

Aboard the Mohawk in Vietnam

An Army aviator writes about the inspiring labors of his observer — labors that are common among enlisted crewmen

Major Donald A. Roberts

NUMEROUS OV-1 Mohawk units, known as Surveillance Airplane Companies, support the ground troops in the Republic of Vietnam. One unit with these triple-tailed, twin-engined, turbo-prop aircraft is the 245th Surveillance Airplane Company.

At 1830 hours on 25 March 1968, a Mohawk from the 245th SAC rose into the sky from its home in I Corps. The crew of two, pilot and observer, started a normal surveillance run in the south

end of A Shau Valley and proceeded north to Khe Sanh. As the aircraft then travelled along the DMZ, the technical observer, SP5 Kevin Ward from Newbury Park, Calif., observed a surprisingly large number of vehicles traveling south-east from North Vietnam on highways 1A and 101. He quickly plotted their exact position and called in the coordinates, first to a fire direction center for an artillery strike, then to an airborne control ship for an airstrike.

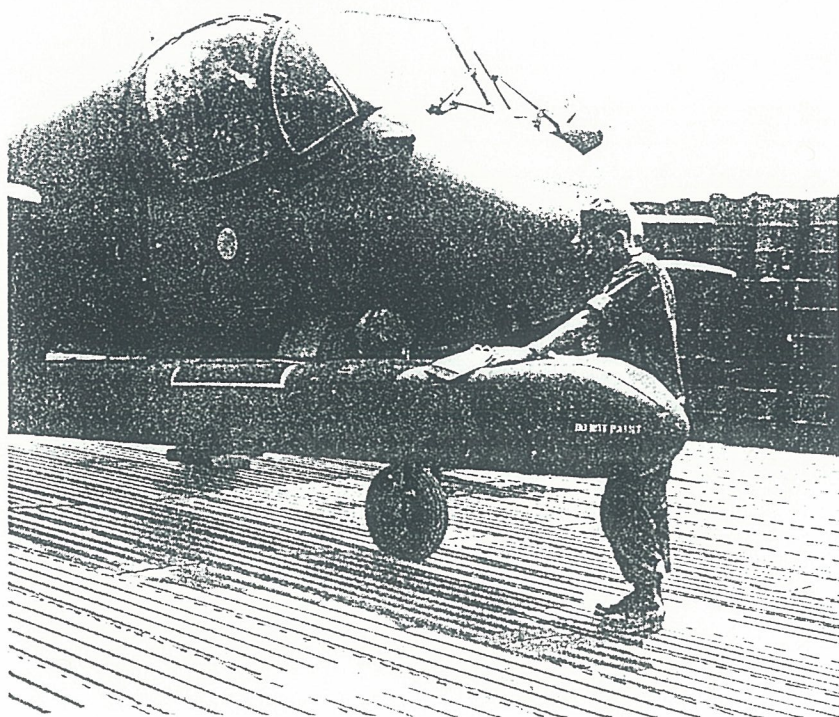
In a race to fire upon this lucrative target, the artillery battalion won. They closed the area to aircraft as they pumped high explosive shells all along the road. There was a very low cloud cover, but the 245th SAC crew could still observe the fireballs illuminate through the clouds. Numerous secondary explosions occurred and the glow from the burning vehicles lingered throughout the night.

