



Stand Off and Sapper Attack on

Tan Son Nhut AB, December 4-5, 1966

First Alert ~ K-9 at Utah Ditch

"Really, it was just a moment ago for those who were there..."

by [Charles Penley](#)

[[377th SPS Association](#)]

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In Memory of [LTC Grove C. Johnson](#), Commander, 377th APS/SPS, 1966-1967

"Proven In Combat... Leader of Men"

The Vietnam Security Police Association, Inc., is extremely grateful to Fred Johnson, Bill Johnson and Jeff Johnson, sons of, LTC Grove C. Johnson, Commander, 377th APS/SPS, 1966-1967, who released noted photographs and information concerning the Stand Off and Sapper attack against Tan Son Nhut AB, on 4 Dec 1966.

VSPA also appreciates the [377th Tan Son Nhut Association](#) and Charles Penley (VSPA member) for sharing these PDF documents and photos with VSPA.

LTC Grove C. Johnson received the [Bronze Star w/V](#) for his actions of 4-5 Dec 1966.

Time-Line

[Stand Off and Sapper Attack on Tan Son Nhut AB, 4-5 Dec 1966](#)

by the 14th Viet Cong Battalion, on 4 December, 1966, 0040 hours

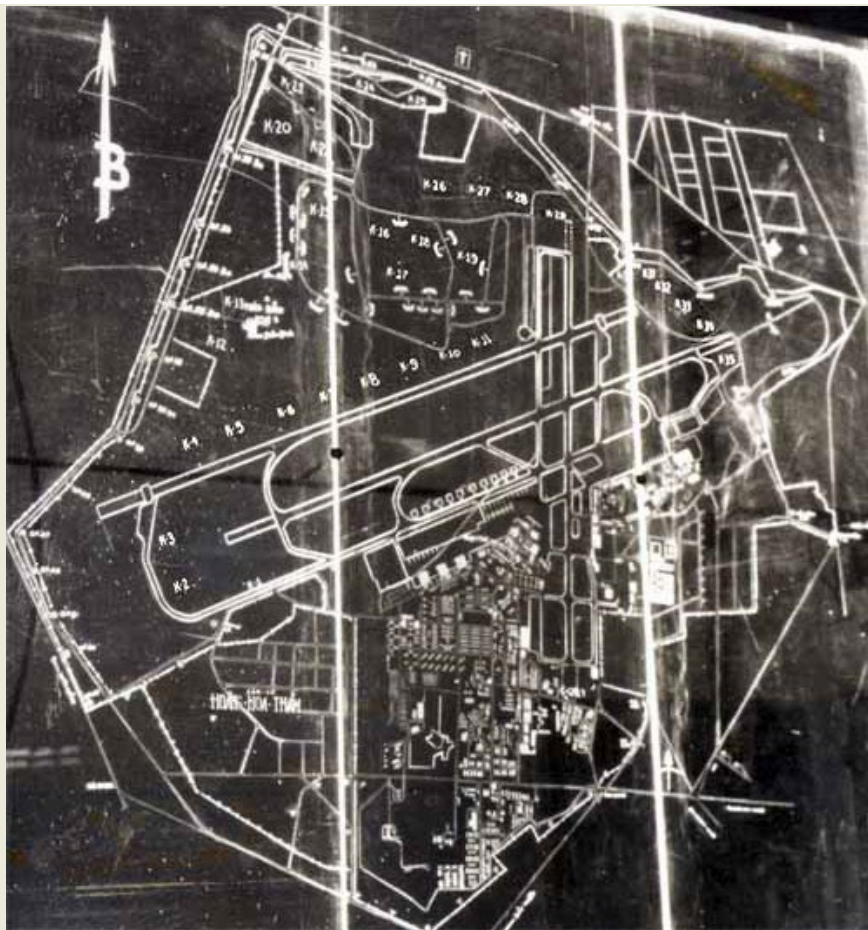
84-Page government document released and converted by Charles Penley to a 24-Page time-line of the base attack. (Time-Line, page 5-11. Numerous Photos and base-map highlighting attack and base defense.)

