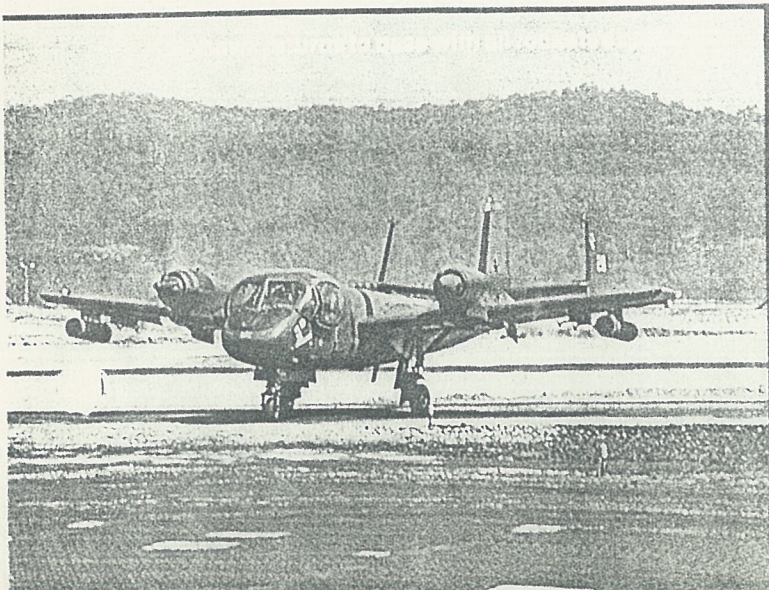


MOHAWKS IN VIETNAM

The Army's Spy Plane

By Hanz Lucas

Somewhere in the skies over Southeast Asia, between the lumbering B-52s which unloaded thousands of tons of devastation in a single mission, the earth-pounding diving attacks of jet fighters, and gunships taking the jungle with millions of rounds from their miniguns, were the U.S. Army's Mohawks. Unarmed, powered by two gas turbine engines, these aircraft found service in nearly every area of the war — and left their dead in the jungles and sea. Yet most of us who fought there and study the war today do not even know they existed. Still fewer knew what the Mohawks were doing. Their role and story have never been told.



Danny White, a former Mohawk pilot and close friend, often talked about his flying experiences during the Vietnam war, so when Jim Shults, editor of Gung-Ho, asked for information on the Mohawks I thought of Danny and the Mohawks (sounds like a rock group). After going over the story with Jim and getting his okay, I then called White.

"Sure," he said, a note of uneasiness stinging his voice. "I'll come over and we'll get started."

I already knew it would take him a short time to start easing up enough to remember what it was like. Over the next few days Danny and I spent several hours in my office/home talking about the Mohawk program. What evolved is a story about a "spy" program that was left largely unpublished during the war years.

"It's hard," Dan said, walking across my living room to the area of warmth around our gas stove, "and what makes it hard is that you bury most of it after the war. People can't understand how flying an unarmed aircraft is fighting, yet our men were killed, just like they were in every other part of the fighting."

As he began to tell his story, a new part of the Vietnam war was added to my understanding. While I had been on the ground, he had been somewhere between the high-level bombing and the dog eat-dog fighting. His was a war of never-never land electronics and the danger of anti-aircraft fire.

The Mohawk is, in fact, the eyes and ears of a Corps commander. With the airplane's various types of electronics and photographic equipment, a commander could actually sit in his own headquarters and "look" at the battle area on a special TV-type screen.

Photos courtesy of SFC Milon Whittier

1967

During the Vietnam war there were three models of the Mohawk flown. OV-1 model A, like the other two, carried a pilot and a technical observer (who operated the electronic equipment). The A-model was equipped for photo recon missions and was the only one of the three types used which could also carry rockets — one pod of 2.75 inchers mounted under each wing. After the VC discovered the Mohawks were unarmed they fired on them. By equipping a few with rockets, the shooting at the Mohawks slowed down since the VC weren't sure which plane was armed.

The unarmed B- and C-models were equipped with Side-Looking Airborne Radar (SLAR), for either infrared or photographic equipment.

There were several companies of Mohawks active during the war at Da Nang, Marble Mountain and the 131st Mohawk Aviation Company at Phu Bai. There were also Mohawk companies in both II and III Corps areas in South Vietnam. It was the 131st, however, which pulled what was called the "unique mission," a three-pronged mission which included infrared and photo-recon; "Route Pack One," a surveillance fight along the coast of North Vietnam; and "Special Mission Twenty," which flew west over South Vietnam and Laos to monitor the NVA's vehicle traffic coming into the South.