There were so many land and water vehicles moving toward

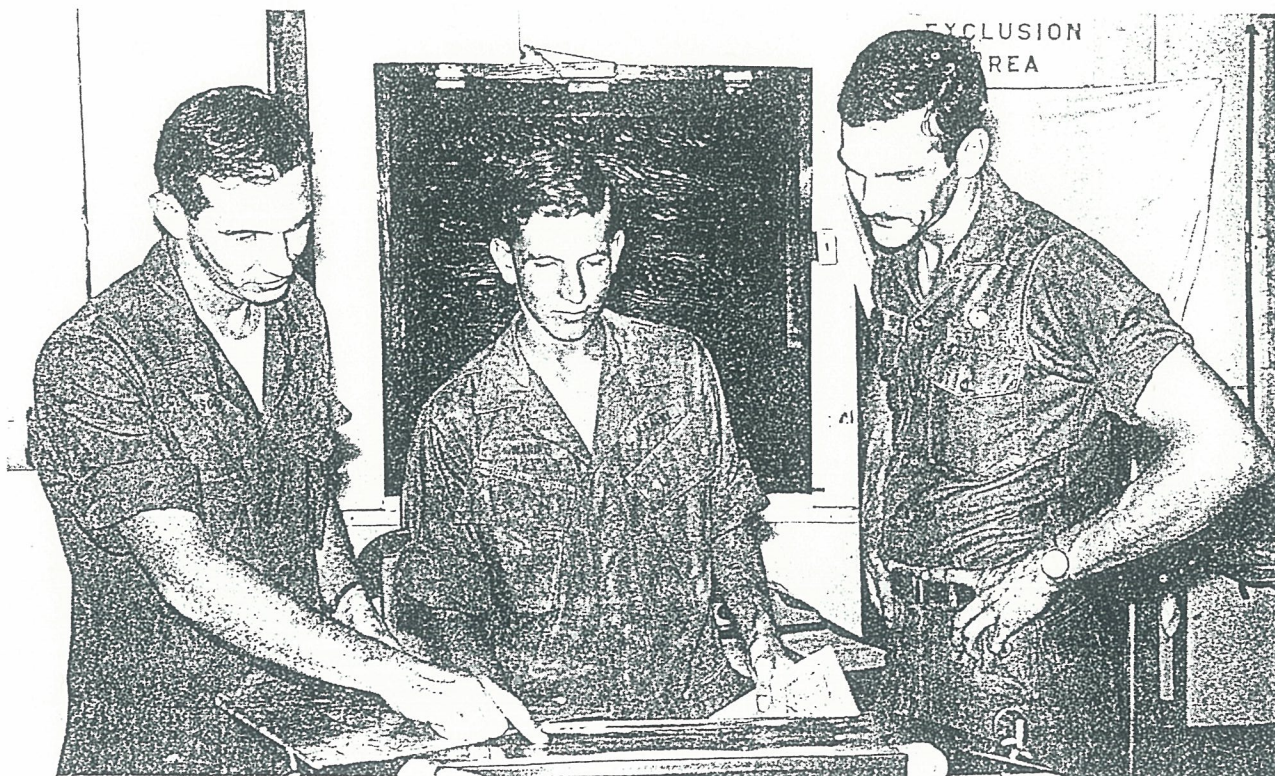
South Vietnam, it was evident this would be an unforgettable night. To assure maximum time on target, Specialist Ward asked the pilot, MAJ Donald A. Roberts, to reduce power to conserve fuel. The flight paths were short and slow cruise would be a better choice, so the pilot responded immediately.

