

Attack On Tan Son Nhut Air Base
December 4-5, 1966 – Time-line of Events

Transcribed by Charles Penley from the After Action Report

04 Dec 1966

0105 - 0315 hours: Mortar and VC penetration assault on Tan Son Nhut.

0105 - 0630 hours: VNAF drops 423 flares over Tan Son Nhut.

0110 hours: Alpha K-19, sentry dog post radios that unidentified individuals were on the north side of his post. Explosions and small arms are heard.

0114 hours: Delta-15, Main Line of Resistance bunker reported that VC were coming through Delta Sector MLR. Reported that his weapon had jammed. VC enter taxiway West-7. Thirteen (13) VC crossed the 07/25 runway and attempted to proceed to the aircraft parking area via taxiway West-5.

This latter element moved into the field of fire of post Delta 11, one of two M-60 machine gun bunkers on the Delta Sector MLR. The machine-gunner posted at Delta 11 is credited with nine VC dead, and two Air Policemen with him in that bunker, firing M-16, are credited with killing the remaining four, three of whom attempted to out-flank the bunker and silence it from the rear.

No VC were observed successfully passing this post, it is assumed that either the entire group of VC was killed, or that any survivors fled north before being sighted by the Air Policemen on the MLR.

While proceeding toward the machine gun bunker, the VC fired at least two B-40 anti-tank grenades (Chicom type 56, USSR Model, RPG-2) at the concrete revetments.

One was fired perpendicular to revetment number 10 and the other was fired at an angle at revetment number 99.

Neither grenade penetrated the full thickness of the concrete, but each penetrated 1 meter into the cement.

0118 hours: Alpha Sector Primary SAT, notified CSC that his vehicle (M- 151 jeep) had been hit by a mortar or grenade and that he was wounded.

0121 hours: 377th Air Police Desk Sergeant notifies 716th MP BN, Saigon.

0130 hours: ARVN coming to assist Tan Son Nhut was ambushed in Vicinity of XS 789963.

0137 hours: Military Police alert force (26 men) in defensive positions southern perimeter near main gate.

0137 hours: "Falcon Red." two VNAF A1H's assault VC mortar positions, west of base at: XS 789958.

0140 hours: Alpha Post K-33 reported that he was in the ditch on his post, that there were VC in the ditch and he was pursuing them.

0200 hours: ARVN make contact with enemy at the Vinatexco Factory.

0205 hours: ARVN deployed outside west perimeter as a blocking force.

0210 hours: Air Police deployed on the west perimeter was as a blocking force. Unknown to them at this time, their position directly blocked the entry - escape route of the VC.

0220 hours: Alpha Post K-33 reported he was hit and wounded but was pursuing the enemy. This sentry dog handler observed a six-man mortar squad near the west side of Alpha Post K-15.

He testified later that he observed the mortar being fired toward the aircraft parking areas. When he proceeded to within 175 meters of the mortar position he took cover and before firing on the mortar crew.

The enemy returned small arms fire but ceased their activity. Despite sustaining a wound below his eye and through his ear, he maintained radio contact with CDS reporting the enemy movements.

0230 hours: High order detonation in the southernmost revetment of the Old Bomb Dump, located in the north central portion of the base. Quantities of US Navy five-inch shells stored in "conex" containers were destroyed.

A satchel charge with sufficient explosive capability to detonate the five inch shell was probably used.

0235 hours: VNAF gun truck sustained minor small arms damage that stopped the engine.

0235 hours: VC Fire subsided. Upon advancing in a search-and-destroy operation toward the enemy position, Air Policemen found the bodies of two Air Policemen, KIA and two wounded Air Policemen were found on or adjacent to the road.

0305 hours: Alpha Post K-20, advised CSC that VC were on his post. He advised that he was receiving fire and requested an ambulance for a sentry dog supervisor who was wounded. This was the last transmission from this handler.

0315 hours: ARVN sends reinforcement to Vinatexco Factory.

0315 hours: CMR unit plotted a mortar location at: XS 791985, approximately 100 meters north of the Vinatexco Textile Mill west of the base.

0330 hours: "Falcon Red," return to base. 0350 hours: Alpha K-21 encountered VC heading west on his post. He engaged them and released his dog, which was wounded by hostile fire.

0400 hours: It is apparent that the VC are attempting to withdraw from base.

0400 hours: All Air Police activities were placed in a static or "hold" status. This action was needed to prevent indiscriminate firing, to clear certain area, to accurately locate all friendly forces and to allow key personnel to regroup and reorganize as deemed necessary.

Throughout the engagement. EOD. personnel had been working closely with the Air Police to strip dead VC of weapons and munitions, to pick up "dud" ordnance, to check suspected booby traps, etc.

0400 hours: EOD teams began a systematic search of the flight line, aircraft and revetments.

