

VT Fused Rockets for the Delta

On a sunny Sunday morning in the Delta during the spring of '68, an USAF Caribou approached Truc Giang AF (VVTG) in Kien Hoa Province from the north. It performed several overhead 360s as it lost altitude to enter the pattern for landing. After landing, it back-taxed and entered the parking area. As the aircraft did a power-up 180 within the ramp area, I walked towards the right side of the aircraft and motioned to the crew with a "what's up" gesture because the crew had not made contact on the airfield's FM radio frequency. As the cargo door was coming down, the copilot motioned towards the rear of the aircraft to indicate they wanted to off-load cargo.

Expecting the crew to shut down the engines, I indicated OK with a "thumbs-up" gesture and began to walk around the wing to the rear of the aircraft. To my surprise, the pilots brought the engines up to power, released the brakes and three pallets rolled off the rear ramp. As the last pallet hit the ground, the ramp door closed and the aircraft taxied out to the runway and departed with a left turn northbound. This cargo delivery has been "professionally" accomplished without having to talk to anyone on the ground? This commotion had gained the attention of personnel on the ramp and as we inspected the cargo, we noticed that the pallets contained boxes of rockets. Since all our ammo was stored in an ammo bunker, we began to remove the individual boxes from the wooden pallets. The boxes were marked as being 2.75-rocket HE w/VT fuse. I opened one of the boxes and found two rockets with longer HE warheads and a plastic covered fuse on the nose.

During preparation for that afternoon's VR mission, I armed my Bird Dog with two of these new rockets. While airborne, I came across four armed individuals on the coastal beach southeast of Ba Tri. I engaged them with machine-gun fire, and as usual, they headed for cover. Since I had the new ammo onboard, I decided that a trial delivery was merited. I rolled into the rocket run and released one of the rockets, and an airburst occurred over the hiding spot. I circled watching for some movement; seeing none, I went down for a lower look and found two laying on the ground with one shaking a fist back at the aircraft, but there was no return fire. I decided that another firing run was in order, and went down for a lower angled approach from over the beach. As I began to fire the machine gun into the target area, two individuals jumped up and started to run further into the vegetation. I reached up and armed the other VT rocket. The rocket fired and traveled in a lower than expected path before it exploded short of the target area. The VT fuse had operated correctly with another air burst, but my flight path was not steep enough to prevent a premature burst. Mud from the explosion was splattered over the entire front of the aircraft. As an artillery aviator, I should have realized that the VT fuse should not be fired from a flat firing angle and would have to be fired with a steeper dive angle than what a PD fused warhead could be fired.

That night, I reported the receipt of the new ammo through MACV channels. The next day, a Huey, flown by two aviation staff majors, arrived from Can Tho. I related the circumstances and passed on my observations to them. I was chastised for having fired the rockets without instructions. My response was that outlying sites often did not await instructions because we were required to making due with whatever was available. As it turned out, the Caribou had delivered the Delta's initial load of operational VT fused

warheads to the wrong airfield; they had mistook Ben Tre's airfield for Can Tho's airfield? The rockets were to be used by the 235th's Cobras at Can Tho AF. The Huey had also brought a cargo net, and I was given instructions that the ammo boxes should be prepared for pick up the next day. On Tuesday, an Innkeeper (CH-47) arrived at VVTG on a return flight to Can Tho from Vung Tau. The sling load of rockets were delivered to Can Tho; however, the sling was short a few boxes of 2.75 rockets w/17 # HE warheads with VT fuses. Thanks to the USAF, these new warheads required more "testing" by an outlying 0-1 Bird Dog.

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Swamp Fox 12