

U-TAPAO RTAFB
635th Security Police Squadron
B-52, Battle damage! CRASH - 26 DEC 1972
Homing Bird
by **HL Hartford**

On patrol with my Sentry Dog Tiki, one windy night, a B-52 with battle damage was struggling to wing home. The huge bomber, which had been shot up with rockets while making a bombing run, was limping toward base. It made one pass overhead then made a slow turn over the sea to the down wind side of the base for another attempt at landing. Most of the bomber's lights were blown away, or malfunctioned, as he approached on final. I could recall it like a kid watching a movie of the good guy hanging on. As the pilot banked and *slipped* the wounded mammoth in the sky, I was suddenly aware that I was calling out loud to myself, urging him *Up, up left ... left a little more*, and so on until suddenly *my God* she went down in flames. I felt so empty. I don't know any SPs that had watched her slowly falling that did not feel a part of that tragedy.

Later, I was told the tail-gunner and one of the pilots were the only two still alive before the crash. I also heard that one of our guys returning to base went through the debris and pulled a crewman out. I never knew if any of the crew made it, I could only hope and pray that they did. I don't care who you are, but on an Air Base we're all a team. As Security Police, we do our best in keeping watch over the base and protecting men and aircraft so they can sleep and work in relative safety and fight the air war.

During the morning hours, as the B-52's were returning to base, I recall what we called *the line up* of B-52's approaching the Air Base from a bombing mission. As they lined up, one after another turned on their landing lights, and at times you could see like pearls on a string with as many as seven to ten sky-lit jewel B-52's approaching. One by one they touched down, as if a new babe safe in its mother's arms.

It has been almost 30 years and still I wear an MIA bracelet with the name Thomas Bennett, from MS, who was a B-52 pilot from U-Tapao RTAFB.

Hello: I remember the night of the B-52 crash at U-Tapao RTAFB. I was a jet engine mechanic working flight line maintenance and I and my crew had gone to the USO for something to eat. We heard the noise of the explosion and came out in time to see the light of the fire. I don't remember the fate of the pilot who survived but learned later that the gunner died at Clark. I believe the pilot may have died there as well. We never learned the names of the crew and I always wondered about that.

I remember also being at the outdoor theater at the beach a number of times and watching flares light up the beach when sappers came in by boat and occasional gunfire that accompanied it. Made for some interesting retreats to the barracks on my bicycle!

Regards,

Dennis Parham, TSgt, USAF(Ret)
U-Tapao, 307th FMS, Dec 72- Dec 73

Courtesy of:

U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Airfield Historical Brief

http://www.vdha.us/stuff/contentmgr/files/c95deb515383cc7442fe9b4dc878a0f8/docs/u_tapao_historical_brief.pdf

Operation Linebacker II



Operation Linebacker II was a United States military operation during the Vietnam War. Sometimes referred to as the "Christmas Bombings" (or "The Eleven Day War" by aircrews), the operation in late December, 1972 had the heaviest bomber strikes of the war, ordered by U.S. President Nixon against targets in North Vietnam. Operation Linebacker II was a resumption of the Linebacker bombings conducted from May to October, except that the emphasis would be on massive attacks by B-52s rather than fighter aircraft.

At U-Tapao 54 B-52s were engaged in Linebacker II. The U-Tapao force had suffered the first loss of a B-52 to a Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM) in November, and had had two others damaged by SAM hits.

On 26 December 1972 two of U-Tapao's B-52s turned back for mechanical reasons but their cells continued the mission. As a consequence a B-52 in each cell was lost, including one that crash-landed at base, killing most of its crew.