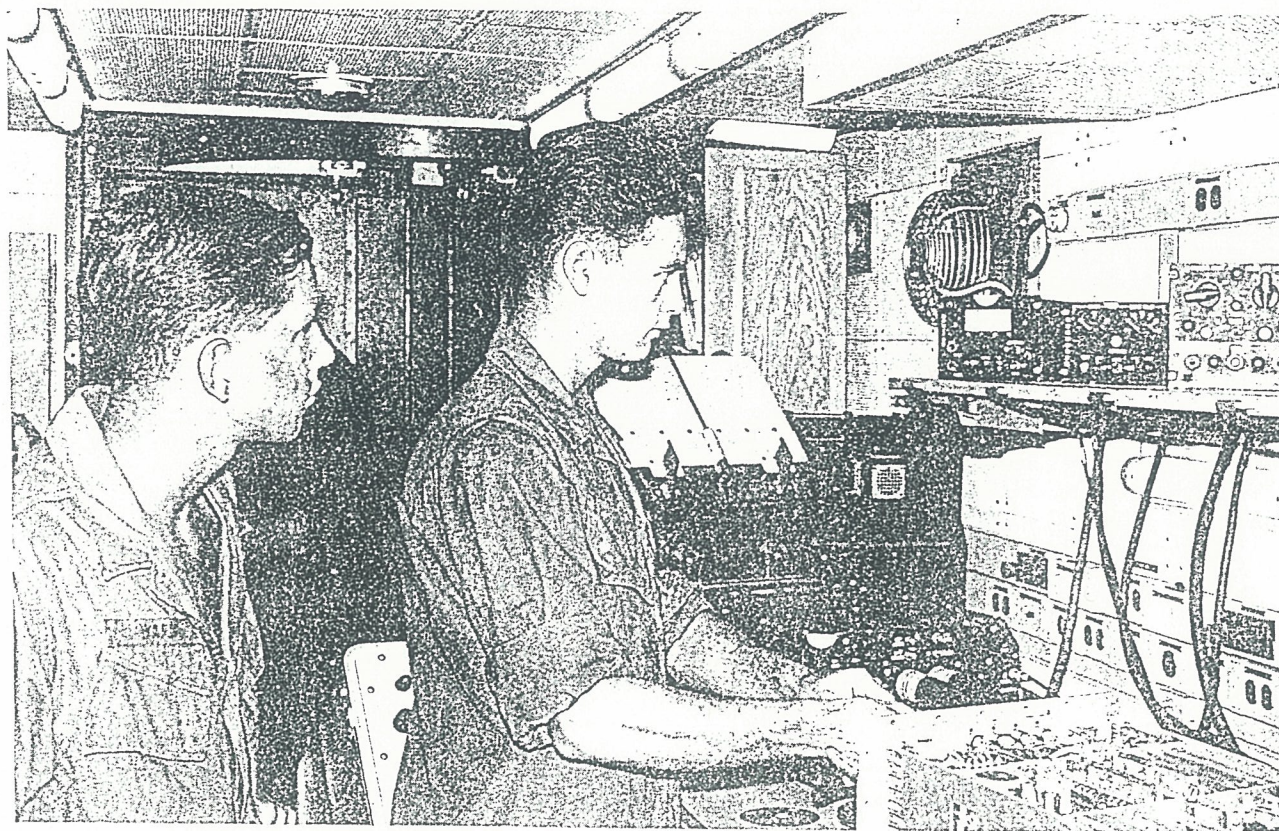
After numerous airstrikes and artillery barrages, all movement stopped for the moment. Specialist Ward had taken a spare moment to update the computer of his Doppler navigational equipment. He programmed a route that would lead the aircraft by Hue Citadel, the city that was lost to the enemy for a short time during the last winter-spring offensive. He efficiently checked all enemy movement in this area.

During the flight, Ward encountered many maintenance problems with his surveillance equipment that would have flustered the average technical observer. He came up with spare parts, string, bits of wire from what appeared to be an unending supply source in an already small, cramped cockpit. In each instance he restored life to his equipment in record time, and this span of time could not have been shortened even in an air-



Above: Specialist Kevin Ward prepares to preflight his Mohawk
Below: Specialists Charles F. Simpson (left), Ward (center) and Huey S. Harrison interpreting imagery in the operations building





Specialists Kevin Ward (left) and Daniel L. Parker working in the avionics van

conditioned avionics lab back behind all enemy movement.

After passing A Shau Valley several times and stopping all vehicles with airstrikes, Specialist Ward suggested an alternate flight path that would cut across the valley in just the right spot to pick up vehicles that might be hiding behind the shadows of mountains. On the first pass using the new flight path, what had appeared to be a quiet, motionless stretch of road now was bustling with activity — vehicles that were sneaking around the hills toward A Shau Airstrip.

With the same uncanny speed, Ward plotted the beginning and end of each string of vehicles and also picked out the stragglers. He used the same efficiency in directing airstrikes on his targets. Major

Roberts sat beside him feeling useless as the man in the other seat plotted targets, directed airstrikes, adjusted artillery, and fed new coordinates into his Doppler navigational equipment. This untiring precision continued in the Khe Sanh area.

After being over the target area for almost 4 hours, thanks to the fuel saving advice of Specialist Ward, the Rapid Data Processor quit functioning, having expended all of its precious film processing liquid. The airplane that was to relieve this crew was late due to maintenance difficulties. The controlling agency at Dong Ha begged the original crew to stay and continue to observe the boats in the South China Sea departing the north to enter the mouth of the river just northeast of Dong Ha.

In an unprecedented move and with creative insight, Specialist Ward sprang into action. He found a long plastic tube that houses spare data processor rollers. With it he sucked up the used chemical out of the waste tank, quickly placed his finger over the top of the plastic tube, and untiringly transferred numerous small loads of chemicals into the supply tank. He had no way of knowing if the expended chemicals would work a second time or what consequences he might suffer if he accidentally swallowed some of this liquid. He knew it turned his flight suit and hands a brown color as he accidentally spilled a few drops.

