

**23<sup>rd</sup> Air Base Group  
Da Nang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam**

[NOTE: the 23<sup>rd</sup> ABG replaced the 6222 Air Base Squadron on 8 July 1963 at Da Nang, and itself would be replaced by the 6252<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing in July 1965, and the 6252<sup>nd</sup> would be replaced by the 35<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing in January 1966.]

**Extract, 23<sup>rd</sup> Air Base Group 1 July through 31 December 1963 Historical Data Record (AFHRA Call Number K-GP-AB-23-HI, Jul-Dec 1963, IRIS Number 437540):**

**Page 2, Narrative:**

**The 23<sup>rd</sup> Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron [was established by the same order that activated the 23<sup>rd</sup> CSG],** with a resultant increase in the manpower authorization for the base. Heretofore all maintenance on assigned C-123B aircraft had been performed by TDY personnel from the 464<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron, Pope AFB, North Carolina. It was not until **October 1963** that the 23<sup>rd</sup> CAMRON really came into being. A very troublesome transition period developed between the departure of the TDY maintenance personnel and the influx of permanently assigned maintenance personnel. By the direction of Headquarters USAF, all TDY aircraft maintenance personnel were to return to the ZI [zone of interior] not later than **30 September 1963**. The month of September arrived, necessitating booking and shipping arrangements to be made for the TDY personnel, but only very few replacements had arrived or were forecast to arrive. The result was that by the first of **October**, 23<sup>rd</sup> CAMRON and 2<sup>nd</sup> Air Division was faced with the decision of considerably reducing its operational capability or obtaining additional maintenance personnel from some other source within PACAF. The decision was made, and approximately 30 mechanics were assigned TDY from Tan Son Nhut and Clark AB to prevent loss of the operational capability. These personnel remained until early **November** when permanent personnel began arriving and assumed the workload.

**Page 3:**

**During the same month [July 1963], a detachment from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Air Base Group was established at Qui Nhon.** Construction of three (3) 16' x 32' buildings, a covered power shed, and sidewalks were completed at the detachment site prior to the end of the month.

**Page 4:**

**During September 1963** a serious mishap occurred at the POL refueling hydrant area when a 6-inch fuel supply line ruptured, spraying fuel over the gas turbine pumping unit and the empennage of a C-123B parked in the refueling area. A flash fire resulted which destroyed the hydrant pumping unit and scorched all the fabric surfaces on the C-123B empennage. Prompt action on the part of the aircraft maintenance men in the area and the fire department prevented complete destruction of the aircraft. As soon as the fire started the flight line chief started the aircraft engines and taxied the aircraft to an area clear of the burning fuel and the fire department then extinguished the smoldering fire in fabric control surfaces.

**Extract, 23<sup>rd</sup> Air Base Group 1 January through 30 June 1964 Historical Data Record (AFHRA Call Number K-GP-AB-23-HI, Jan-Jun 1964, IRIS Number 437541):**

**Page 7, Paragraph 6:**

**In May, celebrated Funeral Mass for A2C Louis George Onohan who drowned at China Beach, 24 April 1964.**

**Extract, 23<sup>rd</sup> Air Base Group 1 July through 31 December 1964 Historical Data Record (AFHRA Call Number K-GP-AB-23-HI, Jul-Dec 1964, IRIS Number 437542):**

**Page 2, Personnel:**

**During July** the group had a shortage of 56 personnel primarily in the aircraft maintenance and **air police career fields**. The manning situation became further aggravated after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August when a general buildup of forces and an increase in tactical air operations was experienced at Da Nang.

**Extract, 23<sup>rd</sup> Air Base Group 1 January through 30 June 1965 History (AFHRA Call Number K-GP-AB-23-HI, Jan-Jun 1965, IRIS Number 437543):**

**Pages i-iii, Foreword:**

**The past six months** were the most significant since the arrival of American forces at Da Nang. The base had grown from a meager beginning with only a handful of advisors to the most strategic air base in Viet-Nam. **The initial buildup started after the Gulf of Tonkin incidents in the latter part of 1964**, when elements of the **Seventh Fleet** were attacked in international waters. The second increase in U.S. Air Force personnel and aircraft was made after the **Viet Cong attacked the American installations at Pleiku**. Since that time there has been a steady rise in the number of units assigned or attached to Da Nang.