TSN After Action Det-s regarding 4-5 Dec 1966

Attack, Losses, and Damage

After Action Det-s

- *Incoming Mortar/Rockets33 [Attack Dec 4-5, TSN!](#) 1966, by Capt. Chuck Henry
- Aircraft Destroyed00 [Silver Star, Major Fox](#) 1966, by Charles Penley
- Aircraft Damaged20 [Shaking Hands with The Enemy!](#) 1966, by Peter Coxon
- US KIA03 [Sappers and Mortars!](#) 1966, by James P. Jerome
- US WIA15 [Attack on Tan Son Nhut!](#) 1966, by Olbert H. Hiatt, 1st Sgt SPS, USAF Ret., 1944-1974
- RVN KIA03 "I immediately lost 11 of my 15-man Quick Reaction Team—2 were killed, and 9 wounded."
- RVN WIA04 [My Story - K9 Kemo](#), 1966, by William Trimble
- NVA/VC KIA28
- NVA/VC [POW](#)s04



Tan Son Nhut Air Base, K-9 Post Map

Killed In Action, 4-5 Dec 1966



A2C George M. Bevich Jr. (Posthumously [Silver](#)

[Star](#), [Purple Heart](#))

[A2C John M. Cole](#) (Posthumously: [Purple Heart](#))

[A2C Oliver J. Riddle](#) (Posthumously: [Purple Heart](#))

Unit Awards

The 377th SPS was awarded the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Valor for its "heroic valor," against the Viet Cong infiltration force. And, for extraordinary gallantry,

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON

SPECIAL ORDER
GB- 743

14 October 1969

1. By direction of the President, _____ is awarded the Legion of Merit for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service from 17 Jul 67 to 1 Jul 69.
2. By direction of the President, each of the following units is awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary gallantry in connection with military operations during the period indicated:

Bombardment Sq, Tactical
~~8th Tactical Bombardment Sq~~ (6 Jun 67 to 18 Jan 68) (PACAF)
~~13th Tactical Bombardment Sq~~ (6 Jun 67 to 18 Jan 68) (PACAF)
 377th Security Police Sq (31 Jan 68 to 2 Feb 68) (PACAF)

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE



JOHN D. RYAN, General, USAF
Chief of Staff

JOHN F. RASH, Colonel, USAF
Director of Administration

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- GB-743

The Presidential

Unit Citation.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON

SPECIAL ORDER
GB-703

9 Nov 1971

1. The 56th Combat Support Group (PACAF) is awarded the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award (with Combat "V" Device) for exceptionally meritorious service in support of military operations from 1 June 1970 to 31 May 1971. The following units share in the award for the same period:

56th Civil Engineering Squadron
56th Headquarters Squadron
56th Security Police Squadron
56th Services Squadron
56th Transportation Squadron

2. The 377th Combat Support Group (PACAF) is awarded the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award (with Combat "V" Device) for exceptionally meritorious service in support of military operations from 1 April 1969 to 31 March 1971. The following units share in the award for the same period unless otherwise indicated:

Headquarters, 377th Combat Support Group
21st Aeromedical Staging Flight, 1 Jan 70 - 31 Mar 71
21st Casualty Staging Flight, 1 Apr 69 - 31 Dec 69
377th Civil Engineering Squadron
~~377th Security Police Squadron~~
377th Services Squadron
377th Supply Squadron
377th Transportation Squadron
377th USAF Dispensary

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE



JOHN D. RYAN, General, USAF
Chief of Staff

DWIGHT W. COVELL, Colonel, USAF
Director of Administration

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GB-703

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with

Combat Valor - Special Order GB 703

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON

SPECIAL ORDER
GB-862

4 December 1973

1. The 377th Air Base Wing (PACAF) is awarded the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award (with Combat V Device) for exceptionally meritorious service in support of military operations from 17 January 1972 to 28 March 1973. The following units share in the award for the same period unless otherwise indicated:

- 377th Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Sq, 17 Jan 72 - 1 Oct 72
- 377th Organizational Maintenance Sq, 1 Oct 72 - 28 Mar 73
- 377th Field Maintenance Sq, 1 Oct 72 - 28 Mar 73
- 377th Civil Engineering Sq, 17 Jan 72 - 2 Aug 72
- 377th Security Police Sq
- 377th Services Sq, 17 Jan 72 - 2 Aug 72
- 377th Supply Sq
- 377th Transportation Sq
- 377th USAF Hospital
- 8th Special Ops Sq, 8 Jul 72 - 1 Oct 72
- 9th Special Ops Sq, 17 Jan 72 - 29 Feb 72
- 21st Tactical Air Support Sq, 15 Mar 72 - 21 Feb 73
- 310th Tactical Airlift Sq, 27 Jan 72 - 15 Nov 72
- 360th Tactical Electronic Warfare Sq, 1 Feb 72 - 24 Nov 72
- 21st Aeromedical Staging Flight
- 6251st USAF Clinic

2. The 6251st Air Base Squadron is awarded the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award (with Combat V Device) for exceptionally meritorious achievement in support of military operations from 1 April 1972 to 18 September 1972.

