

Attack on U-Tapao Royal Thai Airfield - After Action Report – Declassified
(provided by Larry Zacker - Sergeant - U-Tapao RTAF - 1971-1972)
Transcription of DD form 173 – (Original Classification - Secret)

From: 635 CMBTSPTGP (CC) U-Tapao Afld Thai
To: CSAF (IGS)
Info: CINCPACAF (IGS)
7/13 (IGS)
13AF (IGS)
307 STRATWG U-Tapao

Subj: 10 January 1972 Sapper Attack against U-Tapao (U)

Reference CSAF message 042009Z Feb 72.

The following information is submitted to your per instructions of Col. Taylor PACAF (IGS).

The following is a verbatim extract from the final combat after action report. This has been briefed to the US Ambassador in Thailand by the Chief Security Police, U-Tapao RTNA Thailand and to the Royal Thai Armed Forces Security Center by the OSI Detachment Commander at U-Tapao. It supersedes all previous messages and conflict should be resolved in accordance with the following:

(quote) "

9. (c) Execution:

A. (c) At 0222 hours local, I-47, entry controller to MMS area, observed three men walking south toward the B-52 bomber revetment area. The three were observe at time of first sighting north of the MMS access road. At approximately the same time, I-46, close-in defense bunker, saw three men also. He saw two walking abreast and one following a short distance behind. He ran to his bunker and reported the sighting to Central Security Control. Less than one minute later, K9-3, walking military dog patrol located near the point of detection, was patrolling northeast of the B-52 area along the South side of the access road, and walking in an East-South-Easterly direction when his dog alerted. K9-3 observed two unidentified individuals dressed in camouflaged fatigues lying on the ground approximately ten to fifteen feet in front of him. The two individuals had hand guns (the only weapons observed in their possession by K9-3), and they jumped up and fired at least twice at point blank range at the sentry. He took cover and the two men, while running in the direction of the B-52 area, continued to fire at him. He released his dog which continued to bark but did not pursue the penetrators. Before the sentry was able to return fire, the men were out of his sight. The Thai guard in I-46 bunker who had reported the presence of the three individuals moments earlier, heard the shots but did not see any firing. He looked out of his bunker in time to see two of the penetrators break a triangular stacked, triple strand of concertina wire stretched along the North side of post I-45 and I-46 and head toward the B-52s. I-46 later stated that at the time the two men breached the wire, the third man headed North, back in the direction he came from which was toward the K9 kennels. I-46 lost sight of him almost immediately and began following the other two men toward the B-52 area. He withheld fire because of the proximity of the B-52 aircraft parked and taxiing beyond the penetrators. Bravo Sector Supervisor (B-1) and the Bravo Sector three-man SAT (B-4), were briefed and dispatched by CSC. I-46 sentry followed the two men toward revetment M-1, "M" aircraft parking row, and observed one man enter the revetment. An explosion in the revetment was heard and reported by I-46. A second and third explosion occurred in revetments M-2 and M-3. The Bravo sector six-man Quick Reaction Team (B-3) was dispatched immediately to establish a blocking force on South end of the B-52 parking area. The three-man MMS area SAT (B-5) was dispatched as a blocking force on the East side of the fence line inside the MMS area South of the point of detection. Red option I condition initiated and Covered

Wagon message sent. The USAF Lieutenant who is "Tiger" Flight Commander (Tiger 1) and the Thai guard Flight Chief were adjacent to the area during this time on a guard check.

B. (c) One NCO, assigned to 307 OMS, reported during the after action investigation, that he was onboard B-52 parked at revetment M-2 when the explosion occurred at N-1. He exited the aircraft and noticed two men running around the left wing of aircraft at M-1. One of the individuals ran up to him and tried three times unsuccessfully to fire a handgun at him. The NCO described the weapon as a ".22 cal six-shooter". After the weapon failed to fire, the individual ran to spot M-2 and tried to throw what the NCO called a "bomb" in the number 5 and 6 engines of the B-52 parked in that spot. He stated the individuals, very short, appeared to be Orientals and were dressed in camouflaged fatigues. One NCO, assigned to 307 FMS, advised during the investigation, that he was working on B-52 parked in M-3 at the time of the attack. He heard an explosion and departed the aircraft. He said he saw another explosion at M-2 and proceeded to the front of the revetment and observed a figure dressed in camouflaged fatigues run to the front of M-3 and throw an explosive device into the revetment. Upon seeing this, he ran from the area to seek cover. Another NCO, assigned to 307 AMS, working inside B-52 on M-3, heard two explosions. He exited the aircraft and stood near a truck parked in front of the B-52. A man, believed to be oriental, threw something at him that landed in front of the truck. Then a large explosion occurred in M-3 revetment shortly after that, the NCO located an unexploded grenade in the vicinity of the previous "firecracker" explosion.