In very short order, he had his equipment functioning as before and he continued his tasks until the relief ship arrived on station.

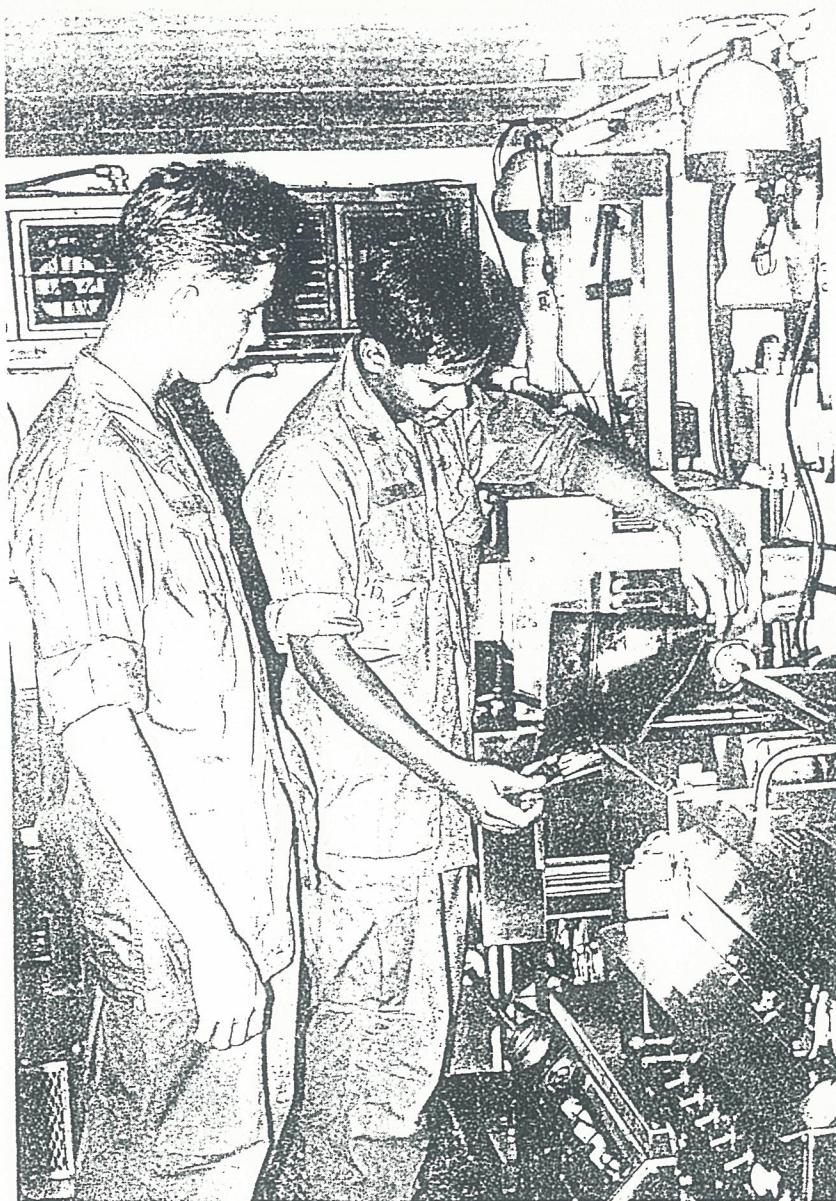
Subsequent relief crews were to benefit throughout the night; Specialist Ward had alerted all ground stations that during this night plagued with miserable weather Charlie was on the move.

This crew had flown together on numerous occasions and it was expected that the technical observer would now reach across the radio console and with the autopilot turn the aircraft toward home, while the pilot was busy checking the weather and tuning in navigational beacons.

When the pilot finished his duties, he sat back and observed this man, who had not been school trained in flying but had chosen to become proficient on his own. Major Roberts watched Specialist Ward make the necessary turns, descents and power adjustments that would bring this long flight to an end. They had been airborne almost 5 hours and the pilot settled back to fill out the logbook.

