



A-1E bombs VC emplacement concealed by heavy jungle. Target marked by forward controller.

Skyraider Support

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ONE OF THE most demanding combat tasks performed by armed helicopter crews in support of efforts of the Republic of Vietnam is visual reconnaissance and target destruction missions within the communist strongholds in the forbidding jungles and wastelands. Those armed reconnaissance flights are necessary to prevent the enemy from running

his forces in these zones and to deny him the privilege of a safe area. To the fire teams these reconnaissances soon become routine but no less hazardous.

Try to imagine yourself in the fire team leader's position as you read this article. This story is true. Similar events are occurring in the combat experiences of nearly every armed helicopter

pilot. Teamwork between services has grown from haphazard beginnings experienced here to a highly proficient and effective fighting team.

Here's the situation. You are an armed helicopter fire team leader whose principal area of operations is the 1st LI Corps area around Saigon. You are familiar with the

conduct reconnaissance. You've done it before. It's old hat.

You know the dense jungle east of national highway 14 to be ominous and foreboding. You're required to lead your fire team into areas of suspected Viet Cong concentration trying to see something, anything, to alert you to the presence of the enemy. You know your job's important; to prevent the communist forces from massing units sufficient to knock over vital installations along route 14.

Song Be, Dong Xoui, Phuoc Vinh, Ap Bo Lar, Tan Uyen—you know the Americans there and you understand their concern. The dense jungle and abandoned hamlets of zone D contain VC units of regimental size, as well as headquarters and logistics points to support these units. You're concerned too. You've heard the heavy beat of .50 caliber machine-gun fire directed at your aircraft; you've heard pilot reports of pink and white tracers visible even in daylight rising from the jungle's foliage.

The whole idea seems unnerving as you lead your fire team along the edge of zone D to the staging area. Upon arrival you're

met by the senior advisor. He indicates he has something different for you today. You can just bet it's something different. It's hard to believe; it's always the same reconnaissance or "seek and kill" mission.

You grab your map and walk into the headquarters building. You're greeted by the rest of the staff. The order begins: The enemy situation is causing greater than average concern. A VC battalion is thought to be moving into a resupply and rest area to mass for an attack on one of the key installations. On this premise the senior advisor has requested and received a flight of four Skyraider A-1E fighter-bombers to support your reconnaissance.

Your mission: seek and destroy Viet Cong armed helicopter style, concentrating primarily on the area thought to contain the suspected battalion. You'll rendezvous with the A-1Es airborne at 1400. The U. S. Air Force forward air controller (FAC) assigned to this sector will be airborne over the operational area in his O-1. You'll acquire the targets, the FAC will approve the use of the fighters, and you'll both direct the fighters as they strike.

Man, we are getting somewhere. You don't mind so much anymore. At last you have a destruction capability to supplement your own weapons systems. You can tackle larger targets now, fly a little lower than usual, and the .50 caliber machineguns, if they miss you the first time, won't get another chance to fire at your aircraft. You coordinate frequencies and talk to the FAC about the basic things you need to know, such as ordnance capabilities of the fighter-bombers, airspace restrictions, proper ordnance for the proper targets, and civilian areas which must be avoided to prevent injury to innocents.

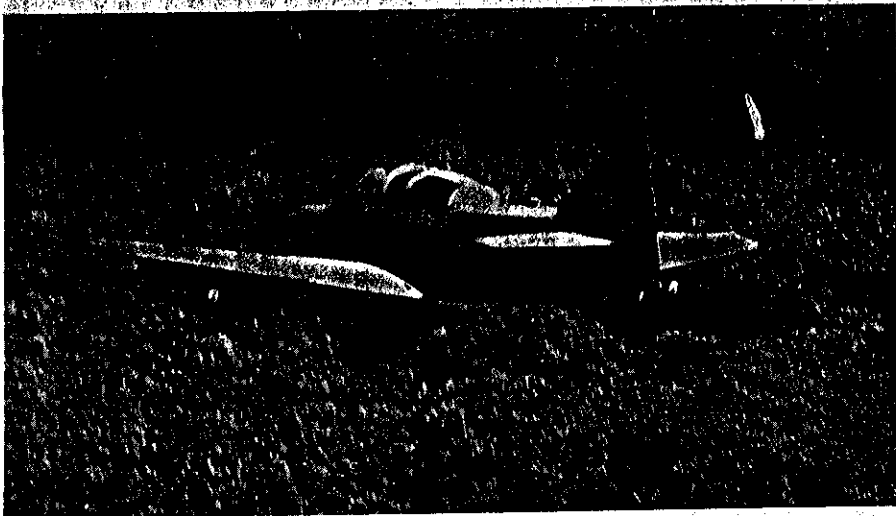
Takeoff time is 1345. Fifteen minutes from the target area you rendezvous en route with the fighters. The FAC briefs the TAC aircraft on today's mission and asks the fighter-bomber commander what ordnance is aboard.

Target area dead ahead. Heavy jungle, two or three small clearings. You notice something irregular in one of the clearings: a Viet Cong victory garden by a small stream. Yep, they're here all right—but where? You're determined to check the clearing closer on your low recon. You pick the



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A-1E hits VC target (left) after receiving strike instructions from a fire team of Hueys (right) which begins a poststrike recon

densest jungle canopy over which to make your descent to contour. Another check with the fighters. They're orbiting overhead in position to answer your call. The FAC says he'll keep you in sight.

