

Dogs Die Protecting Tan Son Nhut AB

By Tom Mitchell
DogMan Editor

For two months a 7-man VC/NVA recon team surveyed Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Their plan was simple. They would penetrate through the perimeter fence at a point where a drainage ditch would lead them south toward the base's runway.

The fence line was defended by the South Vietnamese Air Force, which had a history of ineffectiveness. Once through the perimeter they would push south through the sentry dog posts, over the runway, and onto the flightline.

The plan would work only if the VC/NVA heavily outmanned the American defenders. It was normal for the VC/NVA to attack only when they had a ten-to-one ratio over the enemy forces. In this case they planned to

new runway construction and the 10-foot deep drainage ditch was Dale Sidwell and Toby on Kilo-2; George Bevich and Duke on Kilo-3; Leroy Marsh and Rebel on Kilo-4; and Robert Thorneburg and Nemo on Kilo-5

About three hours after taking post, K-9 section leader Tommy Shehan came by to give Laudner a fifteen minute break.

About 0050hrs, December 4, Shehan went to Sidwell's post, Kilo-2, to give him a break. Then Shehan went on to Kilo-3.

Pulling up to Kilo-3 at

he saw them when I did." Marsh called urgently into his radio, let Rebel off-leash, and slithered back into a sandbagged bunker.

Almost simultaneously, the mortar rounds began hitting on the other side of the runway, on the

dog, Nemo, off-leash. Nemo, as with Rebel, rushed full speed toward the oncoming VC. He took on two of them, taking both to the ground. A shot was fired and Nemo went down, the round going into his mouth and back out through his right eye.

Thorneburg opened fire, but was overwhelmed by the force of the attack. He too was shot and fell to the ground.

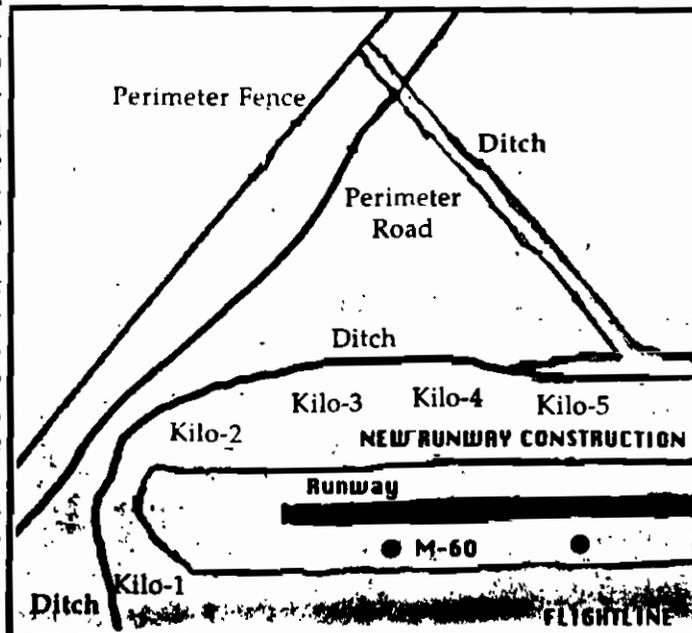
The VC continued to run past Shehan. He regained consciousness, but was unable to

the air dropping flares. They would drop over 500 by dawn. It was like daylight at 0125 ... it also created large and evil looking shadows. (For the dog team the added light was not necessarily the best thing. The dogs could see and hear in the dark. Once it became light that advantage was diminished.)

About 0135 some of the VC racing across the runway got tangled in the concertina wire placed around the runway. The ones that got through the wire headed toward the Security Police bunkers on the flightline side of the runway.

Each of the bunkers held one M-60 and two riflemen with M-16s. The VC/NVA were cut to pieces. Not one of them made it to the flightline.

The attack was momentarily pushed back by 2100 hours.



...the heavy weapons unit would utilize mortars from outside the perimeter.

2300hrs, December 3, 1966. It was time to begin the attack. The VC/NVA headed toward the base perimeter.

USAF sentry dog handler George Bevich was not feeling well the night of December 3, so he switched posts with VDHA member, Larry Laudner.

Bevich and his dog, Duke, had been assigned to Kilo-1, one of the largest of the K-9 posts at Tan Son Nhut (TSN), requiring quite a bit of walking. Laudner and his dog, Cubby, 612E, were supposed to patrol Kilo-3, a smaller and easier post just south of the drainage ditch ... it was pretty wide open and could be covered without walking around too much. Kilo-3 would be easier to patrol for the ill Bevich.

Laudner and Cubby were posted on Kilo-1, at the end of the runway, at about 2100hrs. To the north of his post, between the

on the radio, that he was there to give him a break. Bevich did not respond. Getting out of the truck Shehan saw a large group of VC/NVA rushing toward him. They had overrun Kilo-3, killing Bevich.

Shehan jumped from his truck as the VC/NVA ran past him, tossing a grenade at the truck. The grenade went off inside the truck, throwing Shehan to the ground. Fragments of the grenade tore through him, knocking him unconscious.

Marsh, on Kilo-4, was the first to call-in the attack. "They were about 50 yards out from my post," said Marsh. "Rebel didn't alert because the wind was blowing the wrong direction. But



Ditch the VC came down during the attack

flightline, On Kilo-1, Larry Laudner and Cubby jumped into the ditch for protection from the mortar attack.

Most of the dog handlers had experienced mortar attacks before. On April 13, 1966, the VC hit TSN with some 250 mortars, killing seven Americans, injuring 111.

But this attack was different. This was a ground attack.

Marsh, on Kilo-4, knew when he let Rebel go he might not come back, but that is what he was trained to do. Sentry dogs were trained to alert and then attack.

"I had to send Rebel out. The VC were all around us. I had to slow the attackers so the others could organize."

Rebel rushed forward going for the throat of the enemy. There were no screams. The attacker died instantly. Moments later, automatic fire from another VC killed Rebel.

On Kilo-5, Robert Thorneburg had also let his

watch and ring from him. ... they too headed toward the flightline with bomb ... in tow.

Laudner heard the progress of the attack on the radio.

"Someone yelled that the



Mortar attacks at Tan Son Nhut were common. This photo from April 13, 1966 attack.

enemy had reached the runway and was pushing toward the flightline," said Laudner. "There was weapons fire from almost everywhere. The radio traffic was so heavy no one could get on and you couldn't tell who was where. It was very confusing."

Three AC-47's were now in

was thinking ... about to get killed by ...

About that ... on the radio ... Vietnamese were ... the area near ... ing the attack ... nonchalantly ...

th ... who ... and ... take ... and ... war ... ter of ...

"This ... when ... them ... of 20 or ... formed ... m ... straight ... ward ... looked ... they might ... South Vie ...

name soldiers, but ... couldn't tell for sure.

I yelled something to the soldiers. I can't remember what I said, but they ducked down. They did not respond. They didn't fire at me either."

Laudner yelled to them that he had a dog. Still no re-

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