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE



GEORGE S. BROWN, General, USAF
Chief of Staff

JACK R. BENSON, Colonel, USAF
Director of Administration

DISTRIBUTION
GO

GB-862

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with

Combat Valor - Special Order GB 862
[Presidential Unit Citation - Special Order GB 743](#)

AWARDS

4-5 Dec 1966:

Silver Stars / Bronze Stars w/V
Purple Hearts

[Major Roger P. Fox](#) (right), received the nation's third highest medal, the [Silver Star](#) for his actions taken on Dec 4-5, 1966.

Let history take you back forty-three years ago this month....

It is now 1:10 A.M., December 4, 1966, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, it is quiet as usual and then a sentry dog alerts to some movement in a very large and deep ditch, known as "[Utah Ditch](#)." It is surrounded by trees, bushes and weeds, located on the north-west side of the installation.

The handler called in the situation report, of a large group of men, moving inside his defensive position, where this ditch is located, to Central Security Control (CSC). Almost simultaneously, other sentry dog handlers saw the same movement, and radio traffic began

to pick up.

Immediately enemy forces opened up with automatic weapons fire and mortars. The Air Base was under its second base attack by stand-off weapons of approximately 33 of mortar rounds.

On April 13, 1966 Tan Son Nhut AB received a Stand Off attacked with 246 Rockets and Mortars within thirteen minutes: US KIA 7, WIA 111, RVN KIA 2, and with 9 destroyed aircraft and 62 damaged.



Photo (above), Major Roger P. Fox, courtesy of: Fred Johnson, Bill Johnson and Jeff Johnson, sons of, Lt Col Grove C. Johnson, Commander 377th Air/Security olice Squadron, 1966 - 1967



The size of the Viet Cong infiltration force was estimated to have been over 75 sappers and commandos. For the first time a ground assault by sappers on Tan Son Nhut Air Base began. Once inside the perimeter, the enemy divided into smaller groups to attack their various targets. The targets were the bomb dump, flight line, and *targets of opportunity*.

The first report from the sentry dog handler provided time for the air policemen of the 377th Air Police Squadron to respond and engage the enemy. A blocking force was established and the fighting was fierce.

Thanks to the quick action's of the air policemen, damage to aircraft and facilities was minimal.

A2C Alvin W. Curie (right), 377th APS/SPS, received the nation's third highest medal, the <Silver Star, for his actions taken on Dec 4-5, 1966.

There were THREE of us manning the Delta Sector Machine Gun Post at the time of the sapper attack on 4-5 Dec 1966. They were as follows, A/3C Alvin Currie who manned the right front side M60 Machine Gun, A/3C John P. Walker who was an M16 Rifleman covering the left front side and myself, Robert W. Valentine Jr. who assisted Airman Currie, maintained communication with CSC, fired slap flares to illuminate the area and also covered the center front side of the post as an M16 rifleman. Airman Currie received a Silver Star for his heroic efforts manning the machine gun and repairing it after both the M60 and his own M16 misfired upon initial use. A/3C Walker received a Bronze Star (not sure if it was with "V" device or not but in my opinion it should have been). A/2C Valentine received a Bronze Star with "V" device for his actions.

Additionally, it should be noted that this was A/3C Walker's first night on duty in Vietnam and that he had just arrived on post approximately 45 minutes before all hell broke loose. Personally, I cannot speak highly of both of these gallant men. In my opinion, they are true American Heroes!



Photo (right), A2C Alvin W. Curie, courtesy of: Fred Johnson, Bill Johnson and Jeff Johnson, sons of, Lt Col Grove C. Johnson, Commander 377th Air/Security Police Squadron, 1966 - 1967



Photo (left): A2C Robert B. Kane (left) and A2C Alvin C. Curie (right) defend their post during the sapper attack of 4 Dec 1966. Airman Kane holds a capture enemy .30 rifle, and Airman Curie mans an M60 machinegun.

[Alvin C. Curie passed from a massive heart attack on Dec 7, 1982.]

A2C Tommy C. Poole (right), a Sentry Dog handler, received the nation's third highest medal, the Silver Star and Purple Heart medals for his actions taken on Dec 4-5, 1966.



