

Account of the Da Nang AB Sapper Attack, July 1, 1965
by: 1LT Fred Reiling (LTC Ret.)

Received your message and thought I'd send you some details of the Da Nang memory of the night of Sgt Jensen's death.

At the time, we had three areas on the base that we were guarding. First, was north end of the ramp where the aircraft that were scheduled for sorties either in country or up north were parked. As I recall they were mostly F-104's, A-1's and B-57's. Secondly, was the bomb dump which was across the runway about mid field. Finally, was the south end where F-102's and C-130's were parked.

The 102's were TDY from Clark and were for air defense of the base. The crews were on "Alert" and lived in tents between the taxiway and runway.

The C-130's were Ranch Hand aircraft and were used in the Agent Orange program. They were parked on the east side of the taxi way in the newly completed revetments (replaced sandbag revetments).

On the night in question we had a guard adjacent to the tents the F-102 aircraft people were in. We also had a SAT team that was responsible for all the other transit a/c that were parked all over the ramp. The actual perimeter of the base was the responsibility of the 3rd Marines, and we had the pockets of our resources that we guarded. We also had people spread out in the base proper to protect the people, especially in the "compound" where most of us lived.

That night, Sgt Jensen was performing duty as coffee patrol and hence he had the truck (I thought it was a ton and a half but not sure) and was on the south end at the time of the attack. He was delivering coffee to the guard on the F-102 tents when we started receiving incoming mortar round. I don't recall the exact time but it was late enough that most of us were in bed.

The mortars woke me up and I was at the desk down by the gate of the compound in minutes. As I recall, we took about a dozen incoming rounds of mortar, all hitting in the area of the south overrun and doing virtually no damage. At the same time the sappers came under the concertina fence behind the C-130 revetments. Best estimates were that there were between four and six of them.

They opened small arms fire and Sgt Jensen returned fire with his side arm, a .38 revolver. He had left his M-16 at the desk when he got the coffee jug. He fired and then moved to the rear of the truck where he took up a defensive position and continued firing. He was killed in the gunfight and the sappers continued on with their bandolier grenades, placing them under the aircraft and attempting to get to the tents where the people were sleeping.

Sgt Jensen, by standing his ground, kept the sappers out of the tents and consequently saved many lives, but gave his own by his action. When the sappers had expended their grenades they left the base the same way they had entered.

Due to the heavy smoke, fires and exploding ammunition we set up a perimeter around the area and waited for daylight. Sometime during the night, Sgt Jensen's body was brought out of the area. Best I can remember a SSGt Oates (SAT team leader) and a Army officer had found him and brought him out. He apparently had been killed where he was found, at the back of the truck.

The guard in the area had taken cover in his foxhole and was not injured. The attached pictures are of the area the morning after the raid. The one of the tents with the water tower visible in the background and the two lockers is the approximate area where Sgt Jensen was killed. The aircraft were all in the immediate area.

The two photos of the flag flying at Base Headquarters were taken on the Fourth of July 1965 - the only day of the year that we were allowed to fly the American Flag, hence it got a lot attention.

Nuff for now, this brings back memories that I haven't thought of in many years. I did remain in the Air Force and retired after 23+ years as a L/C, but that is another story.

Can't remember many of the names, but Warren Milburg and I were the first two PCS cop officers in Da Nang, replaced by L/C Art Phillips, Major Marion Hopkins (Ops officer) and numerous Capt's and Lt's. Also had a CASAF package from Cannon TDY which had Lt Howie King as leader. Howie ended up an O-5 or 6. Col Jim Black and Al Feldman were our bosses in Saigon.