

IV CORPS

Can Tho, RVN

April 1970 - April 1971

G2 Air Operations

- Thee Sisters Mountains
- Seven Mountains
- U Minh Forrest
- Cambodian Operation
- South of Camau

The Ernie Wells Files

Paul,

I have two photos that were part of a mosaic that confirmed intelligence about an attempt to initiate a Second Front in the region and it reflects a great deal about what we were doing in the Delta. More importantly it reflects how the entire 73rd supported our effort. General Cushman and General Troung (SIC) will confirm spelling and names, were great friends as well as working hand and glove in keep the NVA out of the delta. The photo interpretation was done by the 73rd and confirmed by MACV J2 analysis. This photo was taken by Paul Tanguay and myself in "Hawk one". It is significant on many levels, first it confirms intelligence gleaned from other sources and was a precursor to the Steal hauled Trawler who made it from a port north of Hanoi to the delta, The individual standing in the water trying to shoot us down was part of the security for those hiding in their sampans in the larger picture, The rough picture is a picture of a picture of the trawler. There is a back story on why they confiscated it from my office in Can Tho. The initial intelligence report was believable with a skeptical pause of "Maybe" to what the hell are we doing about it. As long as the Trawler stayed in the water, it was a Navy target when hit beach it belonged to the General Cushman. Kit Lavell and his bronco's disabled it, the crew of the trawler was take off by fishing boats and they disappeared. The was full attempt by COSVN Communist of South Vietnam. Headquartered in the Parrot's Beak in Cambodia to reestablish its self in the U Minh area. More on the other events that were part of a larger plan by the enemy to push us out of the Delta. Note: there were no other American Forces in the region, they had all gone home. TM 96 (IV CORPS) Can Tho was the only Military in the area. A YO3A observed the Trawler, Osborne whisper-dick, was the pilot. He may have other observations that I don't have. I interview Kit Lavell and he put me in his book because of our role in the trawler incident. I have attached the three photos mentioned above. Knowing the back story adds significant to the photos. You are welcomed to the back story and pictures, do you use PhotoScape software it is free and is great for organizing and editing photos. I run a MAC Mini computer and it works great on the apple. Let me know what you think about the picture. I have about 20 of the mohawk pictures and a half a

dozen or so of the yo3a. I have the intelligence for the time I spent there. Also the 73rd did the support of the South Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and saved their sorry asses, did not plan very well, more on this as well. I'm in the process of writing my memoir and it will be in there as well. I have waited long enough. The Memoir is titled Honor is Due. when I finish the manuscript I will send you a copy, If I ever get there and it will be loaded with the same pictures I will be sending you if you want them

Ernie



Subject: Operation Kampong Speu

A long forgotten name, it wasn't our Operation, it was our counterparts. Cambodia was in total turmoil and wasn't function as a viable government. Through a lot of talks between our government, the South Vietnamese and representative from Phnom Penh. The talks ended with South Vietnam willing to kick the North Vietnamese out of Cambodia and turn the government back to what was left of the Cambodian Government. It is in the history books and on the internet, under Kampong Speu Province. TM 96, us in Can Tho and advisors to a South Vietnamese Armored Cav unit to prepare for the invasion of Cambodia and to march to Kampong Speu and get the NVA out of the province capital in short attack and keep attacking until the enemy was on the run or all dead. Pretty simple, or was it. The Cambodian Intelligence Officer was a Bank of America manager in Phnom Penh who had recently come from New York and his English was better than mine. That was where his intelligence ability ended. The commander of Cambodian forces in Phnom Penh was the local fire chief, Our counterparts were in deep shit. Complicating it even more, the Vietnamese Cav Unit only had three people who could speak English and most of it was very poor and could not read military maps worth a damn, and the US Advisors could not go into Cambodia. It is the 73rd SAC that comes to the rescue....so to speak. We photographed Route of advance all the way from South Vietnam to Kampong Speu, to Phnom Penh and back home. We made photo maps of every inch of the route to include every, obstacle, barrier, bridge, road crossing, village, rebel roadblocks and all of the ways to get around all the road blocks used by locals. Numbered each page and section of the maps and all they had to do was give the numbers of their location and double digit number for support. Time for the advance to Kampong Speu was 1200 hours. They were to leave two hours before first light, and go like hell and straight into battle. The photo maps got them to the line of departure in six hours, the battle was over with the next day. When we reviewed the line of march we saw that they were going to take tanks side by side all the way into Phnom Penh. I called the 73rd II group and asked for a measurement of the width of the road. The reason I ask for it was because on several of my visual surveillance missions with Paul Tanguay we noted parking areas for buses in areas with trees aligned both sides of the road and where the rice fields came up to the edge of the road. We had realized that the roads were built in early 1900's and were narrow for carts and wagons, a few of the early European automobiles the road as built to European specifications and was too narrow for tanks side by side or to pass armored vehicles. The buses could go down both sides of the roads at the same time, they had signals and waited from inbound traffic to finish and then allow for the outbound traffic. That information and the picture maps saved the day and made that Cav Unit's first mission in combat a total and complete success. It was the 73rd's quick response and creative thinking that saved the day. That is what happened in Cambodia, and you guys were the key to the entire operation. There were other operations where the 73rd played a critical and significant role, I will get you up todate as we go along
Ernie



