

## VIETNAM



## Air Base

## USAF HISTORY

## Telling it like it was!

**6222nd ABS (MAAG)/Air Police**

**23rd ABG (MAAG)/Air Police**

**6252nd Air Police Squadron**

**35th Air Police Squadron**

**366th Air Police Squadron**

**366th Security Police Squadron**

**6498th Security Police Squadron**

**APO for Da Nang Air Base was APO San Francisco, 96337**

## History

In 1953/54 the French laid a NATO-standard 7,800-foot asphalt runway at Toluene - later renamed Da Nang, however, there were no runway lights or maintenance buildings. The first aircraft stationed by the French Air Force at Toluene were loaned American B-26s "Invaders" of the Groupe de Bombardement 1/19 Gascogne. In 1954 after the Geneva Peace Accords, these B-26's were returned to the United States. On 1 July the newly-independent South Vietnamese Air Force inherited a token force of fifty-eight aircraft. These included a few squadrons of Cessna L-19 observation aircraft, C-47 transports and various utility aircraft. Toluene Airfield was turned over to civilian use, with the South Vietnamese using facilities at Bien Hoa, Nha Trang and at Tan Son Nhut, near Saigon. In 1958 the South Vietnamese Air Force re-established a presence at Da Nang, stationing the 1st Liaison Squadron with Cessna L-19s. The South Vietnamese Army) also used Da Nang as a ranger training facility.

## USAF Use of Da Nang Air Base Da Nang

Air Base became a joint operating airfield when U.S. Forces started to arrive in the early 1960s. As the fighting between the North and South Vietnamese increased, the number of SVNAF units at Da Nang also increased, as did those of the USAF and U.S. Marine air units which swelled the capacity of the base beyond its limits.

Covered and open aircraft revetments were constructed on concrete and asphalt parking aprons to protect the assigned aircraft from NVA mortar attacks. In addition to these permanent assigned combat units, the airfield was a cargo facility for the huge C-141s, C-5s, and contract commercial flights of the Military Airlift Command, as well as a civil terminal for the various domestic airlines. For the air war over North Vietnam, Da Nang was considered the most suitable diversionary airfield in case of emergency. Landings of this nature became commonplace for Thailand-based USAF fighter bombers, reconnaissance aircraft, strike aircraft from the Navy air-craft carriers stationed in the South China Sea and damaged aircraft of all air units stationed throughout South Vietnam.

The USAF forces stationed there were under the command of the United States Pacific Air Forces (PACAF). The APO for Da Nang Air Base was APO San Francisco, 96337 (Advisory Units).



On 1961, President Kennedy approved a long-range radar facility to be sited near Da Nang to observe and report Soviet flights across the Laotian border.

On 11 September 1961 the deployment of a mobile combat radar system began from the 507th Tactical Control Group at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina.

On 15 June 1962 personnel of project Mule Train arrived at Da Nang, operating two Fairchild C-123 Providers. These C-123s delivered supplies to distant outposts established by the Army Special Forces along the border with Laos, and to drop South Vietnamese parachute troops in operations against the Viet Cong. They were designated Tactical Air Force Transport Squadron Provisional-2. The success of project Farm Gate and the Vietnamese AD-6s at Bien Hoa AB led to an expansion of the mission. This success eventually moved the SVNAF 1st Fighter Squadron to stage two AD-6s at Da Nang, flown by American pilots during 1962.

During 1962 Air Police were assigned to the 6222nd Air Base Squadron/Air Police

During April 1963 the arrival of the 777th Troop Carrier Squadron with sixteen C-123s augmented the airlift of the twenty-nine C-123s at Tan Son Nhut Air Base to support the US Special Forces in Vietnam. By June Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) had 16,652 people, 4,790 of them Air Force. On the 28th, Secretary of Defense McNamara froze MACV strength. To clear up the confusing array of USAF units, PACAF formed new ones without expanding manpower authorizations.

In April of 1963, at Da Nang, the 23d Air Base Group was created to organize the USAF advisory units stationed there. The Mule Train C-123 unit became the 311th Troop Carrier Squadron. F-104 Straighteners. The 23rd ABG Op/AP (MAAG) relieved the 6222nd Air Base Squadron/AP (MAAG).