Route Pack flying required the crew to stay three miles off the North's coast, while the SLAR "looked" a hundred miles into North Vietnam. Because it was unarmed, the idea for the Mohawk was to stay out of the effective range of the NVA's SAM's and anti-aircraft defenses. Monitoring the air defenses and radio chatter of the aircraft was a mothership — usually a Lockheed Super Constellation with the code name "Deep Sea" — during the night flights. Part of Deep Sea's mission was to warn the Mohawk pilots when anti-aircraft missiles were launched or other problems developed in the area.

Although the Mohawks tried to stay out of range, it didn't always work. Danny remembers one mission when he heard a loud "Wham!" to his left. Turning around, he saw the puff of smoke from an AA round. "Suddenly, I realized the bastards were shooting at me, but I didn't know what they were using," he recalls.

He radioed his control that he was taking fire and was told to watch the next one explode, then report the color and number of bursts.

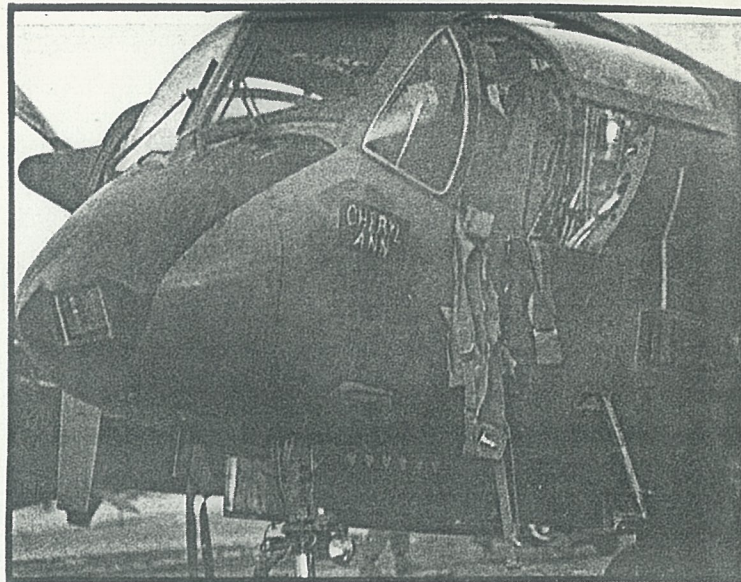
"When I told them it was gray," he recalled, "they said, 'Umm that's an 85 mike-mike firing, so you'd better move to your right a little.' Hell, I was glad to get away from that shit!"

The missions were not limited to I Corps and North Vietnam areas. Mohawks played an important role in the rest of the war as well. The Plain of Jars in Laos was an important battle area during the war, since the NVA moved tons of supplies through the region on their way south. Without the Mohawks working as the eyes and ears of the F-4's, the Air Force's effort to intercept the massive amounts of supplies would not have been nearly as successful as it was.

"Each night at about 2300 two Mohawks were sent out," White recalled. "One was rigged for infrared flying and the second for SLAR. The IR was strictly a recon mission, while the SLAR played an active role in the air war."

While the IR plane flew at about 1500 feet, the SLAR plane was above him at 10,000 to 15,000 feet. With his long-range capability, the SLAR could pick out targets for the "big boys" to attack during the night. Since the attack aircraft could only see about five miles with their radar, the Mohawk was the only way they could really get on target.

The North knew they couldn't send MiGs up to attack the Mohawks while the F-4s were on station. They quickly learned, however, that the fighters were not always on the ground. By watching their own radar screens, the NVA could see the Mohawks and, if no fighters showed up, launch their MiGs. Moonbeam, the controlling aircraft over the Plain of Jars, would pick up the approaching fighters and warn the Mohawks and gunships to leave the area — or face certain death.

