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*Mohawks
on the
Warpath*

PG 16

VIETNAM

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Arsenal

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control. The use of the different reticles depended upon the light and target conditions. An AN/N-6A electrically driven gun camera was also available to provide a photographic record of aerial gunnery. The first detent on the pilot's gun trigger switch operated the camera only, and the second detent operated both the camera and machine guns.

The Mohawk's gun-control system enabled crewmen to fire either two or four of the .50-caliber machine gun pods. The system used the P147-6100-20 and the SUU-12/A machine gun pods. The gun-firing system was independent of the ordnance-release system, permitting simultaneous gun firing and rocket or bomb release on strafing runs.

Machine guns were readied for firing by placing the armament power switch in the on position, the gun-charging switch to ready (which put a round in the machine gun's chamber) and the gun-firing switch to firing. The trigger switch electrically activated the gun's sear mechanism, allowing the firing pin to release and strike the chambered round. In the event of a dud or misfire, recharging the guns from the cockpit extracted the failed round and chambered a new one.

The P147-6100-20 machine gun pod contained one .50-caliber machine gun with a 100-round capacity. The pod had a pneumatic charger and a conventional feed system.

The SUU-12/A machine gun pod contained a .50-caliber machine gun with a 750-round capacity. The ammunition was stored in three separate compartments, and an electrically powered ammunition booster fed the ammunition from the storage compartments to the gun. Compressed air stored in a 100-cubic-inch supply bottle operated the MAU-1A pneumatic charger attached to the right side of the gun.

The Mohawk's LAU-3/A rocket launcher package was an expendable unit that held 19 2.75-inch folding-fin aerial rockets. The firing pulse initiated when the pilot set switches on the external stores panel and then pressed the ordnance release button on the stick grip. The rockets were fired in pairs, except for the last rocket, which fired singly. The firing interval ripple between pairs was 10 milliseconds.

The LAU-32/A smaller rocket launcher package, with a capacity of seven 2.75-inch rockets, was also expendable. The LAU-32/A weighed 153 pounds fully loaded, and its firing sequence was the same as that of the LAU-3/A.

Armed Mohawks were among the earliest American aircraft sent to Vietnam during the war. The 23rd Special Warfare Aviation Detachment (Surveillance), or 23rd SWAD, deployed to Vietnam in September 1962, was assigned to conduct operational testing of the armed OV-1 and provide reconnaissance support for the South Vietnamese army. Piloted by American airmen, the 23rd SWAD's aircraft flew with ARVN observers in the right seat. The unit's pilots had standing orders not to initiate fire, but they could return it if fired upon. The official armed Mohawk configuration for the 23rd SWAD in Vietnam was limited to .50-caliber machine guns in pods only. In actual operations, however, the Mohawks carried a variety of ordnance as dictated by the mission requirements. One typical combination consisted of two .50-caliber machine guns and two rocket pods. The SUU-12 machine guns and the LAU-3/A rocket pods gave the Mohawk a lethal combined payload of 1,500 rounds of .50-caliber ammunition and 38 rockets.

The armed JOV-1 could provide timely intelligence information while simultaneously offering close air support. Mohawks were fast, quiet weapons platforms with quick response times, and they could loiter on target for hours. According to an article by Frank Colucci in the November 1981 issue of *Airpower* magazine, "the Viet Cong developed a fearful respect of the all-seeing Mohawk." They reportedly dubbed the quiet OV-1 "Whispering Death" and offered a standing reward of 50,000 piasters to any gunner who downed an armed Mohawk.

Ground commanders in Vietnam praised the Mohawk's response times and effectiveness. As cited in the official history of the 23rd SWAD, U.S. adviser Major Lewis N. McGuyre once noted: "No mission has been refused by the 23rd SWAD. Response time was excellent in all cases. Missions accepted without a standby night crew can take off in twenty-five minutes from the time of initial notification."

Although the armed Mohawk proved an extremely successful fixed-wing air support weapons platform in Vietnam, the aircraft generated controversy from its beginning. The U.S. Air Force in particular strongly objected to Army fixed-wing aircraft providing close support to ground troops, arguing that providing close air support was one of its own primary missions. The result was a major interservice dispute within the Department of Defense.

The fate of the armed Mohawk ultimately paralleled that of the Vietnam War. The battles were won in Vietnam, but the war was lost elsewhere on a political battlefield. Even

as the 23rd SWAD was being formed and deployed to Vietnam, the U.S. Army Tactical Mobility Requirements Board—chaired by General Hamilton H. Howze and commonly known as the Howze Board—was being formed by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara. The board strongly recommended further testing and experimentation with an Army division organized around helicopter mobility. As a result, the 11th Air Assault Division was formed at Fort Benning, Ga., in early 1963.

While subsequently organizing at Fort Benning, the 11th Air Assault Division received JOV-1C Mohawks to test the aircraft's attack capability, especially in support of troop-carrying helicopters. Mobility tests and experiments successfully validated the concept of air cavalry. As a result, the 11th Air Assault Division was redesignated the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) on July 1, 1965, and deployed to Vietnam shortly thereafter. But the division's JOV-1Cs were shortly replaced by the unarmed OV-1C models.