**During the last half of 1964, and the first month of 1965**, all tactical missions flown from Da Nang were in support of the **Laotian government**. Those missions included: escorting electronic intelligence aircraft; flying MIG-CAP combat air patrols; rescue combat air patrols; and reconnaissance escort. In addition, jet fighters staging from Da Nang were used to bomb and strafe targets on Route 7, the main Communist supply route that runs from North Viet-Nam to the Laotian "Plain of Jarres." This highway was the utmost importance since the North Vietnamese Army used it to infiltrate its troops into South Viet-Nam.

**By February 1965**, the mission of the base was expanded. No longer were air strikes limited to Laos, but now included North as well as South Viet-Nam. Along with the mission expansion came an additional increase in rotational fighter aircraft and personnel. This was followed by a crash building program of the housing of the large influx of men and equipment.

**By the end of February 1965**, Da Nang Air Base underwent a face lifting as men and machines were put on a war basis. Forty hour week work schedules were discarded and an around-the-clock program was initiated. The minimum work day was set at 11 ½ hours per day. However, the buildup came so fast and the demands so heavy that 18 hour work days were not uncommon.

When the U.S. Air Force began flying air strikes in the North, along with it came the obvious threat of retaliatory raids by the Viet Cong. Protective measures were taken in the form of air raid shelters, bunkers, foxholes and protective sandbag revetments for strike aircraft. Also, F-102s were assigned on Temporary Duty (TDY) from Clark Air Base in the Philippines. The mission of the F-102's was base defense against bomber type aircraft. In addition U.S. Marines were moved into the immediate area in division strength and with them came F-4B aircraft and Hawk missiles.

**By the end of March 1965**, the Marines had secured an area approximately ten miles around Da Nang Air Base, and the threat of attack by any sizeable Viet Cong ground force was lessened. **The Hawk missiles were in place and the Da Nang forces** were now in the position

to cope with anything the Viet Cong had to offer, whether they chose to come by land, sea, or by air. No longer was the most northern base in Viet-Nam (approximately 85 miles from the 17<sup>th</sup> Parallel) the most vulnerable to enemy attack.

After the defenses were completed, extensive air operations began. The rotational F-100 aircraft alone were averaging over 600 combat sorties a month over North Viet-Nam as well as in the South. President Lyndon B. Johnson's decision to carry the war to the enemy was now in full swing. The price of war had grown more expensive for the Viet Cong.

**Pages iv-vi, Viet Cong Attack on Da Nang Air Base:**

**A 14 Man Viet Cong suicide squad attacked Da Nang Air Base at 0130 hours, 1 July 1965,** destroying three aircraft and damaging seven others. The infiltrators entered the air base from a position between the base and the southern defense perimeter. They immediately ran through the area where C-130 and F-102 alert aircraft were parked, hurling hand-grenades and spraying the area with semi-automatic weapons fire.

**Within five minutes after the first explosions were heard, 81 millimeter mortar fire** began to land on the south end of the field. The exact number of mortar rounds fired could not be determined, however, fourteen mortar craters were discovered on the overrun to the runway and numerous others landed nearby.

**As a result of the attack, two C-130's and one F-102 were totally destroyed, also, two F-102's sustained extensive damage, four others sustained minor damage and one C-130 was seriously damaged but considered repairable. One air policeman was killed [SSgt Terance K. Jensen] by small arms fire and several crew members were injured by flying glass.**

**[NOTE: SSgt Terance K. Jensen, 23<sup>rd</sup> Air Base Group Air Police, was killed and five Air Force members injured (not seriously) when unfriendly forces attacked the base flight line, Da Nang AB, RVN, with mortar and small arms fire. The injured members treated and released:**

Capt. Eldon W. Badtram  
TSgt Denver Cook  
TSgt James T. Garren  
A1C Clifford C. Tanner  
A2C Carl J. Wilkins]

**The method used by the Viet Cong to enter the USAF restricted area** was to infiltrate through the outer perimeter defenses and then by cutting through the inner perimeter fences. The infiltrators were observed by an air police area supervisor [SSgt Terance K. Jensen] and the entry controller [A1C Albert L. Handy] just prior to the first explosion. The AP immediately instructed the entry controller to notify Central Security Control (CSC) and then he exchanged fire with the enemy. This action alerted the base, however, the air policeman was killed by the heavy automatic fire from the attackers weapons.

