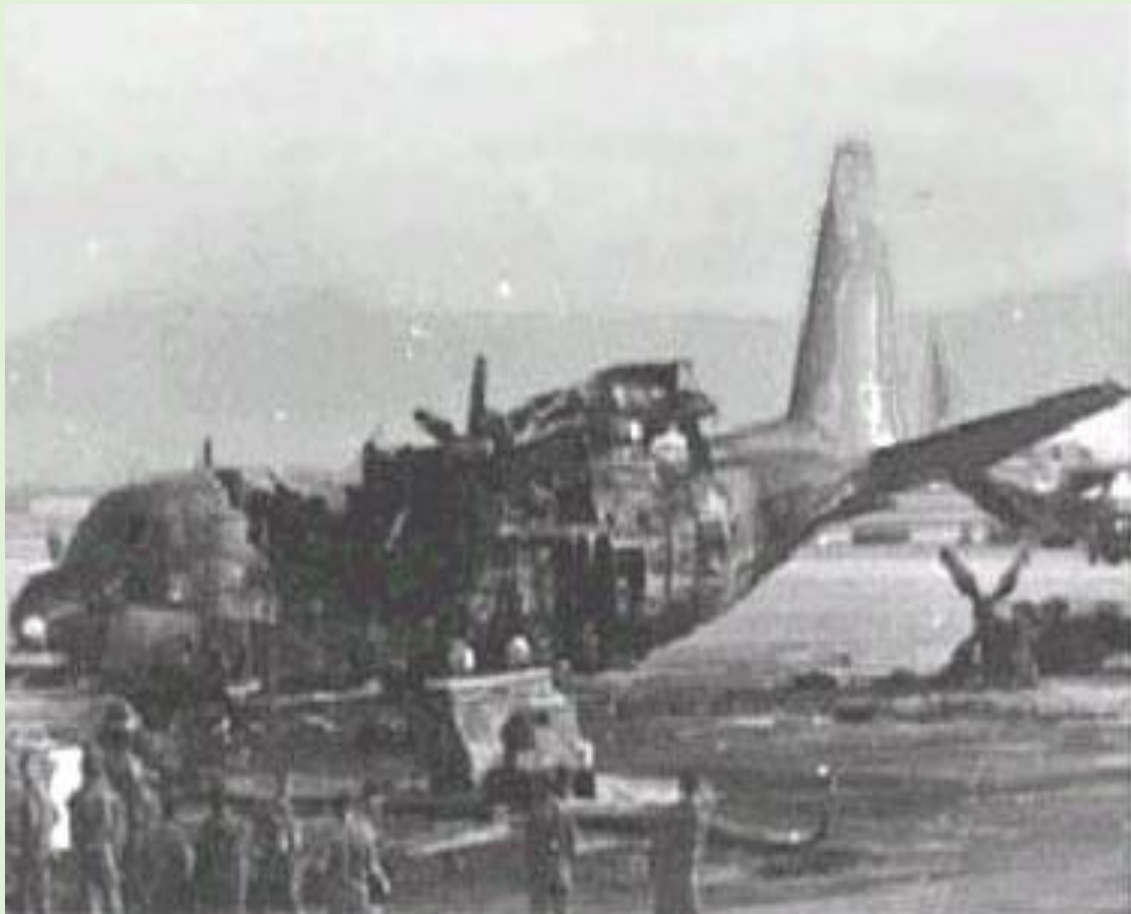
"Spooky" #43-49010, on display at the Air Force Armament Museum in Florida. (Photo: Chris Eger/Guns.com)

On the perimeter near Alpha and Bravo lines a sapper attack was stopped. The VC moved into the silk factory, located near the base perimeter. Alpha Company attempted to take the factory, but met with heavy resistance with one Marine killed. The VC retreated into large drainage pipes under the floor. The Marines contacted the Security Police Squadron and asked for dog teams to go into the drains. By this time most of us were in the rack attempting to sleep despite the noise, small arms fire, F-4's taking off and explosions. The first two handlers found in the hut area agreed to go. When the dog teams entered the drainage pipes, the VC immediately fled into the factory. Alpha Company then took the factory with no more friendly casualties. One of the handlers was Gary Beck, handling Sparky.



Time lapse photograph of an AC-47 helping defend Tan Son Nhut Air Base during the enemy Tet Offensive in 1968.

The Freedom Bird due to land that morning, circled the air base for several hours before landing. When it finally did land, fires were still burning from the attack. That flight also brought in about seven new handlers from a pipeline USAF sentry dog class. That evening as we started to get ready for work the new handlers were moving into the hut. Three of those handlers were Bill Grife, Gill Perry and Pete Koenig. They later described how it felt circling the base, looking down at the smoky fires. Talk about a welcome wagon!





Photos by John Dube
Rocket attack damage on Da Nang AB Air Base



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