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NOVEMBER 1965, 6252nd Air Police Squadron, K-9, Da Nang Airbase, South Vietnam (SVN).

USAF K-9 sentry dog handlers patrolled base perimeters, ammo dumps, dense foliage areas and jungle-areas, and at night along the Air Base runway. All handlers knew it was never wise to linger near runway's edge, lest a battle-damaged aircraft's combat landing turn into a controlled-crash or worse a devastating explosive crash.

That night, Blackie (X129) and I patrolled the field area west of Da Nang Air Base's only active runway with the post covering a thousand-foot box-shaped. The area contained scrub brush, marsh-water ponds, elephant grass, and the graded construction area for the new parallel runway – plenty of concealment for Charlie and critters to hide in.

The night had been long and wet, with low clouds and patches of heavy fog dropping to ground-level and only blue runway lights visible. By midnight I had quartered my post twice and was back up along the runway. I knew I was silhouetted by the dim blue runway lights, and anxious to disappear back into the night fog and wet elephant grass.

During the next few seconds the following occurred:

Blackie at heel cocked his head looking up toward the fog-cloud only a few yards above the runway. Blackie pointed his ears up, puffed his cheeks as he was huffing and bobbing his huge head to direct my attention to whatever was alerting him. Without warning, the heavy fog-cloud suddenly flared with the glow of an aircraft's brilliant landing lights! I was near blind going from night-vision to being hopelessly exposed as if caught in a brilliant search-light beam that turned the fog-bang into a giant halo of glowing cloud-fog. I suddenly understood that a giant C-130 Hercules four-engine aircraft was emerging through the cloud-bank and diving in a Combat Landing with high-beam landing-light pointed directly at me: The C-130 was not aligned with the runway and would land with the left wheels and huge propellers off the runway and on the dirt shoulder, with its wing-span extending 60 feet further from the runway than I was standing.

Banking sharply, the C-130 slammed to earth on the runway's shoulder – there was nowhere to run. I was positive I was going to die. Blackie and I ran faster away from the runway than I thought possible, and heard and saw a huge landing light cowling bounce past us, as a vortex of dirt and fog nearly blinded me. The roar of four C-130 engines at full throttle churned the air swirling a maelstrom of carnage within feet from my head and may have muffled the fact that I indeed had a prehistoric death-cry that was very real!

All the above occurred within a few seconds, and as I pulled Blackie and dove in to a foxhole designed for a K-9 Team-size fox hole in hope of seeing the bottom soles of a TI's brogans at Lackland AFB, Texas.

I was shaking and looked over the sandbagged fighting-hole at the sight of the careening Hercules wig-wag fighting to gain the runway trailing, then desperately powering reverse-engines and as it disappeared into the fog. The vortex of fog-dirt swirled and muffled the sounds of the C-130 that apparently made it further down the runway.

I was shocked and questioned what had just happened and why I was alive. I could see the furrows gouged by the wheels of a 77 tons aircraft, and also that the landing-light cowling that had crashed into the sandbagged bunker and bounced away.

When my constricted voice returned to where I could speak, I radioed Central Security Control and reported the off-runway hard-landing and that someone should clear the runway of debris strewn for several hundred yards.

Since November 1965, when I hear a prop-aircraft fly over from a nearby municipal airport, I can tense and feel myself glancing up for as if I were again endangered by a Hercules flying out of the fog at me. I find myself holding my breath and my heart pounding until I am sure I am safe.

To understand the absolute suddenness and shocking sight of a C-130 flying hell-bent through a fog bank, please copy/paste the following link:

<http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=usaf+combat+landing&gpvt=usaf+combat+landing&FORM=VDRE#view=detail&mid=80545A9E050FB6FDDAC980545A9E050FB6FDDAC9>

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