Photo (right), A2C Tommy C. Poole, courtesy of: Fred Johnson, Bill Johnson and Jeff Johnson, sons of, Lt Col Grove C. Johnson, Commander 377th Air/Security Police Squadron, 1966 - 1967



[A2C Throneburg, Robert A.](#) (left/bed), wounded in action on 4 Dec 1966, is being presented the **[Purple Heart](#)** at U. S. Army 3rd Field Hospital by Col Grover K. Coe (left/standing), Tan Son Nhut's Base Commander. (Dec 1966). Throneburg was also awarded the **[Bronze Star w/Valor](#)**.

[Throneburg and K-9 Nemo in recovery.](#)

377th APS/SPS,
Sentry Dog Handler, K-9 NEMO #A534
Saigon, Vietnam

Photo (left), A2C Robert A. Throneburg, courtesy of: Fred Johnson, Bill Johnson and Jeff Johnson, sons of, Lt Col Grove C. Johnson, Commander 377th Air/Security olice Squadron, 1966 - 1967



[A2C Simmons, Russell](#), wounded in action on 4 Dec 1966, is being presented the **[Purple Heart](#)** at U. S. Army 3rd Field Hospital by Col Grover K. Coe, Tan Son Nhut's Base Commander. (Dec 1966)

377th Air Police Squadron.
“C Flight Security”

Photo (left), A2C Russell Simmons, courtesy of: Fred Johnson, Bill Johnson and Jeff Johnson, sons of, Lt Col Grove C. Johnson, Commander 377th Air/Security olice Squadron, 1966 - 1967

[A2C Davis, Lyle K.](#), AF14861942 wounded in action on 4 Dec 1966, is being presented the **[Purple Heart](#)** at U. S. Army 3rd Field Hospital by Col Grover K. Coe, Tan Son Nhut's Base Commander. (Dec 1966)

377th Air Police Squadron.
“C Flight Security”
Saigon, Vietnam



Wound chest wound, gunshot – condition fair.

Photo (left), A2C Lyle K. Davis, courtesy of: Fred Johnson, Bill Johnson and Jeff Johnson, sons of, Lt Col Grove C. Johnson, Commander 377th Air/Security Police Squadron, 1966 - 1967

[SSgt Habecker, Barry L.](#), AF13546189, wounded in action on 4 Dec 1966, is presented the [Purple Heart](#) at U. S. Army 3rd Field Hospital by Col Grover K. Coe, Tan Son Nhut's Base Commander. (Dec 1966)

377th Air Police Squadron.
"C Flight Security"
Saigon, Vietnam



Photo (right), SSgt Barry L. Habecker, courtesy of: Fred Johnson, Bill Johnson and Jeff Johnson, sons of, Lt Col Grove C. Johnson, Commander 377th Air/Security Police Squadron, 1966 - 1967



Photo (above), A2C Thaddeus M. Janiak, courtesy of: Fred

[A2C Janiak, Thaddeus M.](#), AF16792041 wounded in action on 4 Dec 1966, is being presented the [Purple Heart](#) at U. S. Army 3rd Field Hospital by Col Grover K. Coe, Tan Son Nhut's Base Commander. (Dec 1966)

[Air Force Commendation Medal](#) for actions in battle on December 4, 1966. Commendation attached as follows:

Airman Second Class Thaddeus M. Janiak distinguished himself by outstanding achievement as an Air Policeman, Law Enforcement Section, 377th APS, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Republic of Vietnam on 4 December 1966. On that date, Airman Janiak valiantly fought against a force of Viet Cong attackers attempting to penetrate the base perimeter defenses. Although faced by a numerically superior force, Airman Janiak held his position throughout the ensuing firefight, which resulted in the attacking force being repulsed. This courageous stand against superior odds closed the entry/exit point of the Viet Cong, preventing further entrance by the hostile force and trapping those already on base. The distinctive accomplishments of Airman Janiak reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force. "

Johnson, Bill Johnson and Jeff Johnson, sons of, Lt Col Grove
C. Johnson, Commander 377th Air/Security Police Squadron,
1966 - 1967
/>Deceased – May 30, 1999, Demotte, IN

377th Air Police Squadron.
“C Flight Security”
Saigon, Vietnam

**Sentry Dogs
Killed In Action, 4 Dec 1966:**



KIA: US Sentry Dog, Toby, 206F (handler, Dale E. Sidwell -Post Kilo-2)
KIA: US Sentry Dog, Rebel, 519X (handler, Leroy E. Marsh -Post Kilo-4)
KIA: US Sentry Dog, Cubby, 612E (handler, Larry G. Laudner -Post Kilo-1)