The airplane was still VFR on top, and the pilot knew from past experience the technical observer knew the function and importance of each engine instrument and flight instrument. He also knew Ward had practiced on numerous occasions with the autopilot and had flown the aircraft in marginal weather using a ground control approach. It always resulted in an outstanding termination. This valuable experience is necessary in the event the pilot becomes incapacitated from enemy ground fire. Major Roberts let Specialist Ward continue the flight while he conserved his energy for the night landing.

The pilot marveled at the untiring energy of this 19-year-old man. It was no wonder this particular technical observer was put directly in charge of 22 men who were up to 15 years older than he. Specialist Ward supervised his men and maintained the most sophisticated electronic sensor equipment

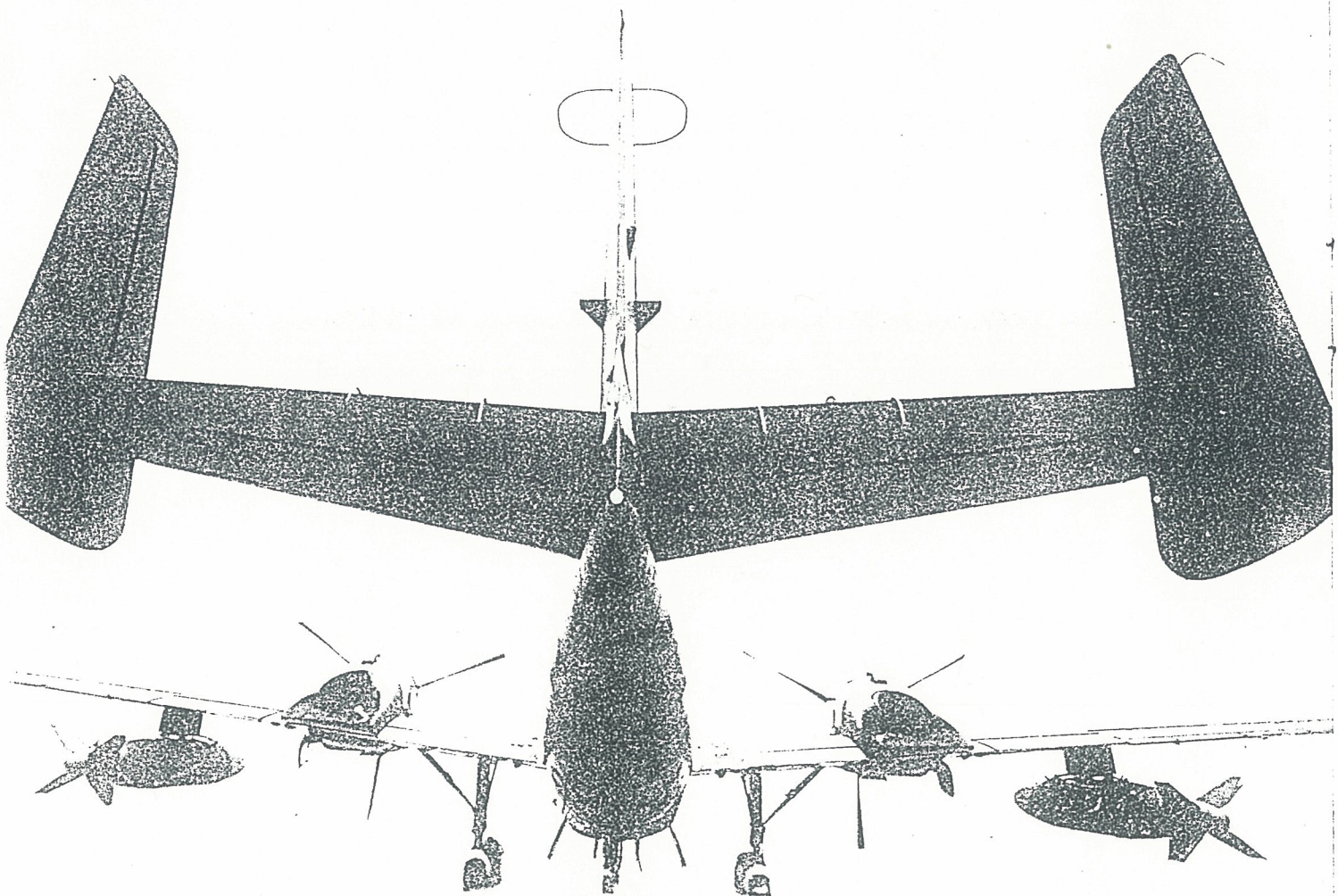


Part of Specialist Kevin Ward's duties include working in the film lab. Here he and Specialist Rinus Mulder (right) develop film

in the United States Army inventory as if he had 17 years service instead of 17 months.