As Kevin J. Dougherty states in *The Evolution of Air Assault*, "Army Chief of Staff General Harold Johnson was forced to withdraw Army plans to use armed Mohawk aircraft as a sacrifice on the altar of accord with the Air Force." The Mohawk was restricted to the reconnaissance role, and in return the Army got clearance to exploit fully the potential of the armed helicopter. Thus, in 1965, the Army issued a directive prohibiting the operation of any armed fixed-wing aircraft.

Despite the official policy, however, U.S. Army commanders in the field in Vietnam continued to demand quick-response close air support. Armed Mohawks kept operating well after the 1965 directive. The OV-1A Mohawk operator's manual was last published in February 1970, and its last change was issued on November 16, 1973. The manual still contained information on the armed OV-1A models, some eight years after the 1965 Department of Defense directive. As late as 1971, rocket-armed Mohawks reportedly flew missions in support of the 101st Airborne Division and the 1st Marine Division.

Unarmed Mohawk models continued to provide effective aerial surveillance, standing watch throughout the world in Vietnam, Alaska, Korea, Europe, and Central and South America. In fact, they were still in service with Georgia and Oregon Army National Guard units and during Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm in 1991. The OV-1 Mohawk finally was phased out of the U.S. Army inventory in 1996, but its legacy and tradition of intelligence gathering live on in the Army's present-day aerial platforms. ☆

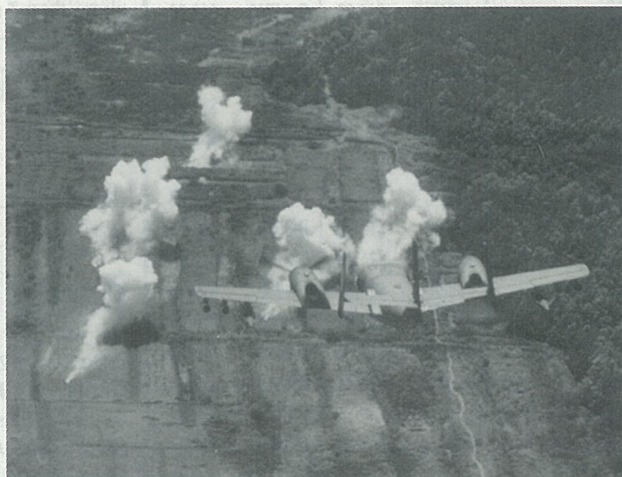


The armed version of the OV-1 Mohawk surveillance plane was called 'Whispering Death' by the Viet Cong.

BY JIM THOMAS

THE U.S. MILITARY WAS painfully aware of its aviation shortcomings during and after the Korean War. Visionaries in the Army and Marine Corps recognized the need to support troops and equipment with advanced photo observation, electronic surveillance and aerial weapons platforms. The two services identified similar needs and eventually agreed on the requirements for an aircraft capable of short takeoffs and rough field operation, and equipped for tactical observation as well as battlefield surveillance missions.

Grumman's G-134 design concept met the joint specifications. The U.S. Army version of the airplane was designated the YAO-1A Mohawk, and nine preproduction models were ordered in 1957, with the first airframe



A Grumman JOV-1A Mohawk of the 73rd Aviation Company (Aerial Surveillance) puts its offensive armament to use against a Viet Cong target (Grumman Corporation, Bethpage, N.Y.).

with the first Mohawk delivered to the U.S. Army Aviation Board in Fort Rucker, Ala., in mid-1960. When the Department of Defense reorganized designations in 1962, the AO-1 was redesignated OV-1.

As a carryover from the original Army and Marine Corps joint design specifications, the Mohawk had three pylons under each wing to accommodate heavy armament. Armed OV-1 Mohawks, designated JOV-1s, could carry an impressive array of armament, including the MK-28 5-inch high-

E-153 chemical cluster bomb, the MK-81 250-pound bomb, the MK-82 500-pound bomb and the MK-83 1,000-pound bomb. Other weapons proposed or tested on the Mohawk included Sidewinder missiles, Bullpup missiles, 20mm guns and MK-24 flares.

Depending on the type of mission, these versatile killing machines could carry four machine guns or four rocket pods, or combinations of the two. Camera systems operated independent of the armament. The machine gun pods were droppable elements, suspended on the bomb rack hooks. To prevent inadvertent release of a gun pod, aircrews had to make sure not to set the station selector switch to a position that mounted a gun pod or the salvo position when executing a bomb release.

An MK-20 Mod 4 illuminated sight or an M-60 infinity sight provided the JOV-1 pilot with an optical line of sight for bombing and firing the guns and rockets. The MK-20 sight consisted of an optical element, illuminated reticles, a reticle selector, a reflector plate, an inclinometer and an adjustable elevation

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The fate of the armed Mohawk ultimately paralleled that of the Vietnam War.

rollout due in 1959. The Marines, however, withdrew from the development program before the first prototype flew.

Grumman test pilot Ralph Donnell took off in the first YAO-1 on April 14, 1959, at Grumman's Peconic River test facility. The Mohawk proved highly maneuverable and rugged. Thirty-five production AO-1AFs were ordered,

velocity aerial rocket, the .50-caliber machine gun pod, the LAU-10/A rocket launcher package (firing 5-inch, folding-fin aerial rockets, or Zunis), the LAU-3/A (AERO 7D) 2.75-inch rocket launcher package, the LAU-32/A (AERO 6A) 2.75-inch rocket launcher package, the MK-79 firebomb (containing 1,000 pounds of napalm), the