

Đà Nẵng AB, Bomb Dump

MAY 6, 1966

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35th APS,

Đà Nẵng AB, K-9, 1965-1966

By Friday, May 6, 1966, I had patrolled the Đà Nẵng AB ammo/bomb dump dozens of times. The spookiest post to me was in the N/E corner of the bomb dump. There were rows of ammo and missile storage bunkers in that area, which stretched over a dozen acres. The very last row of bunkers in the N/W corner bordered a jungle-like growth of tangle-brush, trees, and tall grass. There was also a creek that was dry during the summer, and 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 for observing and reporting what was happening in that area.

Blackie and I were once more patrolling the N/E area of the bomb dump. The first hour was still daylight and permitted time to do a quick check of the area to see what activity might be happening. Sometimes the MMS guys would be working on or moving missiles in or out of the storage bunkers in anticipation of the next morning's air strike north, or for future air support needs. For the most part, there was zero activity, with only a couple of yellow low-riding trucks used for fork-lifting heavy bombs and equipment moving around or parked by storage bunkers.

While there was daylight, I went directly to the N/E corner of the bomb dump. Foilage on the area outside the fence could change and it was a good idea to check it out, and I didn't want 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 loop around, where some large power generators could lite up the work area for MMS. The generators were already powered up, which destroyed being able to hear any potential danger.

As night fell, it was to be a moonless night and clear skies. Take offs and landings seemed to be at a minimum, which was unusual, considering in 1966 Đà Nẵng and Tân Sơn Nhất air bases were tied as the world's busiest airports.

The far side of the creek was lite up for an hour after sunset, and then the area was dark. Blackie and I had completed a counter clockwise patrol of our area and ended up back at the S/E corner. MMS was working noisily in the last bunker with doors open and the area floodlite. I avoided that bunker area until it was dark.

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

Rather than walk a predicatable pattern, I looped around behind the some bunkers, and between others. Approaching the S/E fence area again, it was almost too dark to see anything. Runway and flight line lights helped to 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 in to a clump of bushy grass about waist-high. I kneeled 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.

Suddenly an AK-47 started firing in my area. I don't think my position was known, but the VC knew Blackie was alerting to whatever they were trying to do. A second AK started firing up the front of the bunker I was beside, and spraying wildly. Then it was quiet, although my ears were ringing as we were only about thirty feet from the fenceline. I could hear metal scraping metal and thought they might be trying to cut the wire. Blackie was getting excited but not barking. I knealt and returned fire where I thought muzzle-flashes had come from. Then quickly moved to the back of the bunker for cover, and loosed Blackie who sped away silently. I knew if the VC was inside Blackie would probably die within seconds, although at least one of them would be missing a pair gonads or have a ripped out throat. Blackie hit the fence and I could hear the wires banging around as if he were trying to climb. I fired another clip but there was no return fire.

I called CSC and reported shots-fired and that I had received incoming fire from the N/E corner bunker area. QRT was notified to respond with caution. I withdrew to the third bunker area south, hoping to see the outside area backlite should egress be attempted in silhouette from base lights.

It was dead quiet. Then I heard a "Don" whispered loudly. It was Gary Eberbach with Bucky. Blackie was snatching a quick glance toward Gary and Bucky, then back to the N/E area. We moved forward after quickly agreeing that Gary would block any attempt for VC bypassing Blackie and me, while we moved to try and see or hear anything from the earth covered bunker's top. I loosed Blackie again to check out the fence area and interior.

The QRT arrived on the East fence line and toward the front of the entrance of my area. I warned them to stay out as

Blackie was loose and a second K-9 team was in their area. After a few minutes I called in a normal voice for Blackie. His hearing would pick up my voice whereas anyone close by would not. Blackie came padding up with a wet muzzle, covered in blood. At first I thought he might have attacked a VC, but as I had not heard any screaming or new firing, I guessed that he had tried to chew his way through the fence to get outside the wire. I attached the leash and moved along the south side of the back of the bunkers, following stealthily as possible along that bushy direction, while advising Gary and the QRT to watch for me and try not to shoot us. I wanted to get to an area I could check out Blackie to make sure he wasn't wounded or in need of stitches.

As I moved back with Blackie nearing the front area, Gary reported that Bucky was detecting us and he warned the QRT to be ready. The QRT moved out through the tall grass along the north fence, which was tall enough to shield them from being backlit by runway lights. About twenty minutes later, the QRT advised they had found expended brass and would retrieve some for weapons check. A few minutes later a blood trail was reported, but no wounded or bodies were found. The QRT withdrew a safe distance, and the entire N/E fenceline area was lit up like daylight with pop flares fired over the creek area and away from the bomb dump.

At daylight, all K-9 were relieved from post. At the kennels, 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.

I DEROS'd from Đà Nẵng 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 Đà Nẵng's ammo dump... I was cruising my old high school hangouts 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.

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