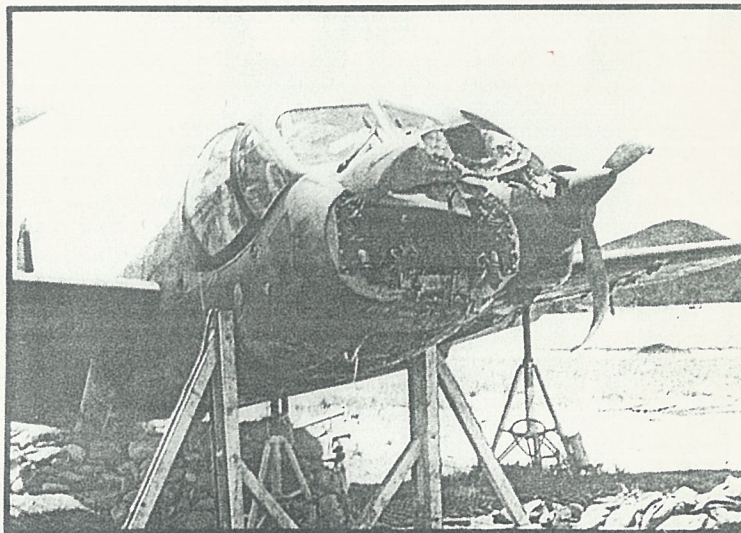


The Cheryl Ann — Republic of Vietnam. The hearts indicate how many times the plane has been hit. Planes not shot at had a pair of red cherries painted on them.

The trick worked. The NVA would hold off shipping anything South that they wanted to be sure to get through until the fighters were gone, then scramble their MiGs and chase the gunships and spy planes away. It frustrated Danny and the other Mohawk pilots because the ruse worked every time, and the NVA were not really committing their MiGs to combat.

The fact that the Mohawks' role in the war was controlled by the highest levels (Washington and Saigon) is well illustrated by a "special mission" Danny flew over the Plain of Jars for a three-star Air Force general sent to Southeast Asia from Washington.

"I was sitting in the operations building, munching on a pizza, when this dude in civies walked in, followed by a three-star. They told me some people in Washington

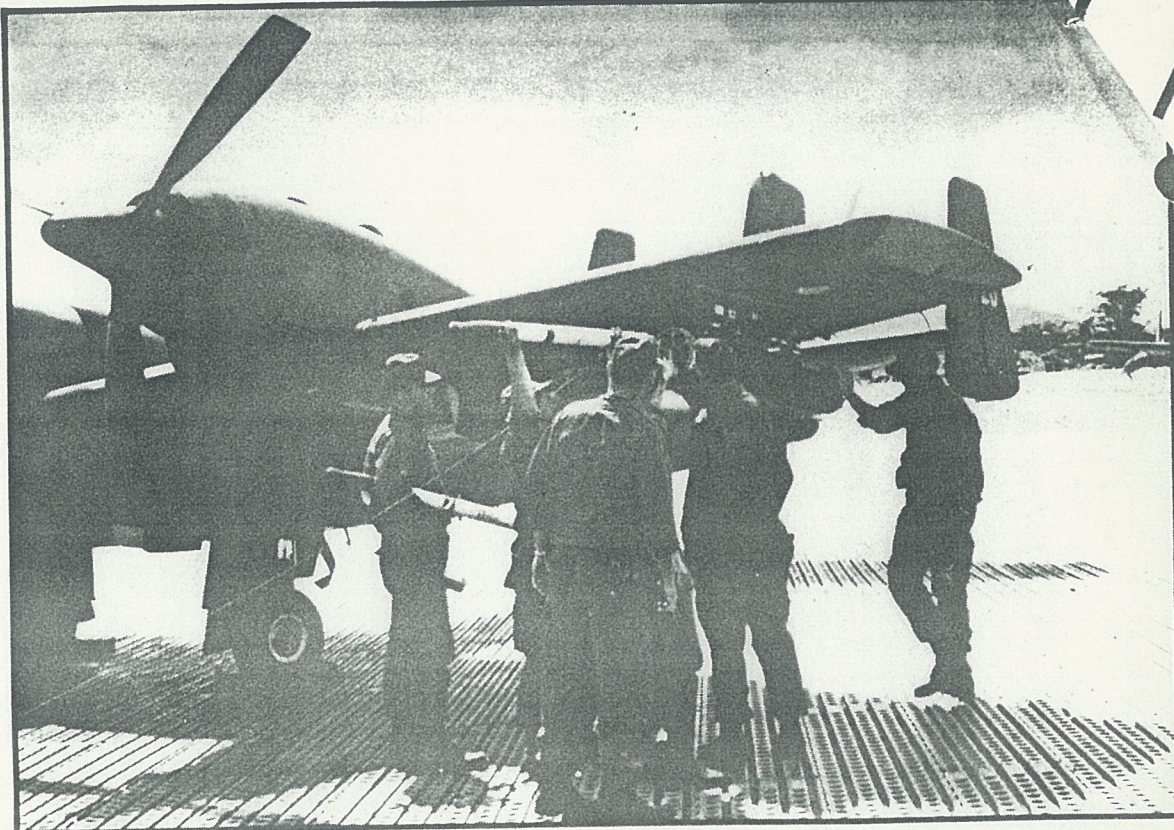


Three days later, Sergeant Whittier, crew chief of the Cheryl Ann, took this photo of her after a new pilot "bounced" on landing.

needed some IR film of the Jars area, so I flew the mission, brought the film back, and the general left. He waited right there with the rest of the ground crew while I flew, then hand-carried the film back."