Casulties

Accident

Cpt Tom Wilson

Ground accident - Long Thoung North, RVN





Honor is Due, Paul Tanguay honoring Cpt Wilson, who walked into a rotating blade, as I recall.



Two birds, I don't recall the pilots name or why we were in

pairs



Plaque to General Cushman, who was one of the senior officers to bring the Mohawk to Vietnam. He was a great friend to the 73rd and made several flights with the 73rd.



Bill shaver brought the plaque to Can Tho for the award.



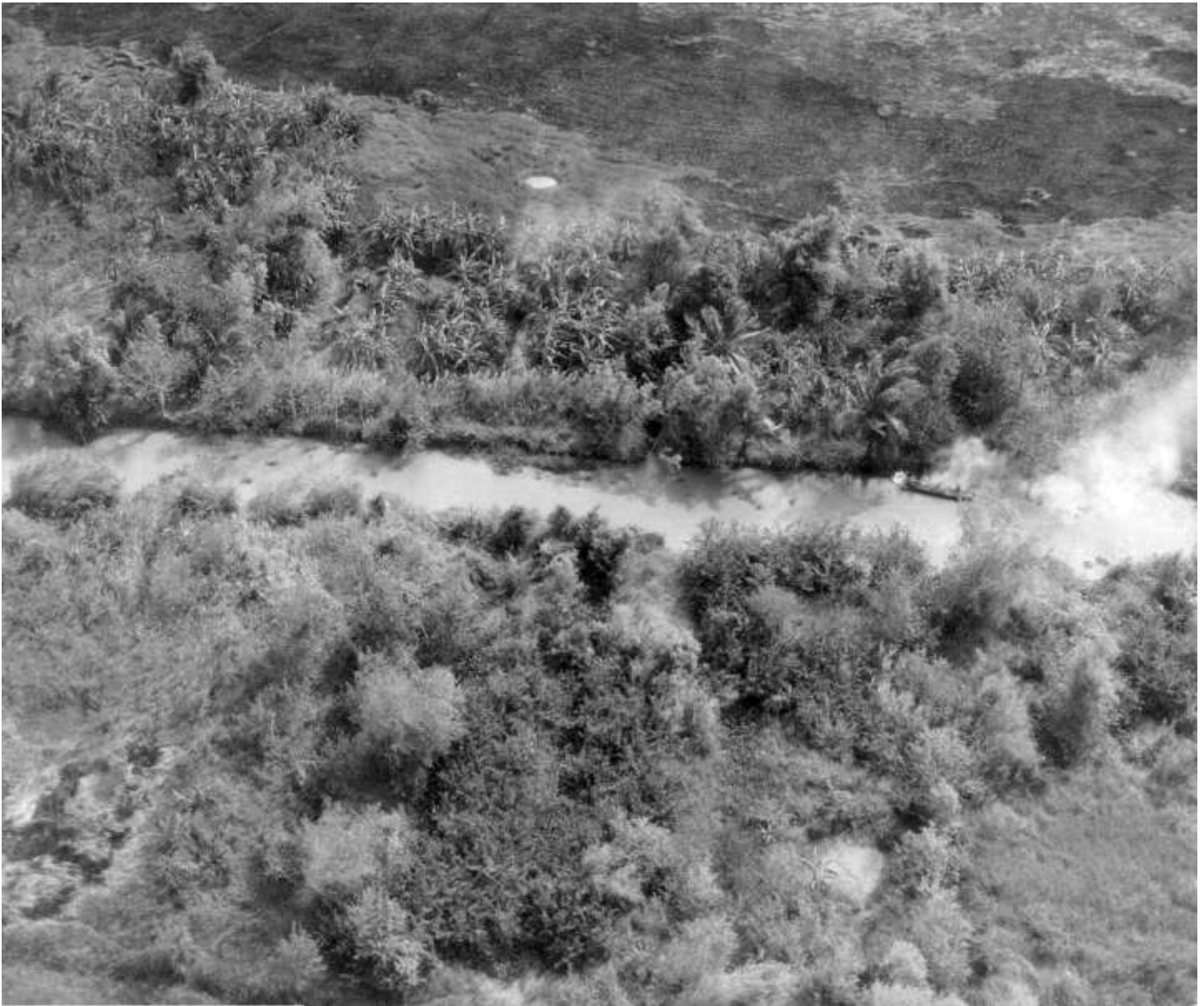
General Cushman making a Visual Recon of the route and of the area in which the battle was to be fought. Tanguay was the pilot. The General like to fly low and dirty, as we called it.



