

Đà Nẵng AB, Bomb Dump
1965 - 1966 - 1969 BOOM-BOOM
THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM

MAY 6, 1966

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35th APS, K-9, Đà Nẵng AB, K-9, 1965-1966

Đà Nẵng Air Base, 35th Air Police Squadron, K-9 Sentry Dogs -

The Bomb Dump was a dangerous place to patrol with rows and columns of large earth-covered bunkers housing missiles, war-heads, ammo, high explosives and other ordnances for aircraft loads. Countless rows and stacks of bombs were, walled- off with large earth-berms, and contained over 40,000 tons of bombs of all sizes, including Daisy Cutters of 15,000 pounds.

The first two Viet Cong attempts to infiltrate and blow up Đà Nẵng's bomb dump were foiled by K-9 Teams. In August 1965, K-9 handler team Tom Baker (RIP 2007/Agent Orange) and Rex 9F97, detected the first attempt, and on 6 May 1966, K-9 handler team Don Poss and Blackie 129X detected the second.

Photo: Gary Knutsen taking Eric from K-9 Trailer.



On Friday, 6 May 1966, I was posted at DaNang's ammo / bomb dump, along with several dog teams. I had patrolled the bomb dump dozens of times and was familiar with the N/E bunker storage area Blackie and I was assigned. Handlers readied their war dogs for the night's patrols and were trucked from the Growl Pad Kennels to the entrance of the giant bomb dump.

Below Photo: Don Poss. Wrist Wrap/double-charged pop-flare.

Photo: K-9 Blackie 129X



As dog-teams scattered throughout the huge bomb dump, Blackie and I started the long walk to the N/E bunker post. I wanted to take advantage of what little daylight remained to check foliage-growth outside the north-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.

Photo: N/E Bomb Dump Storage Bunkers. Don Poss and Blackie 129X, center-right.



Photo: Gary Eberbach and Bucky.



Photo: Gary Eberbach, across from Bomb Dump area.

Photo: Bomb Dump area with rows of bombs stacked. Freedom Hill 327 in background, left.



I moved up into a tall-grass area near where the fence line turned south, becoming the east-fence under-construction new runway, current active-runway, taxiway, and then the flight line with revetments and aircraft parking areas nearly a mile away. Across from the VNAF SPAD parking area were old French bunkers and towers, long abandoned, but perfect for Viet Cong ambush sites; and snakes, and a railroad track. From French Tower, a slightly raised area, K-9 handlers could also see across to the bomb dump.

Photo: Bomb Dump entrance. View is to the West and of Monkey Mountain left/center.





French Tower (closeups above).

Below Photo: Rail Road Tressel, left-center. French Tower, right-center.



Below Photo: Bomb Dump along North perimeter (N/E area of Bomb Dump). Dusk: Looks inviting ... right?



As night fell, areas across the creek were lite up for about an hour, and then it was dark. Blackie and I had quartered our post, meandering between and around storage bunkers and bypassing those with MMS workers doing their thing. We ended up back near the entrance to the N/E corner where MMS were working noisily, which I bypassed until later.



As I began patrol within my bomb dump area, I noticed Monkey Mountain in the distance, (above photo). I also noticed the fence line with barbed-wire horseshoe-like hoops on top. It's funny what the mind notices and files away for who knows what. In the above photo you can see what I noticed: three or four of the horseshoe-like hoops are bent and slanted inward (third post from the right). What was important about that to me was someone, was most likely VC at some time crawled over the wire, bending the barbed hoops. Anyone else could simply have walked around the fence and entered at the AP Gate.

Move forward about 40 years, and I was researching for a VSPA project, and my eyes locked-in on a photo (see below closeup) of some Vietnamese officers at a ceremony of some type--the mountain in that photo's background was *Monkey Mountain*, with *Da Nang AB flightline* in the foreground, *and* a familiar looking barbed wire fence--with horseshoe-like hoops on top bent inward toward where the old 1965 bomb dump used to be.

These two photos would positively connect Agent Orange to every K-9 handler that patrolled the Da Nang bomb dump, and every AP/SP that stood a bomb dump Access Control Gate, to Agent Orange.



Below Photo: Same Bomb Dump N/E perimeter area as above photo-- only D-A-R-K.