**Up to the date of the attack,** no joint security/defense command center had been established. The general internal security was DEFCON 3. **The Air Police internal security forces were responsible for the security of their operational resources and did not receive any guidance from a joint command center.**

**Air policemen throughout the period were utilized for close in and close boundary positions and the USMC, VNAF, and 178<sup>th</sup> Signal Company (USA), provided perimeter protection.** Approximately, 80 per cent of the immediate base perimeter was the responsibility of the USMC, 10 per cent was the responsibility of VNAF, and the remaining 10 per cent the 178<sup>th</sup> Signal Company. The area of infiltration occurred through USMC area of responsibility. External base protection in depth was provided by the Da Nang Special Sector.

**According to information obtained from a wounded Viet Cong caught early on the morning of 1 July 1965, the 1 July attack on Da Nang AB, was carried out by a specially formed unit called the NGUYEN VAN TROI Company.** This company was named after the VC that was executed for bombing the Embassy in Saigon. **This task-organized unit was composed of** a special demolition squad, a platoon of four 81mm mortars, and two rifle platoons with one 57mm recoilless rifle. The demolition squad was sent from the **3<sup>rd</sup> Bn., 18<sup>th</sup> Reg., of the 325 Division to Military Region 5** especially trained for this mission. After a 30 day training period, the company moved to a staging area south of Da Nang. From there, they made a three day move to a position along the South Bank of the Song Cau Do River, approximately 2 ½ miles S.E. of the airfield. **On the night of the 30<sup>th</sup> of June,** the company rented boats and crossed the river at approximately 2000 hours. The rifle and mortar platoons were generally deployed on line and parallel to the airfield fence. The right mortars were to fire on the aircraft parking area while the left section was to fire on the helicopter parking area. The demolition team was to cut the fence and plant the charges. The withdrawal was made through 10-12 holes cut in the fence, and under cover of automatic weapons and rifle fire of the platoon. The rendezvous area was approximately 5 ½ miles SE of the field.

#### **Page vii, Chronology:**

##### **February**

- 8 First air strikes in North Viet-Nam made by Da Nang based USAF aircraft.
- 10 All dependents evacuated from the Da Nang area by C-130 aircraft.

##### **April**

- 12 Four F-4B aircraft, of the USMC arrive at Da Nang.
- 19 A squadron sized element of F-104C aircraft arrived at Da Nang. First F-104 organization to be assigned in Viet-Nam.

##### **June**

- 23 416<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter squadron rotated to Bien Hoa Air Base near Saigon.
- 24 The 8<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron assigned on TDY to Da Nang and became the first B-57 unit to be stationed here.
- 29 615th Tactical Fighter Squadron rotates to England Air force Base, Louisiana.

##### **July**

- 6 Orders received to discontinue the 23<sup>rd</sup> Air Base Group. The 6252<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing named as host unit at Da Nang Air Base.

**Page 1, Organization:**

**23<sup>rd</sup> Air Base Group**

- 23<sup>rd</sup> Air Base Group, Det 1 (Qui Nhon Air Base, RVN)
- 23 Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- 311<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Squadron, Det 1
- 619<sup>th</sup> Control Squadron
- 8<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port Squadron, Det 2
- 6925<sup>th</sup> Security Group, Det 2
- Pacific Air Rescue Center, Det 5
- 30<sup>th</sup> Weather Group, Det 9
- 1964<sup>th</sup> Communications Group, Det 5
- Air Force Advisory Team #5
- Air Support Operations Center
- 509<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Interceptor Squadron

**Page 3, Organization as of 8 July 1965:**

**6252<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing**

- 6252<sup>nd</sup> Combat Support Group
- 6252<sup>nd</sup> Combat Support Squadron
- 6252<sup>nd</sup> Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
- 6252<sup>nd</sup> Materiel Squadron

**The discontinuance of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Air Base Group** brought to a close two years of operations at Da Nang Air Base by that unit. **Prior to 8 July 1963**, the support functions of the base were under the jurisdiction of the 6222<sup>nd</sup> Air Base Squadron.

