

### **Response to Inquiry – John H. Towler**

Paul, I am not exactly sure what you are looking for as I respond to your inquiry. Therefore, I am sending along various pieces of information which might help illustrate the story.

I will reiterate: As a member of 4th ASTA, I flew the first OV-1B Model on a ferry flight from Cubi Point NAS to Vung Tau Viet Nam on December 23, 1964. This was the first recorded combat mission in an OV-1B. In the right seat was SGT Major Charles Davis. To the best of my recollection, there were no SLAR missions until early 1965. That first SLAR mission was piloted by CPT John Connelly and the TO was Spec Jack Pasquini and Cpt. William Buntyn (TO unknown) flew the first IR mission (having arrived in-country as part of the 4<sup>th</sup> ASTA.).

(History of the 4<sup>th</sup> ASTA was published in a Mohawker newsletter some time ago. I have included a copy in this correspondence.)

On December 26, 1964, the 4<sup>th</sup> ASTA and 23<sup>rd</sup> SWAD became the 73<sup>rd</sup> Aviation Company. All missions after that date were flown by the two platoons of the 73<sup>rd</sup>. The visual platoon which had 9 OV-1A armed Mohawks provided support to all of the ARVN Corps. The Infrared and SLAR sections made up the IR&SLAR platoon which utilized 4 OV-1C and 2 OV-1B models. The IR&SLAR missions were flown in support of MACV (Military Assistance Command Viet Nam) Approximately 80% of all missions were flown out of Vung Tau.

The first IR&SLAR missions were flown at the request of MACV in Saigon -- the exact date is unknown. I was assistant operations officer and understand that all of those records have since been destroyed.

SLAR missions (utilizing only the OV-1B Model) monitored and tracked river traffic after curfew. The purpose was to halt movement of small boats and sampans on the river. All information was obtained from the on-board SLAR operators and transmitted to ground stations for whatever action might be required.

### **OV-1 Gun ships**

During the early days of Viet Nam, (1962-66) formation flying was a requirement. All gunship missions used WWII tactics to attack a target.

Each aircraft could carry a varying load of ordnance.

^There were three hard points or attachment points under each wing where six 2.75 rocket pods could be carried. Each pod held 9, 2.75 rockets.

^ It was also possible to carry 4 pods, each pod with 18 2.75 rockets.

^Or, you could carry 4, 50 cal machineguns. Each machinegun pod was self-contained and electronically operated from the cockpit.

^Two rocket pods, one under each wing, could carry 18 rockets and 2 50 cal machineguns

Flight leaders selected targets based on MI data and daily briefings. All rocket attacks were begun at 4,000 feet. The lead aircraft would select the number of rockets to be used on the first run.

Starting from 4,000 feet, the lead aircraft would roll 120 degrees to the left and point the nose towards the ground. He would key the mike and say "In and Hot." Airspeed would build quickly, so it was necessary to trim the aircraft using aileron, elevator and rudder trim. It was not possible to fire accurately unless the airframe was trimmed. This trim had to be achieved before reaching 3000 feet when firing would begin. If you had selected 2 rockets, then every time the firing trigger was pulled, two rockets would fire from each pod. If the first two were headed towards the target, if you had time, you fired again.

Pilots had only from 3000 ft to 1500 ft. to complete all firing. At 1500 ft, you would pull the stick back into your lap and pull 3 G's on the G meter. This would give you a margin of 300 to 500 ft to clear the ground. When you came off the target, you would key your mike and say "Off and Safe". This was to tell the trailing aircraft he was cleared to start his run. He would roll over and key his mike and say "#2 In and Hot"

Two gun ship pilots who were well coordinated could have an aircraft rolling in every time the other one came off the target. Generally, we could get in three runs on a target in 10 minutes. Then we would leave that target.

We had been informed by Intelligence that the Viet Cong primarily used 30 cal machine guns; however they would set up a 50 cal once the OV-1's were in the area. Due to the physical size of the Viet Cong, they would have the 50 cal broken down into 5 pieces which took them about 10 minutes to reassemble. A 30 cal could not bring down a Mohawk; however a well-placed 50 cal could disable an engine or the control cables.

One of the great German fighter pilots said after WWII. "It was better to be a coward for a few minutes, than to be a long time dead".

When using 50 cal machine guns from an aircraft such as the OV-1 and due to the gun pods under each wing and not a part of the main body of the aircraft, too much stress was placed on the wings to make conventional firing runs.

When using 50 cal guns, we would approach the target from a start point of 3 to 5 miles out, at the level of 300 to 500 feet above the ground. At about 1 mile out, we pulled up to from 800 to 1000 feet, rolled the aircraft inverted, led the nose drop below the horizon, roll out, and trim the aircraft. We would begin firing, using tracers, and continue to fire on the target. When over the target, we would roll 90 degrees to left to insure that we did not fly into our own bullets that could ricochet off the target.

Pilots tried not to come back to home base with any live ammo or unused rockets in the pods. Our ground guys took a dim view of walking in front of the aircraft to disarm guns and pods.

The OV-1, with the smaller L-7 engines, would not climb or maintain altitude with one engine inoperative. On Takeoff, once the throttles were pushed forward to the stops, then your right hand would go for the jettison handle for all the wing stores. The pilot would keep his hand on this handle, until he had reached a safe altitude, and then put the gear up. Then flaps and start to trim for climb.