0415 hours: Alpha Kilo-21. found A1C Bevich, KIA. 0445 hours: The Law Enforcement Section made a comprehensive search of the cantonment area of the base. E.O.D. made a search of all dining halls and the Airmen's Club and Officers' Club.

Each found to be free of demolition.

0520 hours: ARVN begins sweep operation off post, west end.

0530 hours: No contact with VC for one hour.

0625 hours: Air Police located several VC inside the perimeter, in the field. VC moving north toward the Air Police blocking element. Air Police open fire. VC returned the fire seriously wounding one Air Policeman. A cover of small-arms fire was laid down by Air Police to permit the medical evacuation of the wounded.

Upon cessation of the covering fire two of the VC in the field waved their hands above the weeds Indicating their desire to surrender. Several Air Policemen moved into the field and surrounded the VC while others stood by to provide a cover fire in the event of a ruse.

Both POWs were wounded and were released to VNAF authorities. A sweep of the field in which they were captured disclosed two dead VC.

A short time later two VC surrendered to Air Police near the west end of the 07/25 runway.

0634 hours: First light.

0657 hours: Sun Rise.

0810 hours: US Army Uh-1 a search-and-destroy operation was initiated.

0849 hours: The main runway(07/25) was opened for normal aircraft operation.

0920 hours: The total security force reverted from emergency to normal security posture.

0920 - 2021 hours: Normal base activities.

0920 - 2021 hours: Alpha Post K-34 detected a VC crossing his post and opened fire. This sentry dog post had been the scene of much of the morning's activities and one on which several VC had been killed or captured, as well as the center of the area swept after sunrise.

The combination of these factors, with a confirmed VC sighting at 2021, indicated the start of an attempt by the remaining VC to withdraw by their original route.

2100 hours: Search-and-destroy operation was organized.

2145 hours: Two VC were taken under fire and killed by Air Police QRF personnel moving southward. A third previously undetected VC opened fire and was also killed.

A lull in flare illumination at this time caused a momentary loss of contact with the VC. When flares again lighted the area, the sweep was resumed and a fourth VC was sighted and killed.

This latter VC fell forward still clasping a hand grenade from which the pin had been pulled. When his body was checked by EOD personnel, the grenade rolled from his hand, the handle released and the primer fuse activated.

An EOD man immediately seized the grenade and threw it a safe distance away where it exploded.

2245 hours: Approximately 275 meters due south, another element of the sweep force searching a nearly impenetrable thicket detected a VC when it had approached to within 1 meter of his hiding place.

Simultaneously the VC opened fire which was returned by Air Police killing the VC.

05 Dec 1966

0021 hours: The moon was in the last quarter when it rose and thus afforded no assistance. Terrain which is extremely rough, intersected by deep drainage canals and high mounds of earth, covered in extensive areas by dense growths of brush and elephant grass.

0029 hours: Sentry dog team posted on Alpha K-34 detected and fired on a VC moving through that post. The VC dove into a bush pursued by the sentry dog. A second sentry dog team moved into the bush and discovered three VC.

The handler, A1C Robert Throneburg, withdrew at this time and was shot three times in the shoulder before he had covered more than 5 meters.

Small arms fire was heard from the bush and Alpha K-34's dog emerged wounded. Elements of the sweep force arrived at this time and a fire fight ensued. When, after several unsuccessful attempts, the wounded Air Policeman had been removed from the target area, three hand grenades were lobbed into the bush, killing the three VC who were concealed therein.

0130 – 0630 hours: Search operation continued with negative results and terminated. A total of eight VC were killed in action and one Air Policeman was wounded in action.

2200 hours: A contingent of VNAF personnel entered the area of the planned sweep in front of the Air Police lines. This obstructed Air Police field of fire.

2228 hours: A second VNAF group also entered the search area in front of the Air Police positions.

0825 -1153 hours: Air Police was assembled to conduct a repeat search of the west area of the base, taking advantage of the daylight. No incident or contact with the enemy.

1153 hours: An Air Police observer posted on a 120 foot water tower located In the southwest portion of the base observed a VC moving south of the Old Bomb Dump area in the North Central part of the base.

The observer directed the SAT to the VC position where he was located, engaged and killed.

1200 - 1340 hours: No further contact with the enemy.

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1400 hours: US Army personnel entered their assigned ammunition bunker at the most southern point in the Old Bomb Dump and discovered satchel charges against the side of a conex box containing high explosives.

In addition, two wooden boxes of high explosives and 9 ½ blocks of Composition 3, all US manufactured, were found secreted in the weeds adjacent to the same conex box.

07 Dec 1966

1030 hours: A satchel charge was found In the next bunker to the northwest. In both instances the timer had not been set nor had the detonator been placed in the explosives.

RESULTS

KIA - 3 USAF personnel

KIA - 3 ARVN personnel

WIA - 15 USAF personnel

WIA - 04 ARVN personnel

KIA - 28 VC personnel

Captured - 4 VC personnel, of which three were wounded.