C. (c) Close-in foot patrol sentry, B-52 parking area (I-64) was patrolling in the area of revetment M-5 when the explosions occurred. He began running north on the "M" ramp. He observed two individuals running South toward him from revetment M-3. As he attempted to fire, the intruders turned and ran to the East, between revetment M-3 and M-4. They were out of his sight before he could fire. Alpha sector six-man QRT (A-3) was deployed between revetment M-3 and M-4. They were reinforced by the Charlie sector three-man SAT (C-4) and began a careful sweep toward the MMS area.

D. (c) At 0235 hours local, K9-4, walking military dog patrol located within the MMS area, reported he was proceeding from MMS tower 3 toward tower 2, both located just inside the North MMS fence line, enroute to position himself closer to the effected area. He observed an individual cross the berm on the South side of the perimeter road and proceed North toward the North Perimeter fence of the MMS area. He challenged the individual and when he did not stop, he fired one shot at him. The individual then fired at least two shots at the dog handler who dropped to the ground for protection and continued firing. At approximately the same time, tower 3 reported small arms fire was possibly being received from off base. Charlie sector six-man QRT (C-3) and Tiger 1 were briefed and dispatched. They deployed on the South side of the berm where the individual had been spotted by K9-4. They began their search and observed one individual approximately 40 yards East-Northeast of tower 2 at the MMS fence lying on his back on the inside of the MMS area with his left foot tangled in the second strand of barbed wire. He was reportedly dressed in camouflaged fatigues and camouflaged hat. They could not determine the extent of injuries and were instructed not to approach closer until assistance arrived since the individual might be booby-trapped, have explosives in his possession, or be armed.

E. (c) Meanwhile the Charlie sector three-man SAT (C-4) and the Bravo sector three-man SAT (B-4) continued their sweep of the area between the B-52 revetments and the MMS storage area in an attempt to make contact with any other penetrators. At approximately 0305 hours local, B-1, joined C-4 and B-4 for the sweep and contact was made with one individual attempting to climb the MMS fence just South of tower 1-7. This individual was fired upon by two members of C-4 when he failed to heed the challenge to halt. C-4 leader fired four short burst with the M-60 machine gun and C-4 member (USAF Security Policeman) fired three short burst with the M-16 on full-automatic. The individual toppled to the ground on the MMS side of the fence, however a search for him met with negative results. A hole was located in the MMS fence line near where the individual was fired upon. B-5 began a sweep North inside the MMS area and C-4 and B-1, along with B-4, continued to

sweep North between the B-52 area and the MMS area. Other response forces continued to sweep all aircraft parking areas, munitions areas, and other vital resource locations.

F. (c) At 0405 hours local, Thai guard in perimeter tower 23, south of the MMS area on the beach, notified CSC that he heard a boat South of the base in the gulf. The OIC of Law Enforcement and one SP NCO were briefed and dispatched to the beach area South of the runway. They also heard a motor but could not see a boat because of the darkness. Due to high noise interference created by in-bound air traffic, the sounds of the boat were not heard again. "Pedro" (Det 12, 38th ARRS Helicopter) was contacted and requested to make a search of the water area where the boat was heard. This search met with negative results.

G. (c) At approximately 0530 hours local, EOD responded to the location of the penetrator in the North end of the MMS area with his foot in the fence. At this time the Base Commander was at that location. A closer look at the individual revealed that he appeared to be holding the handle of a handgun in his right hand. Under cover of three sharpshooters, EOD personnel carefully removed the handgun and the package from the individual's hands. A search of the individual was conducted as directed by the 635th Combat Support Group Commander to ascertain if any intelligence concerning targets, routes, and number of Sapper was on his person. This search revealed a Thai identification card, a draft notice, six cigar shaped chemical delay pencil fuse holders with chemical delay pencil fuses inside, and an F-1 model foreign made fragmentation hand grenade. The individual was transported to the USAF hospital for medical examination. He was pronounced dead at that location. A subsequent autopsy by the Thai doctor at the Royal Thai Naval hospital, Sattahip, disclosed one round of unidentified caliber lead bullet in the penetrator's skull. Point of entry was one-quarter inch anterior of the right ear and the bullet, badly mangled, was located one inch inside the entry wound in the temporal lobe of the brain. One USAF flight surgeon observed the autopsy and stated there was massive bleeding inside the skull and this is what apparently killed the man. The left side of the brain was contused, apparently from the shock force of the entering bullet.

