

## Fighters, Gunships Blast Reds

# 200 AF Sorties a Day Hit Cambodia

TAN SON NHUT AB, Vietnam (Special) — The U.S. Air Force is making its mark quickly and effectively in the thrust against enemy sanctuaries inside Cambodia.

Averaging more than 200 sorties a day since the operations began on May 1, Air Force fighter-bomber crews destroyed more than 1,000 enemy fortifications in the first 10 days of the operation. Pilots were also credited with destroying more than 600 bunkers, setting off more than 250 secondary explosions, and killing more than 300 enemy soldiers.

Air operations were conducted by AC119 Stinger and Shadow gunships from the 14th Special Operations Wing, headquartered at Phan Rang AB; A37 Dragonflies and F100 Supersabres from the 3rd Tactical Fighter Wing at Bien Hoa AB; F100s from the 31st TFW at Tuy Hoa AB and the 35th TFW at Phan Rang AB; and F4 Phantoms of the 12th

TFW at Phu Cut AB and 366th TFW at Da Nang AB.

Directing the air strikes were forward air controllers (FACs) flying out of such places as Quan Loi, Bien Hoa and Pleiku Air Bases.

O1 Bird Dogs of the 22d Tactical Air Support Sq. had to move quickly to get ready for the move into Cambodia.

According to Maj. Robert Drawbaugh, air liaison officer for the 1st ARVN Airborne Div., the Bird Dogs moved into position for the offensive on 36 hours notice.

Normally working out of Phuoc Binh, Fire Support Base Buttons and Tay Ninh, the unit moved to Quan Loi April 30 and, Drawbaugh noted, were ready to go out for the first strike the morning of May 1.

FACs from other units worked under similar circumstances. From the 19th TASS out of Bien Hoa AB, 1st Lt. David B. Marrs directed one strike late in the day, as it was beginning to get

dark. Two F4s of the 12th TFW were ready, but they were low on fuel and the weather was getting bad.

"I put my marker rockets along a line about 100 meters in the trees and the fighters dropped all their bombs along the line," Marrs said.

"The next day the ground forces discovered about 50 North Vietnamese Army soldiers killed and several 80mm mortar tubes and more than 100 82mm mortar rounds.

Ground fire against aircrews was sometimes intense. A37 pilots Maj. Darrell D. Whitaker and 1st Lt. Thomas S. Obeirne were flying a mission in the Fishhook area of Cambodia when an Army hunter-killer helicopter team spotted about 40 enemy soldiers.

"The FAC immediately located the target and marked it with smoke rockets. We were told to hit right on his smoke," the major said. "As I made my first run, my wing man told me

that I was receiving heavy ground fire from the woods."

As Whitaker pulled out of his bomb pass, he noticed that Obeirne was also receiving intense fire. When the aircraft had completed their passes, one of the helicopters went in to look at the area.

The helicopter took heavy ground fire and went down. The FAC directed the A37s to provide cover fire while another Army helicopter dashed in under a hail of gunfire to rescue the downed crewmen.

In another incident, a FAC even resorted to throwing a smoke grenade out the window of his aircraft to mark a target. Maj. Kermit L. Armbruster Jr. was directing air strikes against an enemy location to suppress fire when his last two marker rockets failed to fire.

"I took a smoke grenade and threw it out. It hit 30 meters from where I wanted," he said. The fighters spotted the smoke and placed their bombs nearby.