After returning to the home airfield, the familiar war stories filled the air as the pilots bragged of their daring feats. The technical observer knew he had several extra hours ahead of him cleaning his equipment and assisting the image

interpreters. Specialist Ward continued his duties in the same professional manner, even though he had supervised his crew from 0600 hours the preceding day and now it was 0300 hours a new day. He felt he had received all the reward necessary when on the way to his quarters the pilot briefly said, "Thanks for a good flight."



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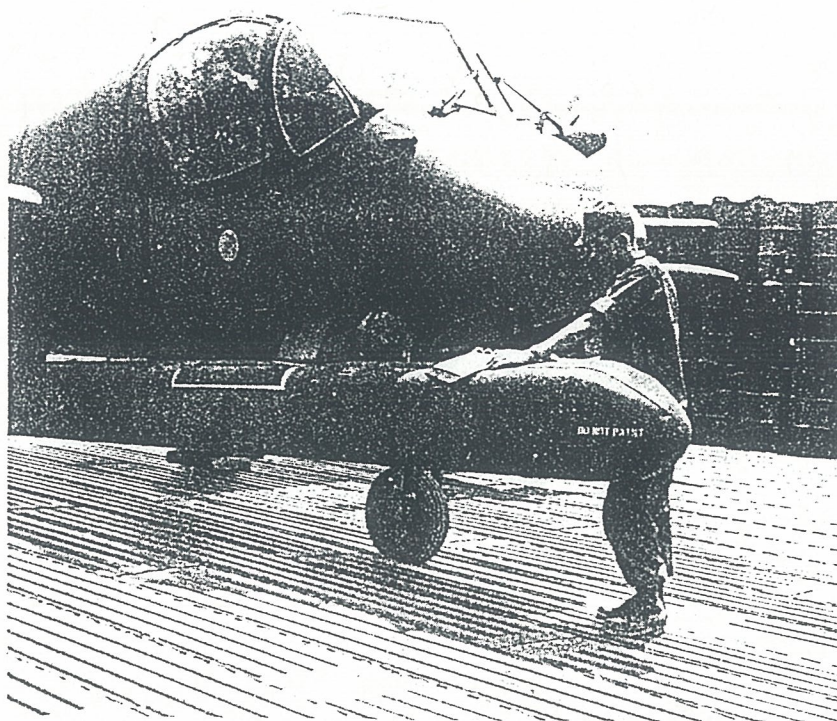