The "big boys" who flew the F-4s and other "real fighting planes" didn't grant the Mohawk pilots their due during the war. Once, at a joint service briefing, Danny remembers an Air Force officer who told the pilots: "...and don't go

Loading up 2.75 inch rockets. Armed Mohawks forced the VC to be more careful about indiscriminate pot shots. The Air Force wasn't happy about the Army fixed-wind planes having ordnance — it wasn't in their agreement on war plans.



screwing around at 400 knots!"

"To us that was like a death-threat and insult all in one statement," Danny recalls. "We flew at less than that speed."

Finally, one of the Mohawk pilots in the rear of the briefing room stood up and reminded the officer that Mohawks were not jet fighters and flew at the lower speeds. The officer looked back at the cluster of army pilots and said: "Well then, good luck!"

The Mohawk pilots were a strange lot. Not really a part of either group involved in the air war — the fighter and bomber pilots or the chopper pilots. Yet Mohawk pilots took just as many risks and left their dead behind in the jungles and in the sea. George Rogalla (see George's Raid) was one of the pilots who was killed in action. While flying a SLAR mission during a monsoon. George was trying too hard to accomplish his mission and flew into a cloud-covered mountain. Another pilot, a captain, flying a Mohawk recon mission over South Vietnam took an AA

round in the gas tank and disappeared in a ball of flame.

Still, the pilots seemed to enjoy their strange brand of war. While Danny was stationed in Urdon, Thailand, he and the other pilots lived in the Paradise Hotel. The hotel's swimming pool was under the Mohawks' approach field and the pilots, whenever they returned from a night mission, flashed their landing lights at the pool, letting the rest of the company know they were home. The poolside visits had another side to them — if the pilot didn't show up, it was evident to the crew they'd lost one.

Danny is not surprised about the lack of glory Mohawks received during the war. "I guess it was because we were really just spies. We might have been slow-moving and not quite as fancy as the SR-71, but that's what we were — spies. The night recon we were doing with fancy electronic equipment was unheard of in other wars. No one really knew we existed or what we were doing. Hell," he adds, "people still look at me like I am crazy when I tell them I flew Mohawks during the war. They've never heard of them!"

The Mohawks' role in the war is often overlooked whenever someone starts to compile any kind of history of the war. The OV-1 Mohawk is not covered at all in Drew Middleton's book, *Air War — Vietnam*. Yet, the Army pilots flew as many missions for the Air Force as they did the Army. In Thailand that was all they flew.

Although the Mohawks found targets for the gunships, the pilot's best bet after radioing a target's location was to "get the hell out of the area." The PUFF pilots never bothered to ask the Mohawk's location before opening up with their miniguns. If the pilot hung around to continue directing fire, he had a good chance of being shot down by his own people!

By the time the war was over, the Mohawk's role in combat was firmly established. It can outfly and outmaneuver most other observation/recon aircraft. Mohawks are now deployed around the world wherever the U.S. Army is positioned. Also, the newest of the OV-1 series, the "D" model, can be changed to operate any of the snooping equipment, thus cutting down on the number of aircraft needed by the Army to meet the needs of the future battlefield. Another plus is that the aircraft and crews are often loaned to civilian agencies for specialized work which

(Continued On Page 54)

Off we go ... roaring by construction crews enlarging the runway, a Mohawk folds its gear just inches off the strip.



MOHAWKS

(Continued From Page 20)

would cost the agency hundreds of thousands of dollars. These missions have ranged from IR flights over the St. Lawrence Seaway to locate ice floes for ships, to tracking down polluters in San Francisco Bay. More importantly, however, is the fact that the Mohawk is now an important part of our future battle plans.