**Sentry Dogs
Wounded In Action, 4 Dec 1966:**



**Photo: Sentry Dog NEMO A534, courtesy of:
Bill Cummings, 635th Security Police
Squadron
U-Tapao, Thailand. 1970 - 1971**

**Sentry Dog NEMO A534 (left), and his handler,
A2C Robert A. Throneburg (see above photo),
were posted for the night.**

Just before total darkness on December 4th, 1966,
and after Sentry Nemo (A534) and his handler
were posted, Nemo alerted and was released to
attack the Viet Cong who had evaded earlier
detection. Nemo and his handler were both
wounded, but not before killing two Viet Cong.
Nemo's injuries included the loss of his right eye
and a gunshot wound that ripped into his nose.

A sweep of the area by the Quick Response Team
(QRT) met with negative results. But using
additional sentry dog teams, the USAF Security
Forces located and killed four more VC.

A second sweep with the dog teams resulted in the
discovery of four additional VC who were hiding
underground. The remaining enemy forces were
soon killed by other Security Police.

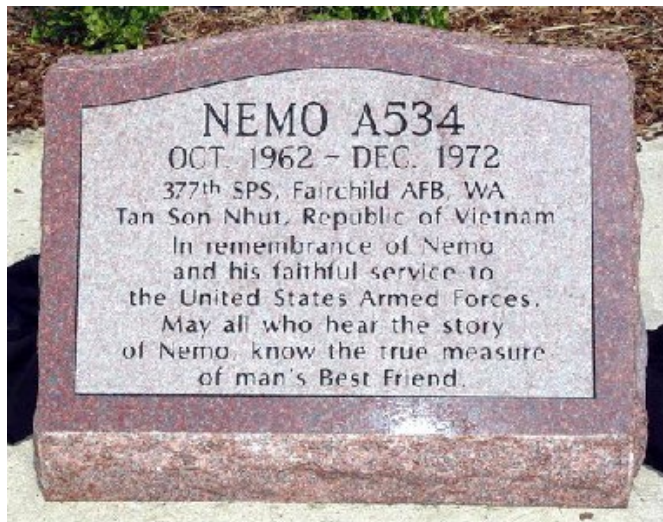
Before help could arrive, Nemo, an 85 pound
German shepherd, although severely wounded,

protected his handler by crawling across his body, and guarding him against anyone who dared to come near.
When help arrived, they were able to convince Nemo to leave his handler, who was then given first aid. Nemo,
suffering from a gunshot wound to his face, and the loss of his right eye, was relieved of sentry dog duties.

377th Air Police Squadron.
“C Flight Security”
Saigon, Vietnam

RIP NEMO: Vietnam War "K-9"
Courtesy of: John "J-Cat" Griffith
Oct 17 2006

In 1964, the US Air Force bought German



Shepherd Nemo, he received sentry dog training, issued serial number A534 and sent to Vietnam in January 1966.

Nemo and his partner Airman 2nd Class Robert Thorneburg became one of the sentry dog teams of the 377th Air Police Squadron at Tan Son Nut Air Base, Saigon. On December 3, 1966, two Vietcong units tried to infiltrate the base. Thorneburg and Nemo were on duty at an old Vietnamese graveyard near the Air Base's runways. Nemo detected several VCs making an assault, his handler was wounded and Nemo was shot in the muzzle. Ignoring his serious head wound, the 85-pound dog threw himself at the four Vietcong guerrillas giving Thorneburg the time to call in backup to secure the attack. Then they

rushed Thorneburg and Nemo back to the base center for emergency medical care. The base veterinarian performed surgery but Nemo lost his right eye. In July 1967, he returned to the United States as the first sentry dog officially retired from active service. His service to his country did not end. The War Department awarded Nemo full military honors as an Air Force canine hero and recruiter. He made television appearances and helped maintain an adequate supply of dogs for all the armed services. He served as mascot at the Department of Defense Dog Center, Lackland AFB, Texas until his death. A permanent grave stone with his name, serial number and details of his heroic exploit remind students just how important a dog is to the handler and the entire unit.

Birth: Oct 1962, USA

Death: Dec 1972, Bexar Couty, TX, USA

Burial: DoD Dog Center Lackland Air Base
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas, USA

We Take Care of Our Own

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