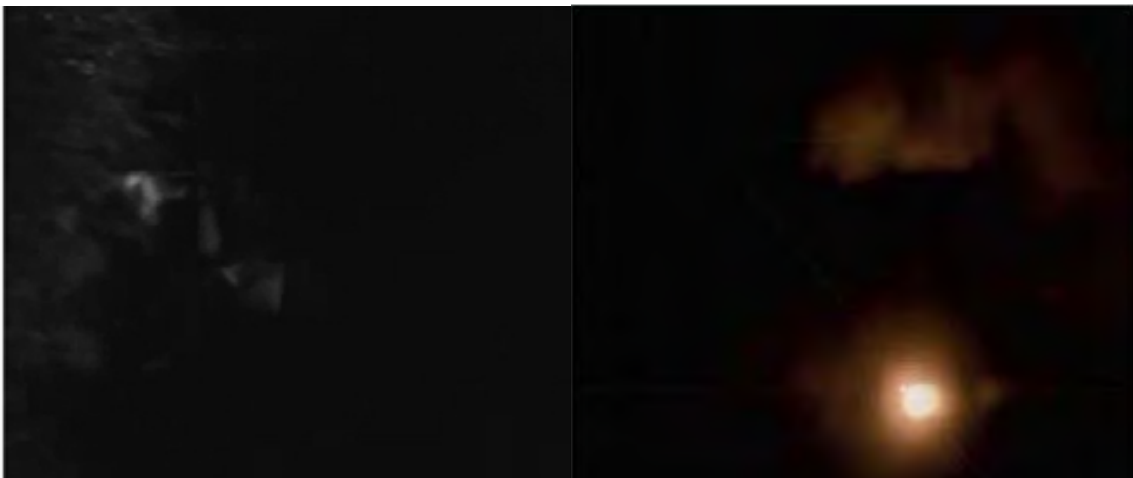
By midnight, it was quiet in my area, although neighboring sectors were still lite up like daylight and I pitied the K-9 handlers in those areas. Rather than walk a predictable pattern, I looped around behind some bunkers as the heavy entrance sliding doors had a single bright light above them. Back along the east-fence area again, it was too dark to see very far. I knew that runway and flight line lights across the fields could help spot movement (including mine), should runway blue-lights start to blink.

As I approached the front doors of the last bunker, Blackie 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 (ammo bunker door was lite up with a single bulb), and turned immediately left, to the north elongated rear side of that bunker 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 in my area. I don't think my position was known, but the VC may have seen K-9 was in the immediate area and thought they were detected. A second AK fired up the front of the bunker, spraying wildly. Then it was quiet, although my ears were ringing as 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 getting excited but not barking. I knelt and returned fire where I had seen muzzle-flashes then quickly moved to the back of the bunker for cover. I loosed Blackie who sped away silently. I knew if VC were inside the fence, Blackie would probably die within seconds-- although at least one of them would be missing a pair of gonads or have a ripped out throat.

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 trees and thick shrub to the left of Blackie. There was no return fire. 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 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. Blackie snatched a quick glance at Gary and Bucky then focused back to the N/E area. Gary and Bucky moved to the bunker's front area where he could watch the fence line for blinking lights.



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.

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 and gave it to the K-9 Sarge.

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.

Back at my tent, James McNall was returning from a lukewarm shower, after hiking a hundred yards to and fro. He asked what was with the rumors flying around, and I said I would tell him later but wanted to hit the cot and sleep.

For some reason I was really pissed, and just wanted to sleep before it got too hot outside. I knew better, but thought that I was close enough to FIGMO that I just might make out of here and just make like Vietnam had never happened.

I DEROS'd from Da Nang Air Base in 3 July 1966. My four years Air Force enlistment was over, but my war was not. Things moved fast, and a week after patrolling with Blackie at



Photo: James McNall returned from the sometimes-working lukewarm showers.



Da Nang ... I was cruising my old high school hang outs in California, believing I could just pick up where I had left off. It was not to be. I bought a '59 Chevy Impala, painted it Candy Chocolate-brown; dated a lot; bought a Cherokee 140 low-wing aircraft, flew up and down the California coast, to Vegas, and a lot of very small airports and landing-fields. Also, flew in and out of LAX--*once*. Went over to see my best-bud since 6th grade. Dennis's little sister, four years younger than I, Kathy came to the door--*she wasn't seven years old anymore--gulp-WOW!* (Married 51 years this Nov 2018, and she's still WOW!).

Anyway... I was fini Vietnam ... but Vietnam was not fini me.

Đà Nẵng Air Base: 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 Nẵng 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, which represent what could have happened the two previous Viet Cong attempts to penetrate the bomb dump.

Photo (1):

Notice the Guard Towers (center and about 30 feet tall). Photo was taken about a mile from the bomb dump. This is important so that you will see the scale in the next photo. Rear of the towers are ammo bunkers and dirt revetments to contain explosions.



Photo (2):

2,000 pound bombs cooks off west of the new runway and flight line. Unexploded bombs were hurtled hundreds of yards away. Later, Security Police would search tall grass for bombs, and EOD would deal with them. Note the C-47 parked in front of the open hanger.



Photo-3:
Đà Nẵng Air Base *Rock'N*
***Rolled* for three solid days!**

In the photo you can see the mushroom from a single bomb towering above SP barracks roofs--more than a mile away.

Aftermath:

The Bomb Dump was obscenely pock-marked with scooped out craters and cooked-off cannon shells. In many places craters festered like opened sores and steamed like Yosemite Valley in California.

For weeks, EOD unearthed and disarmed unexploded bombs that darted in to the fields like macabre statuettes of broken men.

The world's busiest Air Base was closed during the calamity. The control tower was evacuated when 2000-pound bombs began exploding, breaking and cracking glass across the base.

Take offs were at pilot's discretion only. Parked aircraft were quickly shuttled to far ends of the flight line for safety.

And all the while, Charlie wisely kept his distance, unwilling to tangle with a wounded animal uncertain as to what actually had caused his pain

Đà Nẵng Air Base licked it wounds, and kept on doing what Rocket City did best.