1964/65 the 23d Air Base Group supported various USAF deployed squadrons through mid-1965.

During the early days of Operation Rolling Thunder in 1965, North Vietnamese fighter aircraft became a problem for attacking USAF and US Navy strike aircraft. In response, the 476th Tactical Fighter Squadron of the 479th Tactical Fighter Wing from George AFB, California began regular rotations to Da Nang in April 1965. Their job was to fly MiG combat air patrol (MiGCAP) missions to protect American fighter bombers against attack by North Vietnamese fighters. The effect of F-104 deployment upon NVN and PRC MiG operations was immediate and dramatic--NVN MiGs soon learned to avoid contact without USAF strikes being covered by F-104s.

During the entire deployment of the 476th only two fleeting encounters between F-104Cs and enemy fighters occurred. The F-104s rotated back to George AFB in November 1965 and the F-4Cs of the 390th TFS assumed the 435th's escort mission at Da Nang. Although the F-104s had not shot down a single MiG, their mere presence as escort aircraft had diminished MiG activity to the point where MiGs were no longer considered as a primary threat to USAF aircraft flying missions over North Vietnam.

### 6252nd Tactical Wing

The 6252nd Tactical Wing was activated at Da Nang on 18 July, taking over from the 23d Air Base Group. The 6252nd was responsible as the host unit and for operational squadrons assigned to Da Nang. Squadrons assigned were:

- 8th Bombardment Squadron 8 Jul 1965 - 8 Apr 1966 (B-57)
- 13th Bombardment Squadron 16 Aug 1965 - 8 Apr 1966 (B-57)
- 390th Tactical Fighter 29 Oct 1965 - 8 Apr 1966 (F-4C)

Note: 8/13th BS TDY from 405 Fighter Wing Clark AB Philippines; 390th TFS TDY from 366th TFW Holloman AFB NM.35th Tactical Fighter Wing



The 35th Tactical Fighter Wing was activated on 8 April 1966, replacing the 6252nd TW. Its attached squadrons were:

- 8th Bombardment Squadron 8 Apr - 15 Aug 1966 (B-57)
- 13th Bombardment Squadron 17 Apr - 10 Oct 1966 (B-57)
- 390th Tactical Fighter 8 Apr - 10 Oct 1966 (F-4C)
- 480th Tactical Fighter 8 Apr - 10 Oct 1966 (F-4C)
- 64th Fighter-Interceptor 10 Jun - 10 Oct 1966 (F-102)

Note: 8/13th BS and 64th FIS TDY from 405 Fighter Wing Clark AB Philippines; 390/480th TFS TDY from 366th TFW Holloman AFB NM. On 1 October 1966 the 35th and 366th Wings moved in name only, the 35th Wing replacing the 366th Wing at Phan Rang Air Base, South Vietnam, and becoming an F-100 organization. The two B-57 squadrons also shifted bases, following the 35th Wing to Phan Rang.

Note: The 6252nd Air Police Squadron relieved the 23rd ABG/Air Police (MAAG).

### 366th Tactical Fighter Wing



The 366th Tactical Fighter Wing assumed the host unit function at Da Nang transferring from Phan Rang Air Base South Vietnam on 10 October. The wing moved "on paper" to Da Nang AB, South Vietnam, giving the 366th new personnel, equipment, and facilities. Its attached squadrons were:

- 389th Tactical Fighter 10 Oct 1966 – 15 Jun 1969 (F-4C/D)

Notes: Two small red one white stripe on rudder as squadron marking. Tail Codes F-4C: AA, AD, AG, AH, AS, AT, AW, AX, AY. F-4D: AD, AW. Also used AB AK AJ AU AY, (HB 1969 - 71)

- 390th Tactical Fighter 10 Oct 1966 – 30 Jun 1972 (F-4C/D)

Notes: Blue stripe on rudder as squadron marking. Tail Codes F-4C: BT, BY. F-4D: BN BQ. Also used BD BF BL by (LF 1969 - 71).

- 480th Tactical Fighter 10 Oct 1966 – 15 Apr 1969 (F-4C/D)

Notes: Green stripe on rudder as squadron marking. Tail Codes F-4C: CH CW CY. F-4D: CM CO CS CW CY. Also used CV (HK 1969 - 71).

