



Attack on U-Tapao, Royal Thai Air Base



It started out as another normal night on Sunday, January 9, 1972, when we were posted for another night of duty at U-Tapao with our dogs. We were tasked with securing the 18 miles of the base perimeter and were the first line of defense. Unknown at the time, a team of sappers were preparing to attack our B-52s parked in their revetments.

The attack route started from along the Sattahip-Ban Chang Highway, through four holes cut in the perimeter fence. They crossed the open field, up to the roadway where they were detected. They then ran to the B-52 area and exited through the bomb dump.

The following account of that night was taken from statements given by members of the 635th SPS K-9 Section:

Security Police K-9 handler, Sergeant Al Stoltenburg and his dog, Mac* (3M72), were assigned the post along the access road to the bomb dump. The road ran along the north flight line from the gate on the Sattahip-Ban Chang Highway to the gate of the bomb dump. Trucks delivering munitions from the deepwater port at Sattahip used this route.

Around 0130 hours, somewhere in the area between the kennel area and the flight line, Mac alerted and led Al to two figures laying in the grass along side the roadway. When Mac was within three feet of the intruders, they both opened up with small arms, firing 6 to 8 rounds as they rose up, thankfully missing both Al and Mac.

Then as the sappers ran towards the B-52s, Al called in the attack, completing the report just as they reached the B-52 area. One of the sappers was able to get near enough to one B-52 to throw a satchel charge into the intake of an engine, and under the wings of two others. One intruder confronted one of the flight line maintenance personnel and attempted to fire on him, but the gun was either empty or misfired.

There were three explosions heard by all personnel working that night. By now the radio was abuzz with traffic, dispatching response teams and back-up forces to the area. The sappers chose an exit route through the bomb dump. This decision proved fatal to one of the attackers during the firefight with posted and responding Security Police forces. The area was lighted by a number of flares and lights from the towers in the area. One attacker was killed and the second was able to escape over the fence and disappear into the jungle outside the base.

The Security Police and Security Police Dog Handlers not posted at the time of the attack responded and were assigned a post or to special detail. Hours after the attack, and after dawn, a thorough search of the area was conducted for any live ammunition left over from the attack. Numerous other charges and detonators were discovered. The charges had either fallen off the sappers as they ran, or did not detonate because the "quick" fuses being used were not seated far enough into the charge.

The damage to the three B-52s was minor with one B-52 having Engine Number 7 replaced and the other two having bullet holes in the fuselage repaired. All three aircraft flew sorties within 24 hours of the attack.

Final thought of the handlers after that night: ***We all remembered the long night, getting off post at about midday, and going straight to the club to wash away the night.***

Many thanks to the following Security Police K-9 Handlers who contributed to this story: Scotty Linney, Rick Maurer, Jim Mayer, Frank McKinley, Tom Ozuna, Al Stoltenburg, Bernie Turnbloom, David Wymer and Larry Zacker.

The untold story.....

**USAF Sentry Dog Mac, Tattoo 3M72, arrived at U-Tapao in the 1968 build up - commonly called the "Third Wave". He arrived from Lackland AFB, TX on September 22, 1969, with his original handler, A1C Wayne Luker. Mac was assigned to Al Stoltenburg in October of 1971.*

This article appeared in **The Bangkok Post** on January 11, 1972.

U-TAPAO RAID FAILS

Vietnamese killed in daring attack

A SUICIDE squad of two communist terrorist infiltrated the American B52 base at U-tapao in Rayong Province in the early hours of yesterday and attempted unsuccessfully to put the giant bombers out of commission.

One of the infiltrators, a Vietnamese was shot dead and the other was captured, Air Chief Marshal Dawee Chulalaspaya, Chief of Staff, Supreme Command said last night on his return from the base.

While one of the engines of the B52 had to be replaced, two others which were slightly damaged were ready to fly on missions by noon yesterday and all three were operational, he said. The terrorist were believed to have made their entry into U-tapao Base around 8 p.m. Sunday.

At that time a miniature bus carrying eight to ten persons shuttled along the highway outside the fence of the base. It moved back and forth between three guard posts. The guard houses are 100 metres apart. The middle of these three guard posts was vacant and the spotlight was out.

Later, it was learned that the light had been out of order and the guard house unoccupied for the past seven days.

The movements of the bus were later suspected by investigators to have been an attempt to attract the attention of the guards in the other two posts. While this diversionary tactic went on, the infiltrators lying among the tall grass of the embankment got through the barbed wire of the fence. The wire was cut in four places.

Thai and American investigators are trying to find out how the terrorist managed to cross the half-kilometer of clear ground towards the flight line of the B52s. There is a mound of earth with five sandbagged guard posts near the flight line. It appeared that the terrorists took several hours to negotiate the distance to the aircraft.

One of the infiltrators managed to plant a charge under Engine No 7 of the nearest eight-engined B52. At 1:30 a.m. the bomb exploded causing fire and flames and damaging Engine No 7 and the one nearest to it, Engine No 8. Engine No 7 had to be replaced but Engine No 8 could be repaired.

Two other explosions followed. One caused by the throwing of a charge under the next plane put some dents in the fuselage and damaged a few rivets.

The plane was ready to fly by noon yesterday. One report said that the third explosion did similarly slight damage to a third B52 but another report said that the charge damaged a truck.

Suddenly, four flares shot up, brightening up the field. They had presumably been tripped by the terrorist. An American Air Force sentry saw one of the terrorists near the fence and challenged him. When the terrorist raised his gun the sentry shot him. He fell down dead. In his right hand he was holding a .38 gun with two shots already fired. His left hand held a grenade. Four plastic bombs were found hanging from his belt. On his body was found an identification card giving his name as Som Sukcharoen, 30, of Amphoe Muang, Nakhon Phanom. It was believed the identification was false. Air Chief Marshal Dawee said he was of Vietnamese nationality.

Thai and American officials are questioning two Thai guards supposed to have been on duty near the fence which had been cut. They were identified as Boonlue Angsupan and Visut Suthipan.

A helicopter search has been launched over land and sea to find out how the terrorists had come and to find if any others were hiding in the vicinity. Vehicle checkpoints have been set up to look for the strange minibus which had been observed outside the base.

Nobody on the base was hurt. Thai and American officials are closely co-operating in the inquiry. Governor Somporn Thanasathit of Rayong was giving the matter his personal attention. They are puzzled by the manner in which the terrorists managed to gain access into the base and to move across a clear area to the flight line without having been observed or challenged.

It was admitted by both Thai and American officials that infiltration by small group into a big base was always possible. The investigators want to know why the spotlight which had been out of order for the past week had not been replaced or repaired. Alsations trained for patrol duty had barked at the time of the maneuverings of the minibus. But no attention was given to them because of the diversionary tactic



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