

Account of the Da Nang AB Sapper Attack, July 1, 1965

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(Courtesy of USMC Medium Helicopter Squadron 365

<http://www.angelfire.com/de/HMM365Vietnam/hist65july.html>)

JULY 1, 1965: At 0130 hours the Viet Cong attacked the airfield. All hands got to the trenches with no losses. Good discipline. No rounds fired. Mortar attack on GVs (C-130) and F-105s. Two GVs destroyed and one damaged. One F-105 destroyed, two damaged. Two Marines injured. Lasted only about 5 minutes. Captured VC said that the helos were a target but ran out of time. [mckee]

Private Sica and I were on interior guard along the flight line when, at approximately 0130 hours, we heard what sounded like a mortar. We saw flames near the Air Force C-130s and F-102s across the runway from us. After three mortars came in we hit the deck and ran into a bunker on the flight line. There seemed like around 20 rounds coming in. We could see the aircraft on fire and hear the fuel tanks exploding. The whole area was lit up from the fire. Then we heard small arms fire and saw some flares all around the base. Meanwhile our compound, and probably the whole base, was up and men came running to the flight line to get some M-60 machineguns and ammo. PFC Sica is the armorer so he gave it to them. We also took an M-60, ammo, flares, and hand grenades to our bunker. We were out there until 0430 hours. When things finally quieted down we got relieved off of post. [wink]

Glen Newton and I were on guard between the flight line and the squadron tent area when the first explosion racked the C-130 at the Air Force flight line. Running to place ourselves between what we thought was the point of attack and the tent area, we got to the trenches forming our interior defensive perimeter. I was right behind Newton when he dove into one of the trenches. He let out a loud groan when he landed so I decided to just plop down on the ground above the trench works. More explosions racked the C-130s, illuminating the area. Two snapping sounds above my head caused me to try to move into the trench where Newton had gone but suddenly fire came from my right. I knew that that was the area where a grunt company was billeted and also a couple of Ontos anti-tank tracked vehicles were situated so I figured that it was friendly fire that we were receiving. Still it made me mad to have fire directed at me. Newton and I were looking for targets and we saw two silhouetted figures running through the enflamed C-130s but at that distance we couldn't tell whether they were friend or foe. I told Newton to stay in the trench and I was going to run back to the tent to alert everyone of the attack but before I could move more than a few steps tracers swept past me. It was coming from the Marines of the grunt company. I hit the deck fast. The whole company, it seemed, suddenly had opened fire into the night, firing into the flames, into the darkness, at Newton and me.

Finally, I had enough. I had to get back to the squadron to give the warning, so I jumped up on my feet and yelled as loud as I could, "*Hold your fire! Hold your fire, goddammit! We're Marines over here!*" Now I'm not sure that those trigger happy shooters actually heard me and complied with my cease fire order but it seemed to me that there was a pause in the shooting long enough to allow me to race back to the tent area.

I ran through the tent area yelling, "*Attack! Attack! We're under attack!*" I reached the officers' tents first and some came stumbling out wearing nothing but their skivvies and armed with their .38 revolvers. As more men came out of their tents I pointed to the direction of the fire that Newton and I had received. Most of the men had their M-14 rifles and were placing themselves in the trenches. Bert Goodfallow came stumbling out of his tent, pulling on his trousers while trying to hold on to his rifle, and complaining that I was too loud and over reacting. First Sergeant Howard Force was all over the tent area organizing the ground defense, placing machinegun crews in their firing positions, dispersing the men and officers in a 360-degree defensive perimeter. After a while we could hear the NCOs of the grunt company yelling for their troops to hold their fire. For the first five minutes of the attack fire discipline among the grunts was bad.

Captain Frain slept through the entire attack. [delrosario]

I had originally thought it was Private Hughey who was with me on the night of the attack, but at the HMM-365 reunion in San Diego, August 2000, Glen Newton told me it was him instead. Also he told me that I yelled "Hold your fire! We're Americans over here!". How the years have clouded memories!

This attack was conducted by a local VC sapper squad accompanied by personnel from the *Third Battalion, 18th Regiment, 325th People's Army of Vietnam Division (PAVN)*. A VC sapper who had participated in the attack was captured and told interrogators that his unit had planned the attack for 30 days prior. U.S. Air Force Staff Sergeant Terance Kay Jensen was killed by the Viet Cong during their sapper attack on the Air Force flight line. Two U.S. Marines were wounded.

7/2/65: Doubled guards and got set for a second attack. Flares out all night and firefight at the end of the runway for a couple of hours. Nothing serious. [mckee]