**Page 4, Operations:**

**The rapid build-up of US forces here brought with it s a vast selection of the Air Force, Navy and Marine aircraft inventory.** Assembled at Da Nang was one of the most powerful tri-service air armadas since the Korean Conflict. Included in this force were:

- F-105 "Thunderchief"
- F-104 "Starfighter"
- F-102 "Delta Dagger"
- F-100 "Supersabre"
- C-123 "Provider"
- C-130 "Hercules"
- B-57 "Canberra"
- C-47 "Skytrain"
- F-4B "Phantom"
- HU-16 "Albatross"
- EF-10B
- O-1F
- H-34
- HH-43
- HU-1B

A-1H used by the Vietnamese Air Force; and a variety of reconnaissance type aircraft.

With the exception of the C-123's, all aircraft were on temporary rotational duty from other bases in the United States and overseas. Each squadron that rotated here remained for

approximately 30-60 days then returned to its home station after its replacement unit was on station.

**The following units were on TDY at Da Nang Air Base during the period 1 January through 8 July 1965:**

509<sup>th</sup> Fighter Interceptor Squadron (405<sup>th</sup> FW), Clark AFB, Philippines  
 510<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron (3<sup>rd</sup> TFW), England AFB, LA  
 613<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron (401<sup>st</sup> TFW), England AFB, LA (F-100)  
 615<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron (401<sup>st</sup> TFW), England AFB, LA (F-100, 19 Mar-23 Jun 1965)  
 416<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron (3<sup>rd</sup> TFW), England AFB, LA (F-100, 18 Mar-23 Jun 1965)  
 A squadron (12<sup>th</sup>, 44<sup>th</sup>, or 67<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron) from the 18<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing (Kadena AB, Okinawa)  
 8<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron (405<sup>th</sup> FW), Clark AFB, Philippines (B-57, arrived 23 Jun 1965)  
 476<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron (479<sup>th</sup> TFW), George AFB, CA (F-104, 19 Apr-Jul 1965)

**Page 12, 8<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron:**

**An aircraft loss occurred on 30 June 1965**, when it crashed and burned while taking off from Da Nang. Both crewmen escaped with only minor injuries. The B-57 was preparing to takeoff on a combat mission when it developed engine trouble. The crewmen immediately jettisoned their load of 750 pound bombs and wing tip fuel tanks. The bombs rolled harmlessly down the runway, however one of the tip tanks ignited and the aircraft caught fire and exploded after leaving the south end of the runway.

**Page 13, Det 5, Pacific Air Rescue Center:**

**Detachment 5**, had the capability to perform extended air search and rescue over water and rescue and firefighting over land. Throughout the period Det 5, PARC, had two HH-43F's, one HH-43B and four HU-16's assigned at Da Nang on temporary duty. The TDY period for the HU-16 (Albatross) was approximately two weeks. The aircraft came from the 31<sup>st</sup> Air Rescue Squadron, Clark Air Base, Philippines, and two from the 33<sup>rd</sup> Air Rescue Squadron, **Nakhon Phanom West Air Base, Thailand.**

**The first rescue in 1965**, was accomplished on **8 February** when a Vietnamese Air Force officer bailed out from his A1-H aircraft approximately five miles north of Da Nang. The VNAF pilot was picked up within minutes after leaving his disabled aircraft.

**During the January through 7 July period**, Detachment 5, performed 15 live pickups of downed airmen. Four were made by HU-43's and 11 by the HU-16's. In addition, 12 recoveries were made of personnel who died in crashes near the vicinity of Da Nang Air Base.

