**A Summer Day In DaNang**

**AT1 Richard Bukowski**

Waking up on July 15, 1967, it had all the beginnings of a beautiful day in DaNang, Vietnam. Our Super Connie crew was off the flight schedule so we planned a nice beach party at China Beach. This beach was like many other tropical beaches and had white sand and warm, blue water. Our only job that day was to make sure we consumed 100 steaks purloined from the Air Force galley and to drink a sufficient quantity of “Unlabeled” beer. The beer came from an outdoor stockpile where the weather had worn off most of the labels. We really didn’t care what kind of beer it was, just that it be cold. Our chef, AE1 Richard “Snake” Klajbor, was in charge of the menu and the cooking just as he was when we were flying. The rest of us went swimming, relaxed on the beach, or played killer volleyball. The serenity of the day was only occasionally interrupted when an A-1 Skyraider or a H-1 Huey would make a low pass over the beach.

Life in Da Nang wasn’t so bad then. We had recently moved from tents into wooden barracks. There was an air-conditioned theater where you could see an afternoon movie for 50 cents or sleep for a couple of hours where it was cool. There was still the old, outdoors theater where you could see great movies like, “The Attack of the 50 Foot Woman,” while sitting on the ground watching the movie on a screen made from a sheet. About five miles from our barracks was an Air Force PX loaded with every thing one could ever need in the combat zone.

The Air Force also had a base beautification program going which included placing white picket fences around buildings, painting hundreds of rocks white and arranging them to accent various objects like flag poles, bigger rocks, and walkways. I think the Air Force must have thought a pretty base was a happy base. At this point, for a war thing, DaNang wasn’t too bad.

The Air Base had never seen a major attack so sandbag bunker construction was a relatively low priority. After all, several thousand Marines who patrolled the perimeter protected the base. The only time you really knew there was a war going on was at night when the thunder of artillery could be heard in the distance or when planes would land all shot up.

Even though it was relatively calm someone thought it would be a good idea for VQ-1 to build a bunker close to our three new barracks. This project was undertaken and after expending a lot of effort to fill a lot sandbags a bunker large enough to protect all the VQ flight crews and support personnel was nearly completed by July 15, 1967. The roof, which was supposed to be heavy steel plates topped with sandbags, had not been finished.

It had been a nice day at the beach. Most of us hit the sack early since we were on the flight schedule the next morning and had a get up at “Zero dark thirty.” Around midnight we woke up to some strange noises that many of us had never heard before and probably will never, ever forget! It took a couple of seconds to realize the base was under attack! Most of the personnel ran to the new bunker. There were a few who

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thought it was a good idea to take pictures of the war action from vantage points in the barracks. This turned out to be a very bad idea! My immediate group, made up of AT1 Don Stubbs, AT3 Dick Hea and I, decided not to go to the bunker since it didn’t have a roof. Instead, we crawled under a trusty, double-decker, Navy steel bunk and surrounded ourselves with mattresses. This emergency action was never planned, it just seemed like the right thing to do at the moment. As the rockets exploded around us, my thoughts were if a rocket hit our barracks would our make shift bunker protect us. Most of us were in our 20s and we still thought of ourselves as being bullet proof. That bulletproof idea ended abruptly when the ammunition dump next to the barracks blew up sending a shock wave out and tons of shrapnel that severely damaged all three VQ barracks. The handlebars on my bike that was parked next to our barracks even took a hit! This particular ammunition dump was to be emptied because of its run down condition and the proximity to living quarters. The VC took care of that and it was emptied in one very big bang!

After the big blast our small group was unscathed so we continued to stay under our bunks. The rocket attack eventually stopped but we didn’t see any reason to leave our make shift shelter. A Marine sergeant came through the barracks and asked us if we were ready to come out. We said, “No, we were very happy where we were.” He then told us the barracks was on fire and that fragments from a spent 500 lb. bomb had came through the roof of the barracks and set the top floor on fire. Hearing that provided the impetuous for us to quickly leave our shelter and vacate the burning building! When we got outside, we noticed “Puff,” a C-47 (DC-3) with Gatling guns sticking out the port windows, firing thousands of rounds into the hills, leaving a snake like trail of tracers that moved in sync with the roll and pitch of the plane. What a sight!

We learned that the enemy had launched approximately 50 rounds of 120 and 140 MM rockets, each with a range of five miles. The attack lasted 10 to 15 minutes but seemed much longer. When the ammo dump blew up, hot shrapnel rained down on the VQ bunker burning several men. I remember PO2 Worley being taken to the hospital with blood in his lungs. He was one of those taking pictures of the war when the dump blew up and he ingested a large quantity of the shock wave. He was my relief as I was scheduled to go home in a couple of days. He went back to Atsugi and I stayed several more weeks. There were many injuries but no VQ fatalities. Others on the base didn’t fare as well with 12 servicemen killed that night. Later, many VQ personnel were awarded Purple Hearts as a result of that action. My companions and I felt very lucky that we missed out on that recognition!

Later on we found out some of our planes sustained damage in the revetments plus all of our new barracks were now unlivable. As we sat in the darkness mulling over what had just happened, the sun came up, signaling the start of another beautiful day in DaNang.

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Photo taken by Dave Laney of the attack on DaNang on 15 July

 1967

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