- 4th Tactical Fighter 12 Apr 1969 – 31 Oct 1972 (F-4E Tail Code: LA)
- 421st Tactical Fighter 16 Apr 1969 – 31 May 1972 (F-4E Tail Code: LC)

Note: TDY from 33d TFW Eglin AFB, Florida

- 35th Tactical Fighter attached 3 Apr – 12 Jun 1972 (F-4D Tail Code: UP)

Note: TDY from 3d TFW Kusan AB, South Korea

- 20th Tactical Air Support 15 Mar – 27 Jun 1972 (O-2A, OV-10)
- 362nd Tactical Electronic Warfare 1 Feb – 27 Jun 1972 (EC-47N/P/Q aircraft)

Operational sorties by the 366th TFW involved flying cover for F-105 Thunderchief strike aircraft, offering numerous opportunities for aerial combat with North Vietnamese MiG aircraft. 366th TFW pilots scored 18 aerial victories in Southeast Asia. In 1972, gained the 362nd TEWS, equipped with EC-47N/P/Q aircraft, and 20th TASS, flying O-2A and OV-10A aircraft. The former was assigned an electronic countermeasures mission; the latter carried out a forward air control mission.

The 366th was transferred to Takhli RTAFB, on 26 June 1972.

## 20th Tactical Air Support Squadron



On 8 May 1965 the 20th Tactical Air Support Squadron (TASS) was activated as part of the 505th Tactical Control Group. On 8 September 1966 the unit was assigned to the 6250th Tactical Air Support Group (Provisional then on 8 December 1966 the squadron became part of the 504th Tactical Air Support Group headquartered at Tan Son Nhut Air Base near Saigon.

The squadron was authorized thirty "Cessna L-19 Bird Dog 0-1 Birddog aircraft, however this allocation proved difficult to fill, since the aircraft were being transferred from other agencies, primarily the Army.

Four months before its organization, the Air Force had 20 aircraft required by the TASSs in Vietnam. The TASS's growth was dependent on and linked to the acquisition of the 0-1s from other agencies. While TASS operations were initiated in August 1965, it wasn't until the end of the year that the 20th TASS received its full complement of aircraft. As the Forward Air Controller (FAC) pilots began to arrive, they were provided with familiarization checkouts and theater indoctrination flights. Upon completion of these requirements, FACs were assigned to support US and Vietnamese Army units. During this period, FACs were given many and varied tactical call signs.

In the latter part of 1965, the 20th TASS was assigned the out-of-country mission, which entailed flying interdiction missions over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in. Its area of operations (AO) was designated TIGERHOUND. To meet its mission requirements it was necessary to establish a number of forward operating bases (FOB) to support the operation. Initially, FOBs were established at Khe Sanh, Kham Duc, and Kontum. Eventually, the sites were expanded to include Da Nang, Dong Ha Air Field, Dak To, and Pleiku. In mid-July 1966, the 20th TASS was assigned another mission and AO. The new mission was designed TALLY HO. The AO was part of the STEEL TIGER area located in North Vietnam from the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) to about 30 miles north of the DMZ. The TALLY HO missions were flown from Dong Ha Air Field. During this period, it was decided that all out-of-country tactical call signs would carry the name of COVEY.

The 0-1, whether by design or accident proved to be an outstanding FAC aircraft. It provided exceptional visibility, was not complicated, and was surprisingly easy to fly. However, as the weapons of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese regulars became more sophisticated, the 0-1's vulnerability was accentuated. This vulnerability was countered by a new FAC aircraft. The new FAC aircraft was the Cessna Skymaster which was a modified Cessna 337. It was an inline dual engine aircraft with one propeller pushing and the

### **other pulling.**

From late 1966 until late, approximately 350 O-2s were contracted for by the Air Force. The first O-2s, to arrive in country were assigned to the 20th TASS. They were then assigned to Dong Ha Air Field and Khe Sanh to provide a more substantial FAC aircraft to deal with the improvements in the enemy's weaponry. By reading some of the narratives submitted by O-2 pilots, the reader will become acutely aware of the O-2's capabilities and limitations. The O-2 was an interim aircraft, but it filled a void while the OV-10 Bronco was being developed.