H. (c) Security Police and EOD personnel conducted a thorough, systematic search of the MMS area and B-52 area following the removal of the individual from the North fence of the MMS area. This search was conducted for further explosives or penetrators. Located at revetment M-3 were five more fuses, one satchel charge inside no. 4 engine, and one satchel charge near the tail of the aircraft. The satchel charges were equipped with 3 to 5 second delay pull-type fuses, which had been triggered but failed to cause detonation. C-4, while conducting a search of the area Northwest of the first enemy detection, discovered a satchel charge near the entrance to the access road to the K9 kennels. K9-3 discovered a second satchel charge in the concertina wire between and North of I-45 and I-46 at the point of crossing used by the two penetrators. The last two were apparently dropped as they were not triggered to explode. EOD neutralized all charges. "Pedro" was again contacted and along with security police liaison, an aerial recon and search was made of the entire Northeastern portion of the base. This provided no further information. Civilian police made a sweep of the entire beach area South of the base, and Thai Marines, Navy, and local police made a joint sweep of the East side of the exterior of the base. This search met with negative results." (unquote)

Final combat after actions report has been published and is being distributed this date.

2. Were all white night posts manned IAW 207-71 OPLAN? Over 50% of the present for duty Security forces were posted IAW 207-72 plan and PACAFM 207-25. Unit had 88% of authorized Strength available on 10 Jan 72. Therefore 36 low priority random posts were not manned.

However posting criteria in the B-52 area was exceeded by posted sentries in that area and all towers were manned in all areas.

Manning situation was as follows on 10 Jan 72:

Security police authorized (includes 5 officers)

Security police assigned – 444

Security Police TDY to other high-threat Thailand bases – 78
Security Police available at U-Tapao including non-effectives available - 87.4%
Thai guards authorized – 554
Thai guards assigned – 494
Percentage of authorized Thai guard available - 89.2%
Total security force authorized – 976
Total security force available – 860
Percentage of authorized security force available - 88.4%

3. Did all defense force members have radios? Radios were assigned and on all posts prior to the Sapper attack. But since radio allocation is base on white night posting requirements, radio shortage was encountered during Red One posting.

4. Were tower sentries equipped with nod's or starlight scopes? All operational nod's, starlight scopes, and commando scopes were deployed for use at pre-selected posts at the time of the attack. There are 54 towers. The 635th SPS has six nod's, 20 starlight scopes, and three commando scopes assigned. Because of good fresnel perimeter lighting, this number is considered sufficient. Night observation devices of all types are strategically located for surveillance during perimeter light failure and on darkened interior posts at all times.

5. Using referenced grid map 1 Jan 71 locations for:

A. Fencing and lighting (type and condition for both items) around base perimeter (Northeast section), B-52 and MMS areas;

(1) Fencing

(a) perimeter: triple strand concertina wires (exterior and double apron fencing (interior).

Condition: good FF40 - VV35

(b) B-52: perimeter: triple strand concertina wires : HH34-II33 condition: good. Single strand concertina wires: II33-II32 Condition: good

(c) MMS: the entire MMS perimeter consists of eight strand cattle fencing: condition: Good

(2) Lighting

(a) Perimeter: fresnel lights located just inside of double apron fencing. 15 lights (cannot read this on original report) were out. No two adjacent lights were out. This number is normal - lights are repaired daily and these lights were out for only the night of 9-10 Jan 72.

(b) B-52: good lighting in parking area, poor lighting around the perimeter of the parking area.

(c) MMS: good lighting in preload area, poor lighting in storage area, poor lighting around the perimeter of the MMS area.

B. Probable Sapper entry/exit points through base perimeter, B-52 and MMS areas;

(1) perimeter: entry: between tower 41 and 42 & between tower 42 and 43. Exit: Undetermined

(2) B-52: entry: KK31. Exit: KK28.

(3) MMS: entry: NN28 (unconfirmed by probable. Exit RR33 (Sapper KIA)

C. Enemy KIA and all sightings of unidentified individuals; RR33 (location of sapper KIA). NN28 (by tower 17). KK33 (initial sighting of three unidentified individuals).