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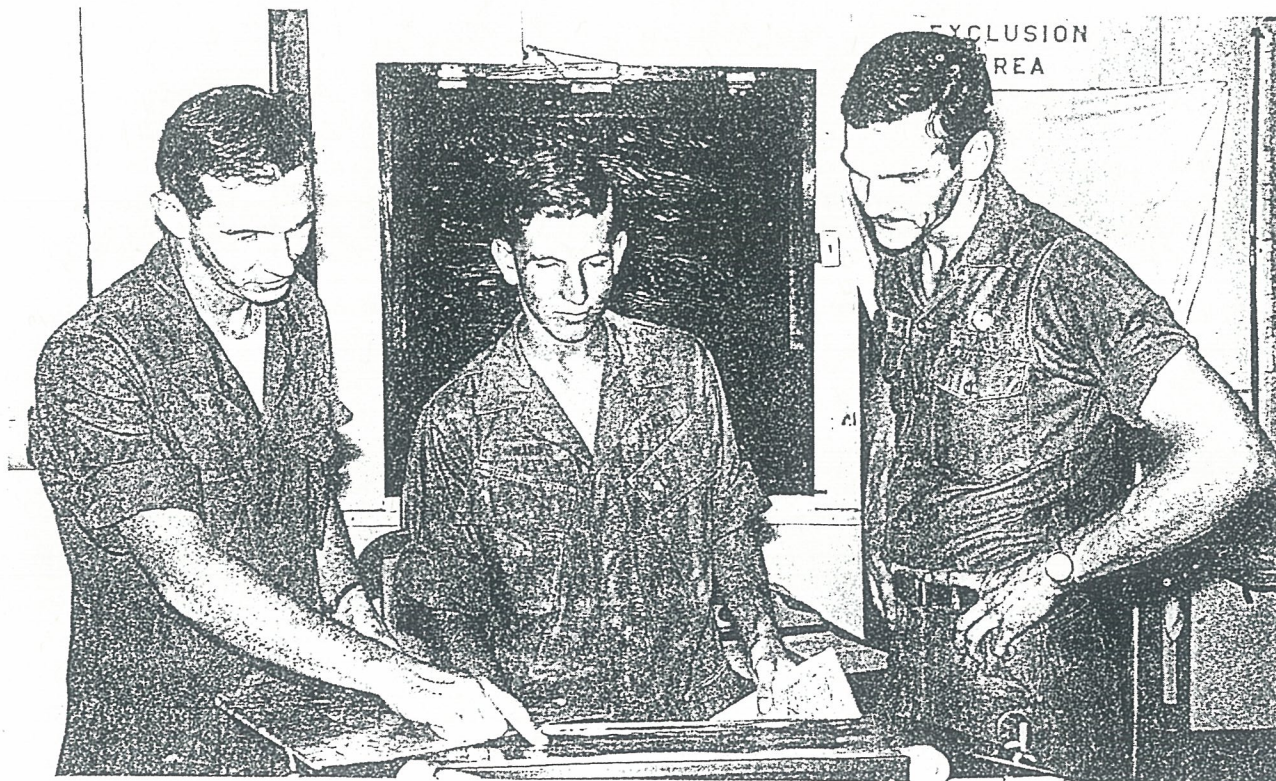
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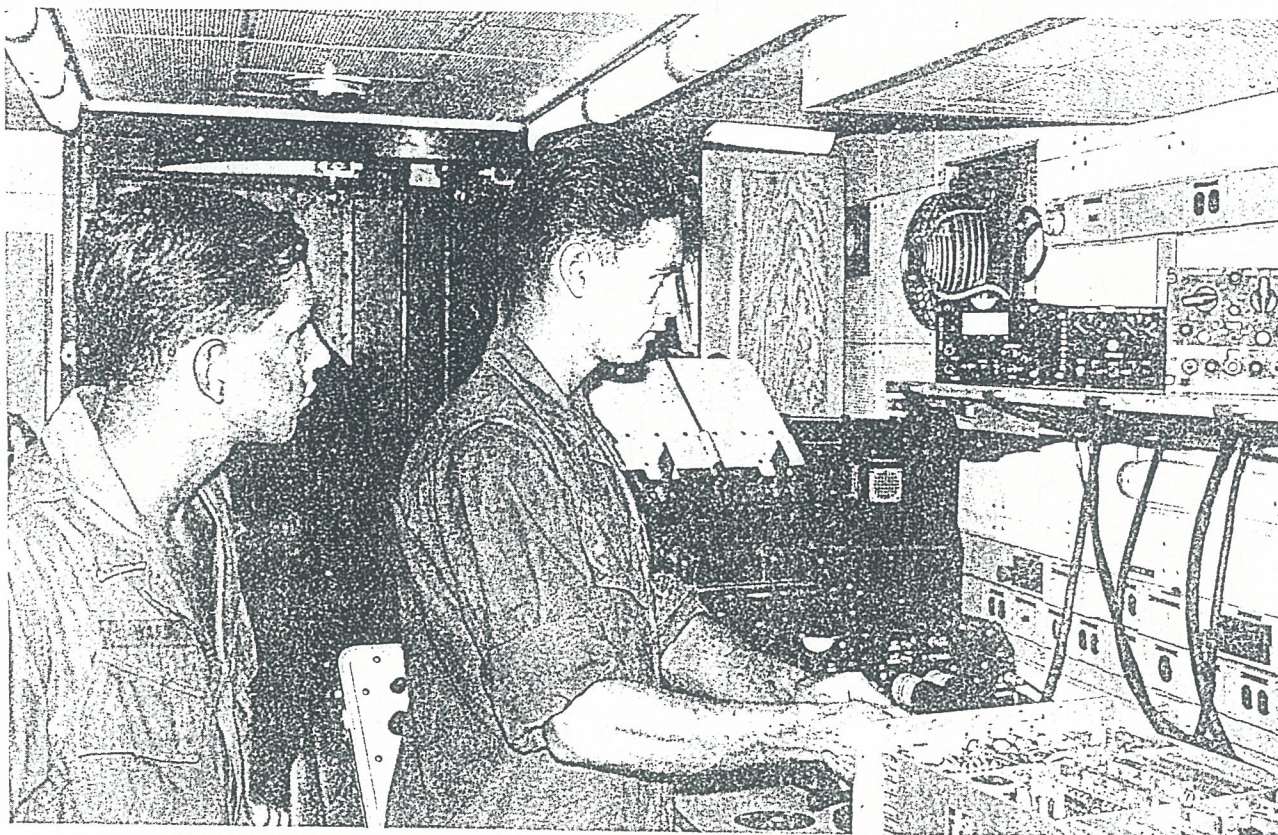
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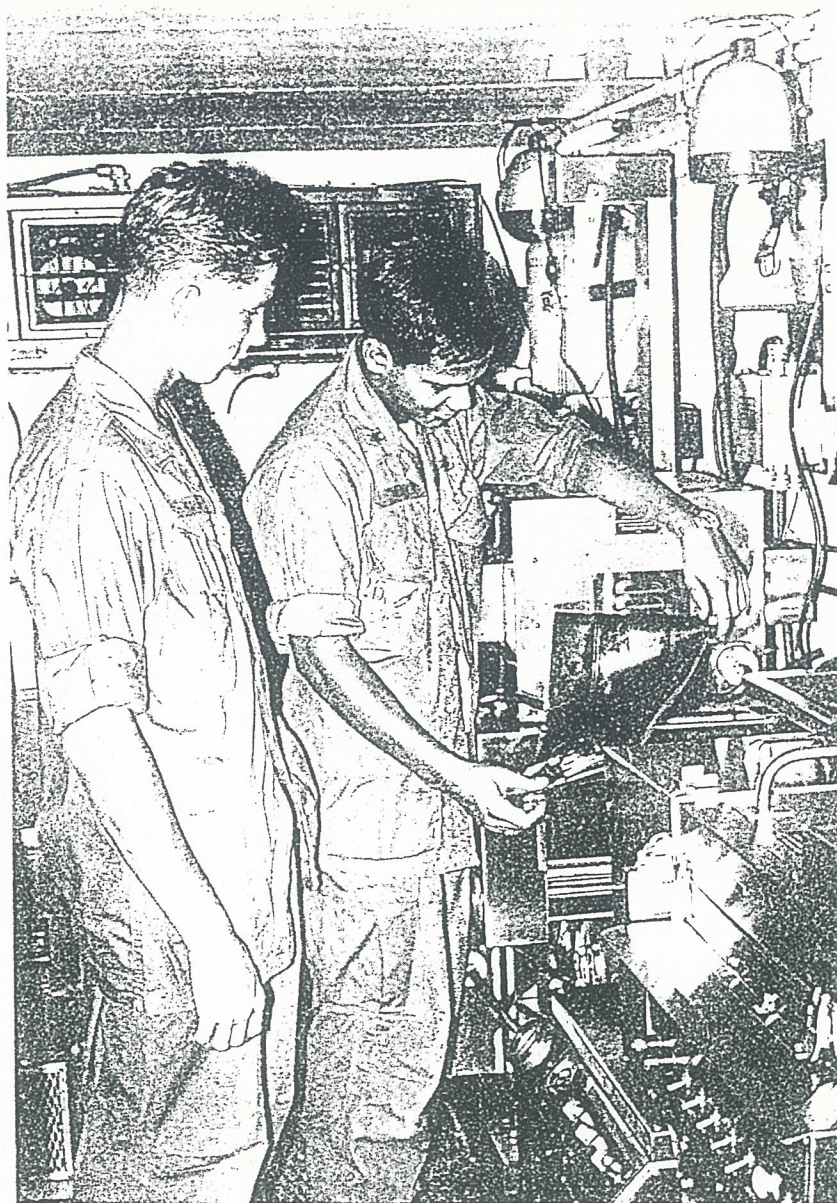
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