May 31, 1967

CIA FLIES SURVEILLANCE IN BLACK SHIELD

This headline is featured in the 50th Vietnam War Commemoration website Timeline listing. It gives us an opportunity to introduce the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) intelligence collection operations in Southeast Asia that matured into a full military war-fighting organization during the Vietnam War, especially in guiding the *Secret War* in Laos & Cambodia.

In early 1967, President Johnson expressed doubts about the U.S. being able to detect surface to surface missiles that it was thought the North Vietnamese Communist regime might deploy to attack American bases in South Vietnam. He asked for a proposed solution and the CIA recommended their newest reconnaissance aircraft, the A-12, be deployed to do photo-recon missions over North Vietnam.

The CIA had completed operational testing of the A-12 in 1965 under *Project OXCART*. The A-12 was designed to fly at 3 times the speed of sound (2,300+ mph) and cruise at an altitude above 90,000 feet. It's new camera was much better than those on the U-2, and due to its speed and altitude capabilities, was far less vulnerable to the growing surface to air missile (SAM) threats being observed in North Vietnam, especially near the Haiphong Harbor and in and around Hanoi.

Plans to deploy OXCART to Kadena, Okinawa, for overflights of China started as early as 1965 under Project Black Shield. CIA modified this plan to include missions over Vietnam.

President Johnson gave the go-ahead approval for Project Black Shield in mid-May and the deployment to Kadena plan was implemented.

50 years ago this month, the first A-12 flew nonstop to Kadena in six hours and six minutes.

On May 29, 1967, the unit at Kadena was ready to fly an operational mission. Under the command of Air Force Col. Hugh C. Slater, 260 personnel had deployed to the Black Shield facility. Except for hangars, which were a month short of completion, everything was in shape for sustained operations.

BLACK SHIELD Missions

Target: North Korea

Number	Pilot	Aircraft	Date
BX6847	Weeks	131	26 January 1968
BX6853	Murray	127	19 February 1968
BX6858	Layton	127	6 May 1968

Target: Cambodia and Laos

Number	Pilot	Aircraft	Date
BX6737	Vojvodich	131	8 December 1967
BX6738	Layton	131	10 December 1967

Target: North Vietnam

Number	Pilot	Aircraft	Date
BSX001	Vojvodich	131	31 May 1967
BSX003	Weeks	131	10 June 1967
BX6705	Layton	129	20 June 1967
BX6706	Weeks	129	30 June 1967
BX6708	Collins	127	13 July 1967
BX6709	Sullivan	131	19 July 1967
BX6710	Collins	129	20 July 1967
BX6716	Vojvodich	131	21 August 1967
BX6718	Layton	127	31 August 1967
BX6722	Weeks	129	16 September 1967
BX6723	Collins	131	17 September 1967
BX6725	Collins	127	4 October 1967
BX6727	Murray	131	6 October 1967
BX6728	Collins	131	15 October 1967
BX6729	Murray	129	18 October 1967
BX6732	Sullivan	131	28 October 1967
BX6733	Murray	127	29 October 1967
BX6734	Sullivan	129	30 October 1967
BX6739	Vojvodich	127	15 December 1967
BX6740	Layton	131	16 December 1967
BX6842	Layton	127	4 January 1968
BX6843	Weeks	131	5 January1968
BX6851	Collins	127	16 February 1968
BX6856	Vojvodich	127	8 March 1968

Graphic by CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence

Declassified documents about the CIA operations in Southeast Asia are available in the CIA online Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI) library. One of the more inclusive works is: ***CIA and the Wars in Southeast Asia, 1947–75, A Studies in Intelligence Anthology*** with selections, introduction, and summaries by Clayton D. Laurie, CIA Historian, and Andres Vaart, Managing Editor, September 2016. An overview and link to this extensive collection of papers is attached as page 2 of this article. The Air Force Magazine article, Black Shield, is also attached.

The next day, the detachment was alerted for a mission to take place on May 31.

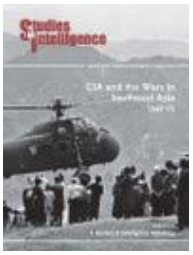
This first Black Shield mission followed one flight line over North Vietnam and another over the demilitarized zone separating North and South Vietnam. It lasted three hours and thirty-nine minutes, and the cruise legs were flown at Mach 3.1 and 80,000 feet.

Results were satisfactory. Seventy of the 190 known surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites in North Vietnam were photographed, as were nine other priority targets. No radar signals were detected, indicating that the first mission had gone completely unnoticed by both the Chinese and North Vietnamese. By mid-July the A-12 reconnaissance flights had determined with a high degree of confidence that there were no surface-to-surface missiles in North Vietnam.[1]

1. ***Air Force Magazine, Black Shield, January 1995.***

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

CIA and the Wars in Southeast Asia, 1947–75



CIA and the Wars in Southeast Asia, 1947–75

A *Studies in Intelligence* Anthology

Selections, introduction, and summaries by Clayton D. Laurie, CIA Historian, and Andres Vaart, Managing Editor September 2016

Purpose. This digitally interactive and hyperlinked anthology was prepared as a contribution to Department of Defense-led interagency efforts to commemorate the passing of 50 years since the large-scale engagement of the military forces of the United States and other countries in defending the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) against communist guerrilla, mainforce, and North Vietnamese Army units. For CIA, and many members of the US military, engagement in South Vietnam began well before what is marked as the beginning of the 50th anniversary commemoration, 1965. As the 41 articles selected by CIA historian Clayton Laurie for this anthology will show, Southeast Asia was the focus of CIA activity as long ago as the early 1950s, when it was directed to provide support to French efforts to maintain control of its colony of Indonesia.

