3rd Ord Depot blown up by VC

1. MLS Two NCO's talking over damage, with 155mm projectile in forground and other ordinance around them that was un-exploded.

2. MS Small arms ammo boxes littering the pad area after the blast.

3. MS Pallets of ammo toppled over on the pad from the blast caused by the VC.

4. MS Same as above.

5. CU small arms ammo probably M-15 ammo cooked off in carrying boxes from the blast.

6. LS Building at 3rd Ord Depot damaged from the explosion.

7. MCU Building at 3rd Ord Depot damaged from blast with an 81mm or 90mm mortar or recoiless rifle round in forground.

8. MS Compressor or generators at 3rd Ord ruin by VC blast.
3rd Ord Depot Blown Up

One roll of film I submitted last year showed live army ordinance littering the roadway and tossed everywhere like a city dump. The 3rd Ord Depot was a prime VC target.

The 3rd Ordinance Depot located adjacent to the army's Long Binh Base 15 miles North of Saigon served the 3rd Field Forces (Corps) area, that included the 1st Infantry Division at Di An between Long Binh and Saigon, The 9th Inf. Div. at Bear Cat about 10 East of Long Binh, the 25th Inf Div. at Cu Chi, Hua Nghia Provience 20 miles Northwest of Saigon, and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment housed East of Bear Cat. Plus the thousands of support troops in the region. I have no knowledge that the 3rd Ord Depot served the Air Force, even tho Tan Son Nhut and Bien Hoa Air Bases were close by.

The 3rd Ord Depot was the transshipment and storage facility for all ammo used by the U.S. Army, including small arms 7.65mm, 30, 45 and 50 caliber bullets, grenades of varying use, smoke, teargas, M-79, fragmentation and white phosphous, mortars 60 and 80mm and 4.2 inch rounds, 2.75 inch rockets, 90 and 106 recoiless rifle ammo, tank ammo, cannon and artillery of 105, 155, 175mm and 8 inch projectiles, propellants, fuses, landmines and a host of other triggering, detonating or incinerary devices used in the war, as well as TNT and C-4 plastic explosives. They may have stored the 40-60-and 80 percent ammonia-nitrate used by RMK/BRJ in their quarry operations.

The VC made numerous attempts to blow up the 3rd Ord Depot, with at least once a month mortar or rockets attacks, trying to rid the U.S. of our ability to make war on them. These trys at the big prize was always with little or no damage caused. Finally on day________ by film slate, without the film, I surmise the date to be late July or August, 1967, when the VC finally got lucky and blew up the massive ammo depot, causing devastating destruction at the complex, crippling the allies war efforts for several weeks.

At the filming it was a mystery whether the VC used rockets or if sappers set explosive charges at the pads. Its inconceivable that such a high profile target wouldn't have laser or inferred sensors, claymore mines and other security measures and devices in place to prevent sappers. I personally believe in the sapper theory as latter described, and rockets as a diversion tactic.
I was with the 221st Signal Company (Pictorial) but under operational control of MAC-V, when the VC attacked the 3rd Ord Depot. About 10:30 at night the alert sirens went off. Shortly after 11 P.M., I witnessed a tremendous fireball 500-700 feet across, if not larger. It was at least 6 to 8 times the size of a rising or setting full moon. Emitting from the fireball was a shock wave easily seen pushing outward from the epicenter at the speed of sound, rattling and shaking the windows and metal building housing myself as it passed.

For the two army DOD teams to have any equipment, MAC-V raided the Air Force, Marine and Navy teams already operations for extra cameras, film and tape recorders, while awaiting the Army's equipment to arrive in country from the U.S.

At daybreak I grabbed my team and camera, driving the 3 miles from the 221st Sig. Co. to the main gate of the 3rd Ord Depot. By air the distance would be 2 miles or less. At the main gate we were turned away. They said the complex was still unsecured and off limits to all but 3rd Ord people (EOD) bomb disposal, MPs and medics. They needed to survey the pads for unexploded, delay detonating devices, dead or wounded people etc, before the press could enter. It was suggested that after lunch we call and check if the ground had been secured.

