

**Sapper Attack! February 22, 1969****Phu Cat Air Base**

by Michael Sipes

(AKA: *Fearless Pig-Killer*),**37th SPS, Cobra Flight Charley 10****Sniper Ambush Team**

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*"The K-9 handler had been wounded in the elbow by AK-47 fire..."**On February 22, 1969, Phu Cat AB received a Sapper Attack.**Casualties: US KIA 0, WIA 0, RVN KIA 0, and with 0 destroyed or damaged aircraft.**NVA/VC KIA: 4, POW 1.***February 22, 1969 – Sapper Attack Phu Cat AB, RVN**

By Michael Sipes, Charley 10 Sniper Ambush Team.

Reading [Joe Barbarise's Sapper Attack story](#) jogged my memories of the event so I put together a brief story of my recollections.

My fire team was assigned to the **Idaho Mortar Pit**, which if memory serves me correctly was located on the northeast perimeter of Phu Cat. We began taking small arms fire at about 2130h and received a mortar *fire mission* from FDC at coordinates given by a K-9 somewhere in front of our location. I don't remember who was with me in the pit that night, but believe it was Henderson and maybe Sopher and Duran. In any event, we fired over 400 HE rounds and a number of flares that night through our gun.

A short while after our fire mission began, the K-9 working the fence in front of Idaho approached us from the dark after exchanging the appropriate challenges was allowed to approach the pit. The K-9 handler had been wounded in the elbow by AK-47 fire and was taken for medical attention up by the duty driver who was resupplying us with mortar rounds. I would be very interested in knowing if anyone remembers who the K-9 handler was, and what was the outcome of his injury's.

The next morning, I was assigned recon to recover bodies.

**All photo's are by me** as I had just received a new *Minolta* camera that day and had taken with me to the mortar pit that night to read the manual and learn how to use it.

**Photos : WARNING - GRAPHIC PHOTOS!**

**Ton & Half:** 37th Security Police in *ton'n'half* Truck, recovering enemy dead, wounded.

**Viet Cong body count** ended up at four (4) KIA and one (1) wounded VC captured alive. As best as I can remember, the live but wounded Viet Cong (below photo) was turned over to the Tiger Division for medical attention and later, interrogation.



After the February attack, I was getting pretty short. I had about 60 days left to mark off on the FIGMO calendar. I continued rotating with my fire team between IRT duty on the APC, working the mortars, and ambushes. I may have also pulled a week up on Hill-151 during my last month.

Although we didn't experience any other combat during those last two months, I remember being pretty shaky on ambush during my last

two months, I remember being pretty shaky on ambush during my last week. With only three or four more days of duty in country, I was on an ambush north of the base, set up in a bamboo hedge row, when we heard a disturbance about 70 or 80 meters in front of our position. We unloaded with the M-40 grenade-launcher, the M-60, and our M-16s. After calling for mortar support, we booked it back to Phu Cat under the cover of the mortar fire.

The next morning, a recon team was sent out and found a dead 250 pound boar, leaving me with a new nick-name of "*Fearless Pig-Killer*" for my last couple of days in country.

**Photos : WARNING - GRAPHIC PHOTOS!**

The four (4) dead Viet Cong provided a ghastly appearance as they had covered their bodies with *chicken and or goose fat mixed with charcoal*. Their general belief was that using the fat would mask their scent allowing them to escape detection by the K-9 units.

One of the other recon groups uncovered a large cache of weapons and the clothing left behind as the sapper team disrobed to leave behind as much human scent as possible. Of interest is that undergarments of at least two women were found in the clothing pile. By the clothing count, projections were that the sapper team was about 25 strong.



