

U.S. Army/French Government OV-1 Mohawk
Evaluation Program Summary
LTC Retired James R. Barkley SR

As mentioned in the last paragraph of the U.S. Army/German evaluation summary, in mid October 1963, the French Government through diplomatic channels expressed an interest in conducting a limited evaluation of the OV-1 Mohawk as configured for the German evaluation. As a result of the request, the U.S. Army Evaluation Team was directed that upon completion of the German program in early November to proceed to a French Air Force Base located in the vicinity of Metz France. Enroute, we were to stop at the U.S. Army Aviation Maintenance Center (USAAMC) at Sandhofen Germany, have all of the German military markings removed from both of the Mohawk aircraft. Those markings were replaced with the French Tri-color identification. With special customs clearances for the ground transportation of our support equipment it was off to France. In Metz was also located a small U.S. Army garrison. The Enlisted U.S. Military personnel who had become a part of the team, were given quarters at the U.S. garrison. The rest of us, military and civilian tech. support personnel found lodging in local hotels.

At the very first meeting with the French military staff, it became very apparent that the conduct of the evaluation was going to be quite different from the way it was conducted in Germany where everything was planned in advance and executed by the numbers. There did not seem to be any detailed objective for the evaluation or daily operational plan. When I requested a proposed schedule of events, it was usually met with "we will talk about it tomorrow." However what they did want was very detailed design information and operational capability of both the SLAR and IR systems, information that at least at that point in time the U.S. Government was not willing to release. As the evaluation proceeded on a very informal way, I concluded that the French did not have any serious plan to procure the Mohawk. They were only interested in the capability of the sensors. They were concerned that if the Germans did procure the Mohawk with SLAR and IR that they (the French) could potentially have a former enemy looking electronically in their direction.

Every day was a different experience. We would not know what event was to happen until we arrived at the airfield. The French planners would have a SLAR mission planned which would go along the French/German national border from Strasbourg to as far north as the German town of Saar-Brucken. The SLAR scans would always be looking into Germany. Major Wilson our ASA representative had little say in the events. About all he could do was to keep his contacts at the American Embassy advised. One of the French pilots assigned to the evaluation spoke very good English. He had an aeronautical engineering degree and was a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base California. He and I flew together a number of times. He was very interested in the Mohawk aircraft performance. We had much fun performing maneuvers not associated with the actual evaluation objectives.

The French Officers were however quite socially inclined. Something we were to learn soon after arrival at the base. I was informed by my French Air Force counterpart that for each daily lunch, the Base Commander requested that I and any other of our field grade officers attend the daily luncheon at the Officers Mess commencing promptly at 11:30. We would be expected to be dressed in regular field uniform (no flight suits). I advised him that ALL of my officers must be included or no one would attend. They reluctantly agreed.

Every day the luncheon went something like this, at 11:30 we all would gather in a room at the mess, the Commander would enter, at which time everyone would be served a before dinner drink. (To stimulate the appetite, they said.) at 12:00 we proceeded into the formal dining room, standing at attention till the commander sat down. Then would come a first course (usually some sort of salad) washed down with a average quality red wine. If you took even one sip from your wine glass, a waiter would be there to refill. This phase would last for about 15 minutes. At that time all plates and glasses were removed and replaced with fine dinnerware and wine glasses. The main course was then served, usually poultry, seafood or pork with all the trimmings and sauces, all quite good. Before starting to eat, the commander would propose a toast to someone for something, and more wine (the very good stuff). Promptly at 13:00 the Commander would stand up. Everyone must stop eating NOW. We then went to the smoking room where cigars were passed around and there was a glass of cognac for everyone. Finally at 14:00 2 and ½ hours after starting the luncheon we were dismissed and expected to go out and fly some sort of mission the French had thought up. This was a normal daily routine for the French officers, pilots included. It only took a few luncheons to determine that on a daily basis, this was not for the U.S. Military team. Through the French Major who was designated as the Evaluation Chief, as gracefully as possible I excused us from further participation in the Commanders daily luncheons. At lunch time we would go to the

American Compound and get a hamburger from the snack bar. The food was not quite as fancy, but it sure made the flying a lot safer.

The evaluation just dragged on day to day but was interrupted on November 22nd the day President Kennedy was assassinated. We the Americans were told to stand down for two days for a time of mourning. It might be interesting to note that the French Commander objected to our stand down on the grounds that we were under their control and that the French Government had NOT declared a day of mourning. Too bad, after a few days, they got over it.

By early December I became apparent that the U.S. Air Force had convinced the German Air Force that the German Army should not have such a large multi-engine aircraft so the whole program began to unravel. We closed out the operation at Metz in mid-December. The OV-1B had already been sent back to Germany for inclusion in the USAREUR assets. Prior to terminating the evaluation, I had been requested by the French military to fly the C-model to several other French Bases just for them to have a look. By the time I completed that task, all the rest of our team had returned to their regular assignments. Upon returning to Metz, I contacted USAREUR and requested instructions as to where to deliver the aircraft. I was instructed to leave it at the French Air Base where it would be retrieved by a 7th Army pilot and that I could go on to Paris and get a flight back to Washington. That was the last I heard of the operation until several months later when we learned that the French Government had complained to the American Embassy that the American Airplane left in their care under guard in December was still at Metz and they wanted it removed. Apparently something had fallen through the crack at the USAREUR level and no one got the word back in December to pick up the bird. The problem was quickly resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Conclusion; The French were never interested in obtaining the Aircraft. They were attempting to obtain intelligence on the sensors.