The pilots of the Vietnam war, though, who proved the

MILITARY MISSION

To provide continuous combat surveillance and indirect target acquisition information in support of field Army, corps, division and separate task force units through the use of organic aircraft and sensor equipment

PEACETIME MISSION

Aerial surveillance, infra-red photography and interpretation
Capabilities include:
monitoring forest fires; detecting fires
locating downed aircraft for Oregon Board of Aeronautics
monitoring volcanic activity of Mt. St. Helens under the direction of University of Washington geophysics program and Oregon Dept. of Geology and Mineral Industries since 1975
detecting crop diseases and monitoring coastal erosion under the direction of Oregon State University
determining extent of floods on behalf of soil and water conservation districts and emergency service agencies
detecting water pollution, channel depths and vegetation growth
photographing ice jams and kelp beds for the Corps of Engineers

Mohawk's worth in combat, often paying with their lives, have drifted into obscurity. Their dedication to flying the mission, even while unarmed, contributed to the war's effort and prevented thousands of tons of supplies from ever reaching the battlefields in the South.

Here's a late, but very real "thank you" to the Mohawks of the Vietnam war for a job well done!

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Danny White is a close friend and asked me to change his name for the story. As a Mohawk pilot in Vietnam, Danny flew a number of missions he still cannot talk about. I've seen his flying record — unfortunately, most of the Mohawk story may never be told.

locating fault areas along the Oregon coastal zones for use in land planning
flying air cover for helicopter rescue of lost climbers
transporting human organs

OV-1 MOHAWK

CHARACTERISTICS

Wing Span	42 Ft.
Length	41 Ft.
Height	12 Ft. 8 In.
Crew:	2
Engines:	Lycoming, 1,700 HP ea., gas turbine
Prop:	3 blade, full feather and reverse
Gross Weight (lbs.)	12,675
Cruise Speed (knots)	207 MPH
Max. Speed:	325 MPH
Max. Range (Miles)	774
Ceiling	33,000
A Model:	visual-photo mission
B Model:	visual-photo-radar
C Model:	visual-photo-infrared
Manufactured by Grumman	

GEORGE'S RAID

By Hanz Lucas

WARRANT OFFICER GEORGE ROGALLA — KILLED IN ACTION, RVN, 1970. MOHAWK PILOT.

He was the teenager of the Mohawk pilots — striving to become part of a world he didn't really understand, not unlike thousands of other young men throughout the war. Still, George, in an odd way, made it to the top and became something of a legend.

"George was a good pilot," Danny explained. "Everyone in the company liked him. What made him special was that he still had that youthful innocence, that set him apart. He met things head on. It was something which brought praise from other pilots — perhaps even a little envy. We were old enough to know better."

Although George was finally killed trying to "accomplish the mission," later in 1970, the story of George's raid lives on in Mohawk operations rooms.

The same year George died, he drew a night Infrared mission over South Vietnam. For a Mohawk pilot, it was "normal." He was unarmed and at the

mercy of the NVA AA guns. George accepted this with his usual exuberance. Flying about 1000 feet over the night-shrouded jungle, George suddenly found himself under fire from NVA automatic small arms anti-aircraft positions.

While the tracers arched towards him, George followed normal Mohawk procedure — a turn away from the fire while climbing for the safety of altitude.

"That must have been when the anger hit him," Danny says slowly. "there is just so much of this unarmed bullshit a man can take in combat, and George had had enough of it."

Banking the aircraft to the left and climbing out of the danger zone while tracers ripped through the night sky around him, George's frustration mounted. Looking behind him, he could see the flashes of the guns. The young pilot decided it was time a "Mohawk" struck back. The months of dodging 85mm AA fire, running from MiG's and SAM's seemed to explode in him, and George lowered his landing light without switching it on.

Reaching the peak of his climb and turning, George rolled the aircraft and pointed it towards the guns. Lining up

his imaginary sights on his new target, he forgot, for a few minutes, his real mission. He pushed the stick forward and went into a hellcat, screaming dive towards the guns. With an unarmed, multi-million dollar aircraft, packed with electronic equipment, George Rogalla was going to attack.

As he came within "range", he reached for another toggle switch, waited, then began flipping his landing light on and off as fast as he could flip the switch. Whatever the powerful blinking light looked like to the NVA will remain a mystery forever. What happened next is history. The unarmed Mohawk, flown by a young American pilot who was angry about not being able to shoot back in a war he was fighting just as hard as everyone else, silenced an NVA anti-aircraft position in the heat of battle — by flashing his landing lights!

"That was George," Dan said remembering and smiling, "if it had been any other pilot, he would have been shot out of the sky."

Recounting the mission later, George closed the story as effectively as it happened: "They stopped shooting."

He then completed the mission.