Aircraft getting ready take-off.







These 3 pictures were part of our Surveillance Plan and shows why we did a Canal Study, looking for camouflaged docks and storage area. Note the individuals moving supplies to a dock area then abandoned the sampan in one damn hurry when we went back for a second look. Gunships were sent to the area and supplies were destroyed.



SLAR ship taking off to monitoring movement along the Cambodian border, Note: here at night, they burn anything they could to make sure the SLAR and Red Haze were rendered ineffective, a counter to the technology



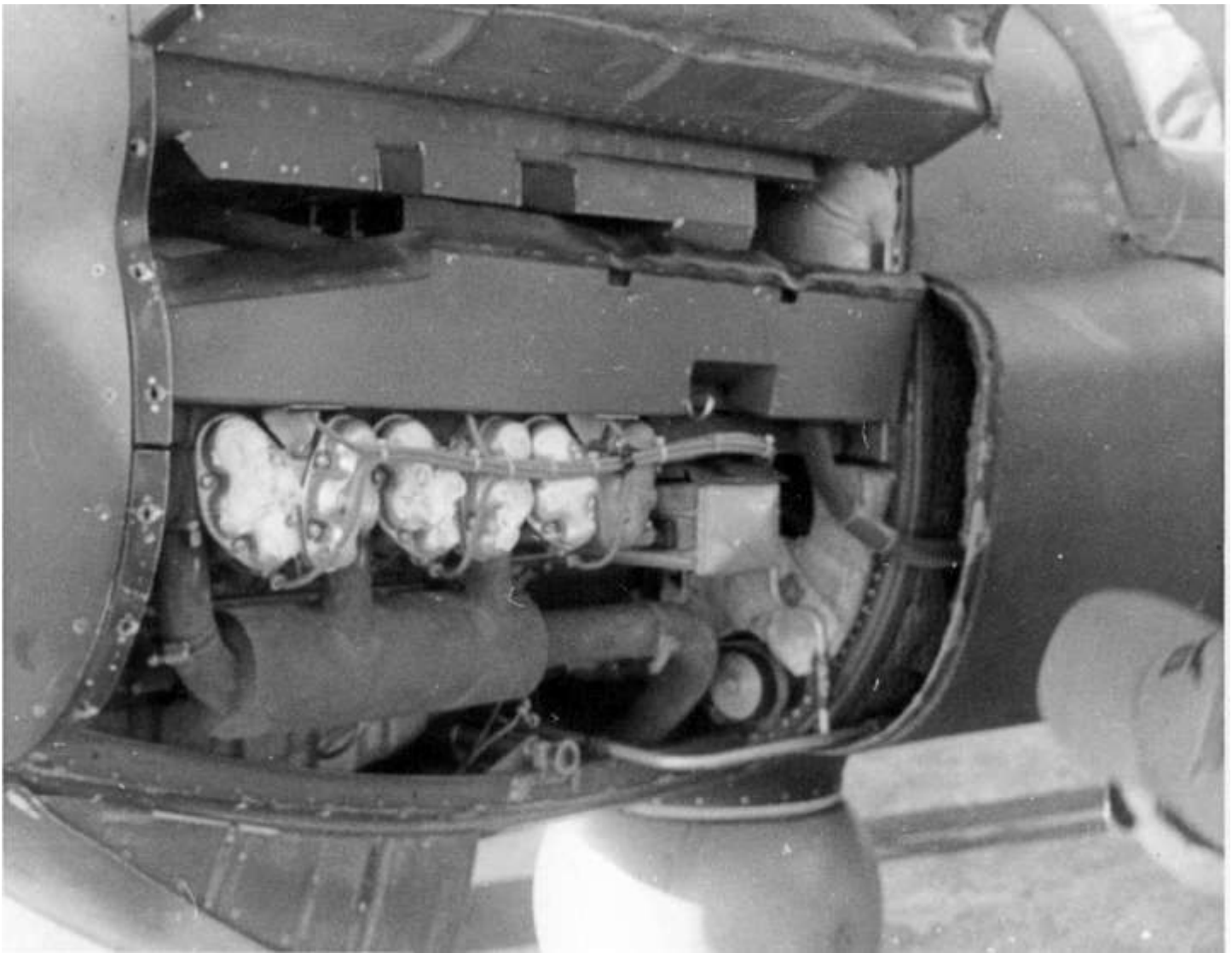




Refueling and servicing of Hawk 01 being supervised by P. Tanguay (Previous 3 pictures).

Three pictures of the YO's in Bien Thuy:





The Three Sisters

Three Sister Mountains, steeped in history and a stronghold by the Viet Cong. It had been several years since the enemy had been strong enough to keep Allied Forces out of the area. It was reported by aircrews and South Vietnamese force that the enemy was using the area again and had been firing crew served weapons at aircraft and convoys coming through the area. It was one of those areas on our Surveillance Plan and offered a significant threat to our counterparts. While on a visual and photo reconnaissance of the area we were taken under fire by ground fire from the enemy in fortified positions. We made a wide sweep of the area chose an approach and began a low-level panoramic photo run. The enemy fire was too intense to continue the mission. We saw fortified fighting positions, and crew