The OV-10 was a more sophisticated and durable FAC vehicle: it had greater ordinance carrying capability, more loiter time, a bit more power, and a greater array of conventional navigation aids and in-flight instrumentation. The 20th TASS received its first OV-10s in July 1969. The arrival of the OV-10s to complement the O-2As resulted in the transfer of the O-1s to other units. By October 1969, the 20th TASS, while supporting five US Army and six South Vietnam force locations, as well as the out-of-country operations, was operating from Da Nang and eleven FOBs.

As the US Army began to gradually reduce its presence in and 1973, the 20th TASS began withdrawing from its FOBs. In response to the North Vietnamese spring offensive of 1972, the 20 TASS reestablished some of its former FOBs. It is notable to mention that in June 1972, the 20th TASS had tripled its pre-invasion sorties. Further, Covey FACs from Da Nang using OV-10s were a vital and integral part of base defense operations during that year. In January 1973, the 20th TASS ceased operations at its last FOB, and flew its final missions in Vietnam.

The O-2s were turned over to the Vietnamese Air Force, and the OV-10s were assigned to other USAF units in Southeast Asia. On 25 January 1973 the 20th TASS moved, without personnel or equipment, to George AFB, California.

### **Other Units At Da Nang**

The 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, variously operating HU-16s, HH-3Es and HH-53s, was assigned to Da Nang Air Base for most of the war.

The 6th Air Commando/Special Operations Squadron based at Pleiku Air Base maintained a detachment of Douglas A-1EH "Skyraiders" at Da Nang from 1 April - 1 September 1969. The unit flew combat missions, including air support for ground forces, air cover for transports, day and night interdiction, combat search and rescue support, armed reconnaissance, and forward air control. United States Marine Corps: III Marine Amphibious Force; 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, 1st Marine Division; 7th Marine Regiment; 27th Marine Regiment; United States Navy: 3rd Naval Mobile Construction Brigade; Naval Support Activity. Known SVNAF Units At Da Nang (June 1974 Table Of Organization)



Da Nang Air Base was the headquarters of the SVNAF 1st Air Division. 41st Tactical Wing

- 110th/120th Liaison Squadron Cessna O-1A, O-2, U-17
- 427th Transport Squadron C-7B
- 718th Reconnaissance Squadron EC-47
- 821st Attack Squadron AC-119K

### **51st Tactical Wing**

- 213th/233d/239th/253d/257th Helicopter Squadron Bell UH-1H
- 247th Helicopter Squadron CH-47A

### **61st Tactical Wing**

- 516th/528th/550th Fighter Squadron A-37B
- 538th Fighter Squadron F-5A/B/E

### **Capture Of Da Nang Air Base**

**With the capture of Ban Me Thuot and the Central Highlands by North Vietnamese forces in late March 1975, the disastrous retreat by the ARVN had a profound effect on the South Vietnamese troops and civilians around Hue, Quang Tri, and Da Nang.**

**Conflicting orders from Saigon caused confusion, lowered morale, and led to troop movements which defied any logic. As rockets and artillery fire began to hit Da Nang Air Base on 28 March, the 1st Air Division was ordered to evacuate. Those ARVN soldiers who did not desert to assist their fleeing families, but instead chose to stand and fight, were overrun.**

**The troops who somehow managed to escape capture then joined the crazed mob attempting to leave Da Nang on anything that floated. Chaos ruled the streets of Da Nang Easter weekend 1975 as military deserters armed with their combat weapons attempted to dictate the terms of their departure. Before the weekend ended some of the most disciplined members of the armed forces would use their weapons against their countrymen in order to gain passage from Da Nang. Approximately 130 aircraft managed to evacuate but over 180 were left behind along with huge stocks of fuel and ordinance. Abandoned were thirty-three A-37s, most of which were captured intact by the NVA. By 30 March one of the largest cities in South Vietnam and its huge Air Field were under communist control. Coming so soon after the loss of Kontum and Pleiku, the fall of Da Nang caused widespread panic and desertion within the South Vietnamese armed forces.**

**The North Vietnamese, sensing that victory was theirs, deployed their reserves and immediately began pushing south along the coast in what was known as the Ho Chi Minh Campaign, the final push toward Saigon.**

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