

3 Guard Dogs Die Defending Saigon Air Base

SAIGON (AP)—A German shepherd dog named Rebel, hurling his 100 pounds of bone and muscle at the shadowy figures moving in the grass, was the first line of defense.

Rebel's strong jaws snapped across the throat of one of the Viet Cong infiltrators, stifling a scream. His hind legs kicked at the midriff of another.

But Rebel, a sentry dog, was soon dead.

"When I let him loose, I had a notion that he might get shot," said his handler, A2C Leroy Marsh, one of the sentries who patrol the blackness of Saigon's Tan Son Nhut AB at night beyond the floodlit airstrips.

Marsh, 23, added sadly, "But I had to send Rebel out there. The VC were all around, I had to throw in everything, the dog, shots. I had to make time so the others could organize."

Two other sentry dogs were killed as they tried to stem the surge of a suicide force of Viet Cong across the northwest corner of the air base Sunday morning.

The dogs were gunned down as the infiltrators began a headlong rush to cross the main airport runway and get past the line of sandbagged bunkers that make up the main line of defense, then penetrate the flight line where scores of jet fighters and transport aircraft are located.

Only one Viet Cong got through, testimony to the defense by 50 American Air Policemen, who fought the guerrillas to a standstill, killing 18 of them and capturing four.

Airman Marsh, patrolling off the northwest end of the main 10,000-foot airstrip, was the first to notice the infiltrators.

"They were padding along 50 yards out," he said.

"Rebel didn't alert me because the wind was blowing in the wrong direction. But she saw them when I did."

Marsh called urgently into his radio, unclipped Rebel's leash, and slithered

back to his waist-high sandbagged bunker.

A grenade blasted the silence, fragments hitting Marsh's section leader who was driving 100 yards away.

"Then it all came in — mortars, rockets, grenades, machine gun fire," Marsh said. "I dropped to my knees and kept firing."

Marsh was not hit as the Viet Cong infiltrators swept past him towards the main line of defense, the Air Police bunkers spaced 20 yards apart on the flight line side of the main airstrip. Each of the bunkers held one M60 machine gun and two automatic rifles. These weapons cut the attacking Viet Cong to pieces.

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