Hustling down to contour you begin the planned flight route. No fire received as yet. But you know they're in there. Clearing ahead; you plan to stay at least 50 meters to its edge, not to fly over it. You remember with a smirk how at Fort Rucker you were required to keep a forced landing area within reach. You just hope and pray you don't need one; for here you are at contour over two or three layers of jungle canopy. Flying over the clearing causes your aircraft to closely resemble goldfish in a bowl, and the Viet Cong tend to take the actions of a cat.

So far so good; nothing unusual in the clearing. You plan to check it again on your flight out, but from a different direction. Garden area is next; you check this closely. As you pass close to the garden you see a well used bridge, and the water in the creek has recently

been muddied. Someone just left in a hurry.

This calls for another pass—with faster airspeed and more evasive action. You roll in; you're on the very edge of the clearing. The door gunner probes the opposite treeline with machinegun fire. Suddenly, "Raider 22 receiving auto weapons fire, 3 o'clock, the treeline!" Your wingman has just been shot at.

Well, now you know. The Air Force jockeys for position. The wingman has marked the area with smoke. You call the FAC and he approves the use of the fighters. Fixing the target with your machineguns, you issue strike instructions to the fighters simultaneously. You've increased your altitude slightly. The target area suddenly erupts with muzzle flashes. There's a .50 caliber in there! You dive for contour cover and report this new development to the fighters now inbound. You get out of the way off to the side, close enough to observe and correct each fighter's pass.

You've been jockeying for position to begin poststrike analysis as soon as possible after the last fighter is off the target. You're contour again and the last fighter is rolling in. You come with the

target area. You know you must get in and out in a hurry and as soon after the last fighter as time will allow. The bombs go off and you're over the target; smoke from the strikes fills the cockpit. At 80-90 knots you feel as if you're over the target for a lifetime. Boy, you could sure use a Mohawk now. Seems to you it would be an ideal ship for poststrike recons.

You draw no fire on your reconnaissance and return to altitude for the smoke to clear. Evidently the Viet Cong have been destroyed or routed. It was a beautiful strike. You make one high 1,500 foot pass over the area to observe the craters in the canopy. Hey, there's a hootch down there and another, and another. This target is far from being developed and destroyed. You descend for a low recon. You're excited but you know that to get ahead of yourself can be fatal to you and your fire team. You remember the cardinal rules of armed helicopter employment and all your experiences these past few months.

You position the fighters and inform them to begin their attack should they observe white smoke thrown from either of the fire team's aircraft. You know you're

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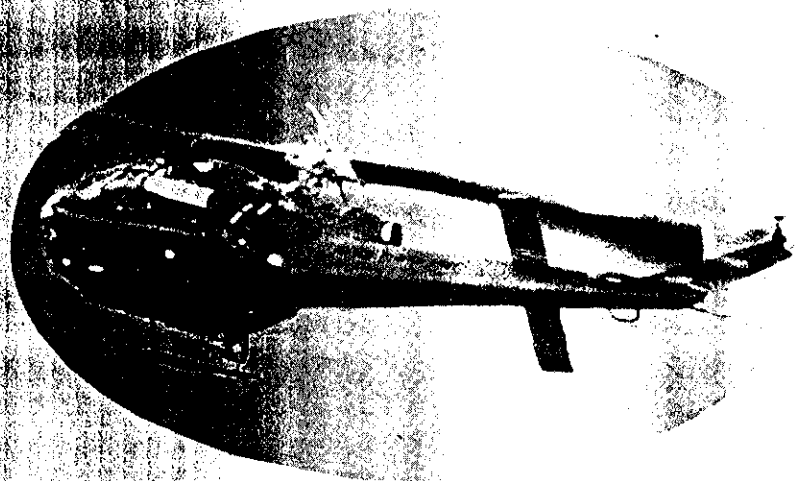
vulnerable while reconning these craters. You're over the target area. The area is a complex of well-constructed storage sheds and warehouses. This must be one of the most important targets the battalion must have been present when discovered by your fire team.

he will request additional air support.

You're low on fuel and return to the staging area. You feel good. You've got valuable information on the enemy and you've developed a target worthy of additional air strikes, maybe even a thorough

find him, fix him, and destroy him immediately or he will vanish.

The echo of the bombs can still be heard to the east as you step out of your aircraft. It has been a good mission; you've been involved in a highly successful SKUNK HUNT.



You report all this. On a second pass you mark the area with colored smoke grenades, describing each individual target to be destroyed within the target area. You ask the FAC to analyze this information and determine if the fighters on hand can do this job. You recommend that the FAC control the amount of ordnance to be expended from the fighters, as it is a critical factor now with such a large destruction mission.

Your fire team starts to seal off the area by strafing the outskirts. The VC are undoubtedly moving by now, having been discovered and hit hard. The FAC agrees and retains control of the fighters. He informs you that

ground operation to verify the results of the Air Force work.

But most of all you've taken a giant step in extending your reconnaissance/destruction capability. The Army and Air Force have developed and executed an outstanding method of reconnaissance and instant destruction so vital in this kind of warfare where the enemy is extremely elusive and second to none in the execution of guerrilla warfare. You've got to