*Photo below: Ton & Half 37th Security Police in ton'n'half Truck, recovering Viet Cong dead, wounded, and weapons cache.*





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**Author: Tom Oller**

**Subject: Re: Phu Cat AB Sapper Attack, 22 Feb 1969, posted.**

How well I remember that night! I was a member of the **822nd** assigned to Phu Cat for 2 months. We were off duty that day as we were to fly back to Phan Rang that night. We were to rotate home the next day. The attack delayed everything by one day. We were recalled to duty that night. I was on a RSAT team that responded to the flight line and guarded an area that had a ravine that came up to the maintenance buildings. VC in the past had been able to get that far. I have the same pictures taken at the mortar pit of the dead VC and the weapons captured.

**Author:** [Bill Marshall LM 85](#)

**Subject:** Re: Phu Cat AB Sapper Attack, 22 Feb 1969, posted

Remember the night like it was last night! I was working I/E when the radios came alive with CSC and the motor crews were busy dropping HE & IL Lumination rounds. Night turned to day, and everyone sprang into action and did their jobs.

I remember the morning after sweeping the area and had my first look at the toll that had been exacted on the penetration effort. We later learned through the interrogation of the captured VC, this was not their first incursion past the MIR, they had actually prepared in advance several penetrations attempts that were foiled. It was rumored the Viet Cong killed that morning were workers on the base during the day, however, I do not know this as a fact. Cobra Flight, mortar crews, K-9 and all assigned Security Policemen did their jobs in an exemplary manner.

**From:** [William Clay](#)

**Subject:** Re: Phu Cat AB Sapper Attack, 22 Feb 1969, posted.

Yes I remember that night, and this is the way I remember:

I was in the Sniper Ambush Section Charlie-9, but my team was not out this night. I was sitting on a pile of sandbags just outside FDC when the attack started. I went to the mortar pit there and helped with the HE and illumination rounds. They fired a lot of them. I could hear the radio traffic enough to know that K9 and the mortar crews saved us. I heard a K-9 unit out by old *Hawaii* call for Ammo, saying he was out of ammo. An Airman I grabbed some bandoleers and started that way. However, I was ordered to stay put by *Father Time*, (never knew his real name) but he had tattoos all over him, and said I was needed there and he would take the ammo. I do not know if he did or not. I was an Airman 2nd class and he a SSgt so I did what he said. Later on, after I had some experience, I would have gone anyway.

I believe SSgt Johnson, K9, received the Bronze Star for his action that night but, in my opinion, he deserved the Medal of Honor. I was told later that one K9 brought his handler in, the handler was wounded and kind of out of it, so that dog save his handler. I believe this happened near Idaho mortar pit ( the one between old Hawaii and the Ammo dump) I believe that was Idaho, it's been so long ago I am not quite sure the call sign.

The mortar pit itself was in danger of being over run but MacDonald and the crew would not leave and kept firing. Brave men for sure.

That morning my Fire Team went on the sweep along with others. We found the dead VC and one live one. I was helping load the dead on to a 2 1/2 ton. One we picked up, I picked him up at the shoulders and someone else picked up the feet. When we went to load him in the back of the 2 1/2 ton (feet first) the VC's brains spilled out onto my face and the gore ran down by chest. He had been shot in the forehead causing a flap of skull to blow out. I guess that when he fell back to the ground the flap closed until we lifted him up. Surprising I did not get sick or even think much about it.

We went back to Special Activities compound, where FDC was located, and put the dead out there all lined up. Photos were taken and finally the bodies were removed. Of course, during the retrieval of these bodies we searched them for Intel. I found nothing but I believe there were maps, plots and other important documents found.

Remember I said we found a live VC. He was severely wounded and was in some brush. I was standing so close to him near his feet when he moved a bit. He could have taken me out with ease. He had a hand-grenade in his hand but did not use it. I would like to take credit for capturing him but I did not. Another SP, I do not know who, moved in, took the grenade away from the VC and took care of business.

Well that is about it. I thank God for K9 and the Mortar Crews of the 37th SPS because, in my opinion, they were the true hero's of this battle.

**Ed Clay, Charlie-9.**

Additional combat photos:

[Phu Cat Sapper Attack! 22 Feb 1969, by Joe Barbarise](#)

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