THAILAND

SAPPER ATTACK, UBON RTAFB!

13 Jan 1970

8th SPS (PACAF)
Ubon RTAFB, 8th SPS, 13 Jan 1970

by CMSgt (Ret.) Bob Laymon
© 2004

"Hatch had landed in the middle of a communist sapper attack targeting the 16th SOS AC-130A "Specter" gunships parked in the middle of the airfield ... "

General (Ret.) Monroe W. Hatch, Jr.
As told by *then*-Major Monroe W. Hatch, Jr.,
T-39A instructor pilot and HQ 7th Air Force standardization and evaluation flight examiner

General (Ret.) Monroe W. Hatch, Jr. *served as a Scatback T-39A pilot and 7th AF stan/eval flight examiner from June 1969 – 1970 and provided the following first-person account of the second (of three) sapper attack on Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB), Ratchathani, Thailand during the Vietnam War.*

A major at the time of the 1970 Ubon attack, Hatch would go on to become the vice chief of staff of the U.S. Air Force from February 1987 – May 1990.

Scatback T-39A Sabreliner, Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN (photo: Lt Col Jim Reed, Scatback IP, June 1969 - June 1970)

Background: *"Scatback" was the in-theater classified courier airlift system transporting elements of the daily HQ 7th Air Force FRAG order, pre-strike/gun camera/BDA photos, Intel papers, official mail, small cargo and passengers in a courier program predating what we now know (generically) as FedEx®. Scatback also provide DV/VIP combat airlift throughout the SEA theater of operation.*

Then-Major Monroe Hatch was piloting Scatback "Delta" (the night combat courier mission) on Tuesday, 13 January 1970. Major Hatch performed a routine night landing to the southwest on Ubon runway 23, at approximately 0200 hrs. Unbeknown to Hatch, **earlier in the evening** Ubon airfield had been placed under ground attack - alert condition **Yellowsince 2121 hrs**.

During the rollout after touchdown, an unknown person in dark clothing ran across Ubon runway 23/05 at midfield, directly in Hatch's T-39 landing light, startling both he and his copilot. Hatch also observed (in his peripheral vision) an unknown number of additional shadowy persons along the edge of the Ubon runway during his landing.

Hatch initially dismissed the individual in his landing light as perhaps a local airfield worker, somehow in the wrong place, at the wrong time. He continued the landing rollout to the end of runway 23. After landing, he turned right into the EOR run-up area and then began to back-taxi northeast on the Ubon parallel taxiway, near the 8th TFW “Wolfpack” F-4D revetments.

Immediately thereafter, at 0202 hrs, Ubon tower came up GUARD channel 243.0 UHF with a general alarm transmission that Ubon airfield was under ground attack - alert condition: **Red - Option 1**.

Hatch had landed in the middle of a communist sapper attack targeting the 16th SOS AC-130A “Specter” gunships parked in the middle of the airfield, along the horseshoe in the Ubon parallel taxiway.

Looking directly out of his windshield, Hatch observed the developing battle in front of them. He stopped his T-39A on the parallel taxiway and shutdown his Pratt & Whitney J60-P-3A engines. Hatch, his Scatback copilot and enlisted flight mechanic deplaned into the darkness of the Ubon taxiway.

Approximately 150 yards east of their Sabreliner, a battle was raging on-base between 16 armed PAVN SOF sappers and Sabotage Alert Teams (SATs) of the 8th Security Police Squadron, reinforced by Thai Army units. USAF 81mm

motor pit crews began launching illumination rounds into the night sky to help identify enemy forces on the airfield. Tracer rounds pierced the night sky.

0203 hours: Remaining near their parked aircraft, Hatch was an eyewitness as Ubon SAT bunker Echo-36 fired an M-79 grenade, at point blank range, hitting one of the PAVN sappers with satchel charges strapped to his body, resulting in a large (and obviously fatal) detonation.

By 0206 hours, the battle continued to rage and had moved quickly to within less than 50 yards of the AC-130s parked on their hardstands along the parallel taxiway.

As USAF SAT and Thai Army forces gained the upper hand over their communist enemy, the battle of Ubon subsided. Hatch and his crew reentered their Scatback T-39A Sabreliner, performed their scheduled exchange of classified courier material for the 8th TFW and then departed Ubon RTAFB.

This had been one of the most unique sorties of the Scatback Delta combat courier mission that flew nightly from Tan Son Nhut AB, Saigon RVN to the five tactical fighter wings stationed in Thailand.

To learn more about the 13 January 1970 battle of Ubon, go to the Vietnam Security Police Association (USAF) web site:

8th Security Police Squadron
NVA / Target Ubon!
July 28, 1969
January 13, 1970
June 4, 1972

By Kelly S. Bateman TexasK-9@swbell.net
8th SPS, K-9 Sentry Dog Handler,
(Baron 279M) 3/70 - 3/71
© 2000

Click here: > Ubon RTAFB Sapper Attacks: 1969; 1970; 1972

About the author: CMSgt (Ret.) Bob Laymon served as an enlisted aircrew member with the 7th Air Force T-39A "**Scatback**" combat courier mission. During this tour of duty, he flew 725 sorties, and logged 917 flight hours, of which 550 hours were logged as combat for sorties flown to locations in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. He was credited with 185 combat missions (from September 1971 – September 1972).

Chief Laymon is currently a member of the Randolph AFB Speaker's Bureau. He has presented his PowerPoint briefing about "Scatback" to numerous military and civilian groups interested in the heritage of the Southeast Asia war.