

# **The Mohawk Team**

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The low-pitched hum and passing whine of twin turboprops is a familiar sound to the residents of the Vietnamese coastal town of Vung Tau. It continues through-out the night, greets them as they wake up in the morning, and is with them all day. The sound belongs to the Mohawks of the 73d Surveillance Airplane Company as they depart and return on their round-the-clock surveillance schedule in III Corps Tactical Zone.

Utilizing the OV-1 Mohawk, a high performance aircraft carrying sophisticated electronic sensors and cameras, the officers and men of the 73d work on a 24-hour basis to provide visual, photographic and electronic surveillance as required by the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), allied forces, and US forces in the conduct of counterinsurgency operations. To accomplish its mission, the 73d has three flight platoons, - a Visual/Photographic platoon and two "exotic" platoons: Infrared (IR) and Side Looking Airborne Radar (SLAR).

A flight team consists of an aviator and an observer. The IR and SLAR technical observers are enlisted men and are school trained at the United States Army Combat Surveillance School/Training Center at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. In addition, the officers of the Imagery Interpretation Section fly on visual missions to personally keep abreast of what is happening and increase their own knowledge of the situation.

During the day the visual flight teams, equipped with the KA-30 aerial camera mounted in the belly of the Mohawk and the KA-60 panoramic camera mounted in the nose, roam over the area of operations, performing low level visual and photographic reconnaissance in search of Viet Cong activity, areas of infiltration, and troop buildup.

As the sun sets, the night teams depart Vung Tau for their vigil in the same area. The SLAR teams, high in the sky, record night movements of the Viet Cong and report the movements to ground forces for action by armed helicopters, or artillery batteries. The IR teams, flying search patterns, seek out "hot spots" and send in immediate reports of the infrared emissions. After the return of an "exotic" team, the data is processed, evaluated and interpreted by the Imagery Interpretation Section and a full report forwarded to the requesting agency.

The integrated use of its several surveillance systems is standing operating procedure for the 73d, and it is not unusual for an area to be covered by electronic sensor and photo/visual observation in one 24-hour period. A variety of information is obtained in this manner and each flight has the benefit of the data previously collected. Always maintaining contact with the troops on the ground, the "Hawks" also report timely information for immediate action.

Speed with accuracy is the operational criterion for the 73d. Inflight reporting of mobile targets is standard, and rapid interpretation of mission imagery is a necessity if effective action is to be taken. Working around the clock, the 73d interpreters prepare reports on the 500 to 600 feet of photographic, SALAR and IR imagery produced in a typical day. Detailed analyses are performed in an effort to detect the telltale changes which indicate enemy activity. "Hot" reports are called in the minute imagery is received with full reports following later. Total time from aircraft landing to a finished report on its way by teletype is frequently less than three hours.

The 73d Surveillance Airplane Company traces its Vietnam lineage back to the 23d special Warfare Aviation Detachment. The 23d SWAD was activated at Fort Rucker, Alabama in July 1962 for deployment to Vietnam. The US Army Aerial Surveillance and Target Acquisition Platoon (Augmented) formed the nucleus of the new organization. Its aircraft were six JOV-1C's modified to carry .50 caliber machine guns and 2.75-inch rockets. Because of the uniqueness of armed fixed-wing aircraft in the Army, aerial ordnance training was conducted by the Navy at Jacksonville Naval Air Station, Florida.

On 19 September, 1962, the aircraft arrived at Nha Trang. Full scale operations began in October. From August 1963 until December 1963, the 23d SWAD was based at Bien Hoa Base and has been at Vung Tau since then. In December 1964 the 23d SWAD and 4<sup>th</sup> Aerial Surveillance and Target Acquisition Platoon were deactivated and the assets consolidated to form the 73d Aviation Company (Aerial Surveillance) to give the new unit a 24-hour, all weather capability. Using Side Looking Airborne Radar and infrared sensors to augment its visual and photographic reconnaissance capabilities, it discouraged the Viet Cong from moving at night as it had previously hindered their daily movement.

Success of a routine mission can be exemplified many ways. For example, Captain Paul Piper and SP4 John Boyd, while on a SLAR mission, received radar echoes from along a river west of Saigon. While in flight, they radioed an armed helicopter fire team in Saigon, which destroyed 45 sampans.

Visual and photographic reconnaissance flights flown by Major Gene Hall's visual pilots have monitored and recorded the infiltration of Viet Cong supplies and troops along the many infiltration routes in III CTZ. Captain Forrest Lanning, while flying with Lieutenant Robert Harris, was diverted from his assigned mission and sent to search an area north of Tay Ninh. On the second pass down a highway they received intense automatic weapons fire. They had found what they were sent for-- a Viet Cong convoy on the move.

The organization of Army Surveillance Airplane Companies such as the 73d is unique in that the units are virtually self-controlled, requiring no outside support in order to produce the final goal -- intelligence. Equipped with a full range of facilities, from photo labs to camera and sensor repair shops, plus a complete Imagery Interpretation Section, the 73d is capable of dealing with all phases of surveillance from the mission request to final delivery of the mission results in the form of an immediate imagery interpretation report.

In addition to its primary mission, the personnel of the 73d take an active interest in civic action in the Vung Tau area. The 73d, through its families and friends in the US and contributions from members of the company, provide items such as blankets, sheets, soap, towels and medicine for the Le Loi Hospital, run by an Australian Surgical Team. The 73d also contributes money and comfort items on a monthly basis to four children in Baria who were orphaned during the Tet offensive.