**Page 15, 311<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Squadron:**

**The 311<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Squadron equipped with 17, C-123 "Providers"** was the only permanently based tactical aircraft unit at Da Nang Air Base.

**Page 16:**

**Operations into all northern airfields during the January through June period** were met with an increasing amount of accurate Viet Cong ground fire due to the stepped up Viet Cong activity in the **I Corps** area. Several 311<sup>th</sup> personnel have been wounded on air-drop and resupply missions and one Vietnamese passenger was killed during a landing on final approach at Da Nang.

**Appendix 1, Message, 23 SLE Da Nang AB, RVN to 2 Air Div Tan Son Nhut AB  
RVN, Sequence of Attack on Da Nang on 1 July 1965.**

1. (a) **At approximately 0120, 1 July 1965, a band of VC infiltrators** entered the south-southeast corner of the base.  
(b) **The VC then ran through this area where alert C-130 and F-102 aircraft are parked, hurling hand-grenade type charges and spraying the area with semi-automatic weapons fire.**  
(c) **At approximately 0125, 81 mm mortar fire began to land on the south end of the field.** Fourteen mortar craters were discovered in the vicinity of the alert area, while many other mortars landed in other parts of the airfield.  
(d) **Small arms fire was heard throughout the remainder of the night,** however, no actual encounter with the VC were made.  
(e) **The immediate actions of the perimeter forces,** composed of US Marine Corps personnel and external security forces composed of ARVN soldiers are unknown. No increased Marine activity was noted until approximately 0220 hours when numerous patrols were observed along and between the south perimeter fences.  
(f) **The internal security forces (Air Police) immediately assumed an expanded security posture by doubling all security post with off-duty forces.** The Primary SAT was in the immediate area of the VC infiltration minutes after the first explosions were heard. A secondary SAT was in service and standing by as a back-up force.
2. **The method of penetration into USAF Restricted Areas was to infiltrate Marine Corps perimeter defenses** and then cutting holes through the perimeter fences. The infiltrators were observed by the Air Police Area Supervisor and Entry Controller subsequent to the first explosion. The Area Supervisor immediately instructed the Entry Controller to notify CSC and then he began to exchange fire with the enemy.
3. **No joint security/defense command center** was, or has been established.
4. **The general internal security posture is DEFON 3.** All internal security forces are responsible for the security of their operational resources and do not receive guidance from a joint command center.
5. **Because of severe shortage in manpower,** communications, and vehicles, USAF operational resources were not afforded protection as per AFM 207-1. USAF Air Policemen are utilized for close in and close boundary positions and the USMC, VNAF and 178<sup>th</sup> Signal Co provide distant perimeter protections.
6. **Approximately 80% of the immediate base perimeter is the responsibility of the USMC.** 10% is the responsibility and belongs to VNAF and 10% that of the 178 Signal Company. The area of infiltration occurred through the USMC area of responsibility. External base protection in depth is provided by the Da Nang Special Sector. Exact figures as to the amount of personnel deployed for perimeter and external defense are not available at this level and should be requested through MACV or I Corps channels.

**Extract, 23<sup>rd</sup> Air Base Group history, January through June 1965 (AFHRA Call Number K-GP-AB-23-HI, Jan-Jun 1965, IRIS Number 437543), Supporting Document 8, End of Tour Report by Maj William W. Burnett, 311<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Sq, 315<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Gp, 3 May 1965, page 8:**

**In our mission, we are required to furnish flare support for various contingencies such as relief of beleaguered outposts, or support of a night operation.** There have been times when we have been unable to furnish sufficient crewmembers to act as **“Flare Kickers”** due to the requirements of our regularly scheduled commitments. During these times we have called upon our clerical help for assistance and they have responded magnificently. They have unselfishly and untiringly stood alert along with our regular crewmembers, launched on flare missions and at the same time continued to fulfill their regular duties. These requirements resulted in their being available on alert status as often as every other night. Yet when application was made to award these people pay in the form of hazard pay, there were not enough slots available to allow them to be given the hazard pay.