D. Confirmed weapon fire from off base and probable targets; Even through a Thai guard at tower 3 reported off base fires directed toward MMS, there is no evidence to confirm off base firing. Tower 3 guard stated seeing muzzle flashes at RR35.

E. Contacts between Sappers and defense forces; KK33 (two Sappers and K9-3). KK32 (challenged by I46 guard) KK27 (seen by I64 guard). NN28 (one Sapper seen by tower 17). RR33 (Sapper KIA and K9-4)

F. Close-in sentries in B-52 and MMS areas; B-52: I64 and I65 foot patrols in the parking area; MMS: I58 and I58a foot patrol for the preload (JJ19-RR19) Other close-in guards were posted as close-boundary guards augmented by 3-men SAT in both B-52 and MMS areas.

G. Boundaries of K9 posts one through eight:

K9-1: AA36 - BB38.

K9-2: CC38 - FF38.

K9-3: JJ34 - MM34

K9-4: OO33 - UU33

K9-5: UU33 - UU29

K9-6: UU29 - UU23

K9-7: TT22 - RR18

K9-8: RR18 - NN18.

Were military working dog on K9 post three and four simply released or were they properly directed to attack? The military dog on K9 post three did the job he is trained to do. He detected the intruders and alerted his handler. Simultaneously with the alert the intruders starting firing at the handler at a range of from 10 to 15 feet. After taking immediate cover he gave his dog the order to attack. By this time the individual's were out of sight and the dog's visual contact was broken by the handlers action in taking cover.

The K9-4 sentry spotted the individual himself as the intruder crossed a berm in front of him. He immediately challenged and fired at the individual when his challenge was ignored.

What type of weapons were K9 handlers armed with and what was state of weapon readiness at the time of challenging? Both sentries were equipped with GAU 5 submachine guns with magazine loaded and inserted, one round in the chamber, and safety on. Weapons are carried on sentries backs with long slings to allow free use of the weapon. K9-3 did not challenge - He was fired on immediately upon his dogs alert. K9-4 had his weapon in his hands at the time of his challenge and fired at the intruder when his challenge was ignored.

K9 post four: describe actions of K9: at the time of release was intruder inside MMS fence; Was K9 team inside MMS fence? K9 was released after the exchange of gunfire. Both intruder and K9 team were inside the fence. Was K9 team on post 3 working an alert? Handler's recognition of the alert, and firing by the intruders were almost simultaneous. The handler did not have time to challenge.

Why didn't defense force members fire at intruders without challenging subsequent to the first incident with the K9 post three handler? Area is dark precluding reasonable degree of assurance in making positive identification of the intruders from friendly forces, particularly since the intruders were dressed in a similar attire worn by the Thai guards and Security Police. There was no witness to the initial firing other than the K9 handler fired upon. Why didn't defense force members on post I47 MMS entry controller and I46 close-in machine gunner fire at intruders? The three unidentified individuals were sighted outside of the restricted area where pedestrian traffic (even though suspicious) is not unusual. The presence of these individuals did not pose an immediate threat to the US resources or personnel. Further, lack of lighting prevented positive identification. Since Thai Nationals are employed in the MMS areas, such sightings still does not justify firing at them without properly challenging. Even after their confrontation with a K9 sentry, inability to identify and distinguish enemy fire. Moments later, I47 guard would have been firing toward I46 in the direction of parked aircraft. I46 guard did not witness firing by the intruders even though he heard shots being fired. When he again spotted intruders, he would have fired toward parked aircraft and a B-52 taxiing. He, therefore, fortunately, did not fire at the intruders.

Why weren't Sappers detected while penetrating the base perimeter defenses?

(a) The base perimeter is over 17 miles long. Heavy vegetation on private property extends up to the fence line along most of this out perimeter. Distances between perimeter towers average about 2000 feet. The fence consists of three rolls of concertina wire and double apron. There is good perimeter lighting in the area penetrated. Sentries in the towers were checked during the night and morning of the attack and were alert when checked. Thai guards were manning those perimeter posts.

(b) Possibly the single greatest aid to the penetrators was the fact that the base had never been hit by an attack and there was no intelligence indicating an increase or change in the threat. It is extremely rare (never in Thailand previously) for Sappers to be detected prior to reaching their targets during white

night conditions. In the instant case the detection by sentries patrolling and positioned closer to the resources indicates that the security force was alert. This detection has been credited with thwarting the enemy's attack plans and limiting damage to the resources to minor levels.