served machine gun positions engage the aircraft. We felt the aircraft take several hits. Cpt Tanguay quickly aborted the photo run and gained sufficient altitude to allow us to pinpoint the precise coordinates and considered calling in artillery. Because of the location of the enemy guns we were unable to act as forward observers. The incident was reported to the G3 in Can Tho. Cpt Tanguay did a system check and to determine the aircraft was hit but not damaged. We returned to 73rd to have the crew chief to examine the aircraft. Our report was given in a debriefing at Can Tho. Immediate plans to eliminate enemy forces from the mountain went into action. Reconnaissance both day and night by the 73rd gave the planner the data necessary to plan and execute a major operation in the area. In the following days, the area received heavy artillery bombardment, and a major air assault forcing the enemy off the mountain and back to their safe areas in Cambodia. Again, the 73rd SAC saved the day, with the quick thinking of Cpt Tanguay, and his willingness to gather as much information about the enemy's positions and crew served weapons, was key to a successful

operation by the South Vietnamese. Days later the Senior Advisor and General Troung went in the security forces and surveyed area, made their assessment and returned to Can Tho.

Paul this maybe a bit rough I got most of it from a witness statement by Paul Tanguay and my debriefing notes to the G2 and G3 Colonel Joseph Ross Franklin. It is a fair historical representative of what I recall, it was one long time ago.