

Đà Nẵng

Air Base - 1969

Air Force Mortar Crew

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366th SPS,

Đà Nẵng Air Base, Republic of Vietnam

November 1968 to January 1970

The 366th SPS had an 81 mm mortar pit at Đà Nẵng Air Base located between Alpha CO Lines and the perimeter road that circled the Air Base. This pit normally fired illumination missions for the marines. Mortar flare's contain a parachute that is deployed by a small explosive charge. The explosion also ignites a flare that burns very bright. Now a dog can be seen easily by flare light, they will not freeze immediately. However, people, who drop to the ground when the flare is first shot off can be very hard to see. These flares were guaranteed to destroy your night vision. We were never too thrilled with the thought of the Air Force giving SP's **big guns**. Now to a dog handler, a heavy weapon has teeth, weighs over 80 pounds, and is generally called a dog.



One night on Alpha CO lines, we heard the metallic-thump of the **mortar firing**. I took cover and expected to hear the pop of the flare opening, have the bright light appear, and my night vision destroyed. But no flare ignited in the sky. I did hear a faint thud between the mortar pit and my post. A few minutes later, the mortar fired again. Still no flare, and the thud that followed was louder this time! It did not take this dog handler long to realize the *thud* was the mortar round landing, and they were walking the rounds up to where I was. I did not think that a mortar flare landing on your head would be a fun thing. They fired again, but this time the round landed right in front of a Marine tower. The flare popped open and started burning. Now that section of Alpha CO lines was known for sniper fire.

The Marine in the tower was brightly illuminated and needed to get out of the tower as fast as possible. Assisted by gravity, he hit the ground by jumping/falling off the ladder. Unfortunately, he broke his leg. I often wondered if the mortar team painted a *Marine tower* on their scoreboard or, if the Marine was awarded a Purple Heart

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