

On 6 April, Jolly 62, a good friend of mine named Pete Chapman, came in to make the first pickup. Pete came in from the southeast. The idea was to go from the southeast over Clark's position toward the northwest, across the river, over the road, pick up Bat 21, come back, make a left hand turn come back down the entry path, over Clark, pick him up, then go out south. They got across the river, and as they started to go for Bat 21, he started taking fire from a village. For some reason, somebody in the Jolly pressed the UHF mike button. Maybe one of them was hit; you'll never know--pressed the UHF mike button, and the Jolly turned right. We all screamed, "Don't turn right, turn left!"

Because if he turned right that put him into some more heavy machinegun fire, and when he did, they just sieved that helicopter. He made it back across the river and blew up in the air just south of where Clark was down. That did two things. That made us know there was no way we were going to get those two out within the next 2 or 3 days.

The other thing was it really made us pissed. We started back in on that area and -- we had pinpointed where the fire was coming from. It was coming from a village north of the river. We went in with Sandies, F-4s, and just proceeded to blow that village from one side to the other. When we blew it, the North Vietnamese ran out of those houses like you have never seen before. The hardest part about it was controlling the air. There was no doubt about what the targets were. We just literally cleared that whole area out -- we had to -- and laid down a heavy carpet of gas to keep anybody who was left, down.

The other thing that started to shape up -- there had been movement reported south of the river in the area of Cam Lo. We knew basically -- I am sure I would get a fight out of the Army with this one--we had stopped them at the river. As far as our area was concerned, we had flat stopped them at the river. We also knew a group was coming through the Khe Sanh area, trying to make a flanking movement into the area.

The South Vietnamese kept screaming, "Tanks, tanks, south of the river, and east of Quang Tri" On 6 April, after the loss of Jolly 62, I conducted a visual reconnaissance of that area at 200 feet above the ground. We went through every foot trail, down every road, and I never saw one damn tank. When we came up to Cam Lo, there were a bunch of people and tanks, the whole nine yards. Cam Lo -- and it was cloudy -- you couldn't put an air strike through the clouds. Cam Lo was one of our targets, not the town itself, but south and east of the town where we had rumors that they were setting up a tank battalion headquarters. We put about six sets of air on top of that, and that seemed to cool that area off. We did not see any tanks south of the river at all. In fact, we tried to talk the ARVN [Army of Republic of Vietnam] into moving up to take Clark out from the southside of the river, but they wouldn't do it. Clark did not see any North Vietnamese south of the river.

SAMs got very, bad, and Rocky Smith and I went back out on 7 April. We flew two sorties that day, 4 hours in the morning and 4 hours in the afternoon. After talking to the Red Crown people after the action was over during our time, when we were there, the NVA fired 83 SAMs into the area south of the DMZ.

We had 10 or 13 of them go off within 500-600 feet of the airplane on that day. One, I remember, we were west of the survivor's area, and they started to hammer us hard. Covey 282 got hit just off our left wing by about tow miles. Crewed by pilot David P. Mott and observer USMC Bill Thomas. Neither of them were heard from after they ejected from the airplane.

We went to DaNang after that first part of the day was over and came back out again. I spent 4 more hours and then went home. This continued on until around 10 April; we did not put in anymore helicopters. We couldn't. We just kept a steady bombing pressure into the area, kept the survivors separated from the bad guys.