(c) There are no electronic penetration detection devices at U-Tapao. These perimeter systems have proved their worth elsewhere in SEA. A current survey by the PACAF IGS indicates that such devices can be used to good advantage at U-Tapao. Recommend strong support in this area. How were breaches in perimeter and MMS fences affected, that is, cut, stretched open, etc? The fence was cut.

Officer and Senior NCO supervision: During the night and morning of the attack, the on-duty flight (Tiger flight) was checked by two Security Police officers prior to the attack. The Squadron Operations Officer, Captain Shiroyama, attended Guardmount at 2030 hours and checked posts until 0030 hours on the 10th. Lt. Todd, the commander of Tiger flight (an unauthorized position, but one which we deemed necessary and have manned since April 1971) conducted Guardmount and was on post check up to the time of the attack. All squadron officers and senior NCO's have performed harsh hours guard checks on a frequent basis - since April 1971. (At least one officer or senior NCO [top 3] conducts guard checks every night in addition to the officer and E-7's assigned to Tiger flight.) Additionally, the 307th Strategic Wing Commander, General Elliott, the 635th Combat Support Group Commander, Col Knapp, and other senior officers, have inspected and addressed Tiger flight during Guardmounts on numerous occasions prior to the attack. Much of the difficulty in motivating the security force has been eliminated, of course, by the attack itself. There remains a major problem in officer and middle management supervision. The 635th SPS has a total authorized strength of 995 personnel including the 554 Royal Thai guards over which we have operational control and supervisory responsibilities. Five officers, three super grades, (including the First Sgt.), eight Master Sergeants, and 14 Tech Sergeants, are the total number of guaranteed career personnel authorized to manage this force. We at base level, recommend a total reevaluation of the unit detail listing to include additional supervisory and administrative positions. UDL changes have been initiated by the unit to reflect many realignments.

However, based on the current situation at U-Tapao and your identified need to put more officers and senior supervisors in contact with the posted sentry, we recommend the following as a minimum number of officers required at this base:

<u>Position</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Number</u>
Commander	Lt. Col.	1
Squadron section co	Capt.	1
Security police admin officer	Capt.	1
Operations officer	Major	1
Intelligence/liaison officer	Capt.	1
Law enforcement officer	Lt.	1
Plans officer	Lt.	1
Air base defense officer	Capt.	1
Flight commanders	Lt.	3
		Total 11

This authorization would reduce the span of control from 1 officer to 199 personnel to one Officer per 90 personnel. NCO grade structure should also be based on a 1000 man unit. This Message transmitted directly to CSAF (IGS) in accordance with instructions received from PACAF IG.

GP-4

Drafter: Larry T. Zacker, Sgt, USAF
Admin & Reports Branch

Abbreviated joint message form - (Transcription of OPREP-3/002 message)

H. Type of attack - Sapper attack

H1. Ref:

H2. 09 2130 Jan 72

Day Hr Z Mon Yr the incident occurred.

H3. N/A

H4. (Description of incident) A marauder was shot and killed on the fence at U-Tapao Airfield early this morning shortly after three explosions damaged two B-52 bombers in their revetments. The shooting occurred in the Northeast corner of the airfield, just North of the bomb storage area. Perimeter guard was fired upon by the marauder with a .38 caliber pistol and he returned fire with his M-16 rifle. Explosives were found on the body, which was identified as that of an Asian male. The person apparently threw one explosive charge into engine number seven (7) of the first aircraft. The explosion which followed damaged engines number seven (7) and eight (8); engine number three (3) suffered shrapnel damage. Another explosive device exploded on the ground beneath strut number three (3) of a second B-52, apparently causing concussion to the cowling. The third explosion also occurred on the ground, between engine number eight (8) and the right wind tank of a third B-52. No apparent damage to aircraft. Several more explosive charges were found near the third revetment, having apparently been dropped by the intruder. There are no American or Thai military casualties.

Unclassified

Reference: 13AF Unclassified EFTO message R130300Z 72

Subject: U-Tapao attack

I wish to add my own words of appreciation to those of General Clay's and General McNickle's for the outstanding manner in which members of the 635th Combat Support Group responded during the 10 Jan 72 Sapper attack on U-Tapao Airfield.

BT

#2946