By mid-afternoon we had a guided tour of the complex that stretched 1/2 to 3/4 of a mile along the front of Bear Cat Road, and equal in size from front to rear of the compound. At first we saw "U" shaped revetments that formed the storage pads. They were about 100 feet wide and probably 75 feet deep. The ammo was stacked neatly within the pads, some 2 and 3 pallets high, with at least 20 feet open space around the stored ammo and the earthen embankments that separated the pads. The embankments themselves were impressive. I would guess 15 feet high and I bet 5 feet wide at the top, and 20 feet thick at the bottom. Occasionally in the front of the compound we saw a pallet tipped over from the concussion.

I know a pallet of 155mm artillery projectiles comprises 6 rounds. The pallet is roughly a foot by 18-20 inches long, and weights 600 pounds. Using only half the pad size or 30X50 feet many tons could be stored on each level. 105 artillery rounds are shipped several in a wood box and were stacked higher on the pads.
Further to the rear and center of the complex live ammo was thrown and blown around in total disarray. I saw 3 maybe more pads totally blown away, leaving a 15 to 20 foot crater in it's place and deep wide cracks in the ground from the blast. I wanted to dismount the vehicle to film, but was aborted, when the guide told us that some of the damaged ammo was so temperature sensitive that my casting a shadow on the ammo could cause it to explode. Some of my thoughts touring the destruction was beer cans at the city dump. One big difference, this was live unexploded ordnance littering the roadway, ready to blow at the slightest movement or cloud passing over head.

American ammo is strong and durable, yet reliable. Nobody ever heard of a G.I. diving for cover, being killed from a grenade on his pistol belt exploding from being jarred. I took a convoy from Saigon to Tay Ninh, with a stop at Cu Chi over pot hole covered road, where the ammo trucks definitely got rattled, bounced and jarred about on route. Yet ammo depot issuing criteria was higher, than combat unit user standards, causing much, if not all of the tossed, blown and shaken ord­inance unservicable requiring its destruction. This was an every day event at the 3rd Ord Depot, but not on this magnitude. Every evening at 5 P.M., the EOD team detonated several pads of un-issueable ammo, putting on a spectacular show for the troops at Long Binh and surrounding area, and a dependable explosion, that I used on occasion, including the A-37 fighter/bomber story.

Following the EOD team out the rear gate of the 3rd Ord Depot Compound, they led us through a woods about a ½ mile away. There the EOD Team had 5 pads distanced over 100 yards apart, on which was stacked from 5 to 15 tons of munitions per pad. For safety reasons, they used twins of everything. They had two vehicles and NEVER shut them off, not wanting to be stranded out there in a stalled truck. They used two charges of explosives per pad and mechanical detonation cord and blasting caps, rather than electrical blasting caps. I later learned that radio chatter could set off electrical blasting caps, and Vietnam certainly had over abundant radio chatter.

Climbing the guard tower, setting up the camera and tripod, the EOD sergent pointed the direction where the first explosion would take place, than the second and so on. Even being this distance away and a woods between us, shrapnel flew all around us.
Being a photographer not EOD nor ordinance qualified, I still have reservations that a VC rocket had a direct hit on a ammo pad would have detonated the entire pad, nor blown the 3 or more totally blown pads I witnessed. The VC were famous tunnel builders, many 100s of yards long and up to 5 levels deep. I believe, the VC tunneled under the 3rd Ord Depots perimeter defenses and ground security measures, allowing sappers easy entry to set explosives charges on multiple pads, that created only ONE huge fireball, rather than several secondary explosions that would be expected from a rocket attack.

In a stupid move USARV set their data processing unit on a plot of land intersecting the Bien Hoa and Bear Cat Roads, against the perimeter fence of the 3rd Ord Depot. When I filmed the operation, they were working out of vans and the IBM-360 mainframe computer had rigid tolerances for operating. The entire set of vans had to be perfectly level, like a pool table. No vibrations, climate control of temperature and humidity interruptions were frequent not only from heavy truck, APC and tanks traffic, but occasionally B-52 raids close by, but by more important, the computer operations had to be completed before the 3rd Ord conducted their evening diastrophism. Eventually the data processing unit moved to more hospitable site several miles away.

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