

Brief history of the 4th ASTA

The 4th ASTA was a name given to this military unit by the CIA. Originally it was the 82nd Aerial Surveillance and Target Acquisition (ASTA) Detachment. It was changed for security reasons. The CIA also had their own name for the project: Yankee-Yankee-Uniform, or just YU.

A little background:

The United States never signed the Geneva Accords ending the French Occupation of North Viet Nam. One of the paragraphs of the Accords or agreements stated. " No foreign country shall conduct electronic warfare in either South or North Viet Nam".

The Air Force and Navy was conducting electronic surveillance from other bases and from Aircraft Carriers. In order for the United States Army to get OV-1 C&B Models, or IR and SLAR into South Viet Nam, top secret clearance was required.

4th ASTA was funded by the CIA and formed at Ft. Bragg, NC beginning July 19, 1964. All officers, pilots and enlisted were provided restricted ID cards to allow them access to a special section of Simmons Airfield at Ft. Bragg. All aircraft and equipment were protect by a temporary 10' barbed wire fence, and controlled by armed guards. Only the Commanding General of the 82nd Airborne Division and his assistant knew our mission.

Officers were entrusted with special credit cards which enabled us to purchase any materials and equipment required for establishing the unit. This included special tools, rifles, pistols, personal survival gear, jeeps, trucks, etc..

When Army Intelligence in DC decided the unit was sufficiently prepared, a date was set for deployment of the entire 4th ASTA unit.

On Friday November 6, 1964 at 12 noon our commanding officer called the entire unit together stating that everyone had 15 days to visit families. The only information that could be provided was that we would return in one year but they could not be informed about our destination.

Pilots received orders to fly the 5 OV-1s, 3 OV-1Cs and 2 OV-1B s to Alameda Naval Air Station in San Francisco Bay. Upon delivery of the Mohawks, pilots were to report to the nearest military station to their home of record with 20 days to get families settled and report to the G-1 at the nearest military base to await further orders.

The CIA had a team of several hundred civilians and military personnel arrive at our location the same day at 4 pm. Most of them were vehicle drivers, the others were laborers. They moved everything: IR and SLAR ground stations, support vehicles, aircraft maintenance equipment, conex containers, desks, typewriters, office supplies, uniforms – everything – to Ft. Bragg's rail yard where they were loaded onto covered boxcars and shipped out to Mobile, AL.

On Monday morning, personnel at Ft. Bragg found the hangar empty, the 10 ft barbed wire fence gone – all the security guards, gone. Not a trace of the 4th ASTA was anywhere on this post. One of the generals on staff at the 82nd stated: "I am impressed. They just vanished."

Fifteen days later, all enlisted reported to Seymour Johnson AFB NC from which they traveled several days to Viet Nam. The equipment took 30 days by sea to arrive in Viet Nam.

The OV-1's were at sea 25 days and arrived at Subic Bay , Philippines, _____.

Three OV-1 pilots, myself (John Towler) Gary Trippensse, and Bill Buntyn remained at Cubi Point, NAS for three weeks, test flying the five OV-1's.

On December 23 rd 1964, along with two other pilots from the 23rd SWAD, we flew the Mohawks from Cubi Point, NAS, Philippines to Vung Tau, South Viet Nam.

During this time, men and equipment had arrived at Vung Tau, having us set up and operational for combat missions on the day of arrival with the Mohawks.

The 4th ASTA was the first OV-1 Mohawk unit to deploy as a unit from the United States to a combat zone, EVER. Other units followed, but none can claim the title of "FIRST."