Dedication. This volume is dedicated to the men and women of the United States, Allied nations, and peoples of the region with whom US intelligence worked to thwart the advance of communism in Southeast Asia. Among the more than fifty-three thousand Americans who gave their lives were eighteen members of the Central Intelligence Agency, their sacrifices marked by stars carved into CIA's Memorial Wall.

About the digital interactive PDF

The site includes an interactive timeline of war-related events. The timeline includes intelligence events provided by CIA's History Staff. Upon entry into the PDF, readers will be able to navigate within the PDF and to the 41 articles in the anthology, as well as to additional CIA and Intelligence Community-produced resources.

Download Interactive digital PDF. [PDF 6.0MB*]

Download print PDF. [PDF 12.4MB*]

Page 31, CIA Technology in the War, sub-paragraph 3, for a brief mention of the CIA A-12 reconnaissance missions.

Additional information about the United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration can be found at http://www.vietnamwar50th.com/

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Journal of the Air Force Association
AIR FORCE MAGAZINE

BLACK SHIELD

JANUARY 1995

With its unprecedented speed and capabilities, the A-12 proved an invaluable reconnaissance tool during the Vietnam War.

This article is condensed from a secret study of the A-12 program that was first published in the Winter 1970-71 issue of Studies in Intelligence, *a classified internal publication of the Central Intelligence Agency. It was written by CIA analysts under the collective pseudonym "Thomas P. McInnch." The document was recently declassified. "The Oxcart Story" in our November 1994 issue, also taken from the CIA document, told of the origins and development of the A-12.*

On May 31, 1967, a long, thin, highly classified American aircraft taxied to the runway at Kadena AB, Okinawa, south of the Japanese main islands. Despite heavy rain, the pilot was cleared to take off, and the aircraft roared into the sky. A few hours later and some 1,500 miles away, this unusual craft made two swift slashes through the airspace of North Vietnam, turned, and dashed toward home.

The aircraft, developed by Lockheed's Skunk Works for the Central Intelligence Agency, had opened a new era in operational airpower. The first mission of the A-12 reconnaissance aircraft had been flown at more than three times the speed of sound.

Earlier in the spring of 1967, a good deal of apprehension was evident in Washington about the possibility that the North Vietnamese Communist regime might deploy deadly surface-to-surface missiles on its territory and attack American military bases in South Vietnam. This concern was aggravated by doubts that the US would be able to detect the move if it occurred. President Lyndon B. Johnson asked for a proposal on the matter.

The CIA suggested using its latest classified A-12 reconnaissance aircraft, code named "Oxcart." The Oxcart was notable for its extremely long, slim shape, enormous jet engines, and sharp, projecting nose. It was a revolutionary airplane, able to fly at Mach 3 for more than 3,000 miles without refueling. After it had burned off much of its fuel, it could cruise above 90,000 feet. The CIA pointed out that the A-12's camera was far superior to those on its drones or on its U-2 spy plane, and its vulnerability was far less.

After the end of U-2 flights over the Soviet Union in 1960, when Francis Gary Powers was shot down, US authorities were understandably cautious about committing to further manned reconnaissance over unfriendly territory. Even so, officials from the State Department and Defense Department, who earlier that year had opposed such a deployment, decided to reexamine the risks.

The first interest was in using the A-12 over Cuba. In early 1964, CIA project headquarters began planning for the contingency of flights over that island under a program designated Skylark. An accident held up this program for a time, but in August, the CIA directed that Skylark achieve emergency operational readiness by November 5. This involved preparing a small detachment that would be able to do the job over Cuba, though at less than the full design capability of the Oxcart. The goal was to operate at Mach 2.8 and 80,000 feet.

After considerable aircraft modifications, the detachment simulated Cuba missions on training flights. A limited emergency Skylark capability was announced. With two weeks' notice, the detachment would overfly Cuba, though with fewer ready aircraft and pilots than had been planned.

Despite all this preparation, U-2s proved adequate for the mission, and the A-12 was reserved for more critical situations.

Project Black Shield

Detailed planning for an Asian deployment had been going on since 1965, when the United States had considered using the Oxcart to spy on Chinese military activities. The project, code named "Black Shield," called for the Oxcart to operate out of Kadena. In the first phase, three aircraft would stage to Okinawa for sixty-day periods, twice a year, with about 225 personnel involved. After this was in good order, Black Shield would advance to maintaining a permanent detachment at Kadena.

In May 1967, as State and Defense engaged in deliberations, the Director of Central Intelligence, Richard Helms, submitted another formal proposal to deploy the Oxcart. He also raised the matter at President Johnson's "Tuesday lunch" with top security advisors on May 16 and received the President's approval to go ahead with the plan. Later that day, presidential advisor Walt Rostow formally conveyed Johnson's decision, and the Black Shield deployment plan was put into effect.

The next day, the airlift to Kadena began. On May 22, the first A-12 (serial number 131) flew nonstop from the continental US to Kadena in six hours and six minutes. Aircraft No. 127 departed on May 24 and arrived five hours and fifty-five minutes later. The third, No. 129, left according to plan on May 26 and proceeded normally until, in the vicinity of Wake Island, the pilot experienced difficulties with the inertial navigation and communication systems. He made a precautionary landing at Wake, where a prepositioned emergency recovery team secured the aircraft without incident. The flight to Kadena resumed the next day.

Arrangements were made to brief the ambassadors and CIA chiefs of station in the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, South Vietnam, and Japan and the high commissioner and chief of station, Okinawa. The prime ministers of Japan and Thailand were advised, as were the president and defense minister of Taiwan. The chiefs of the air forces of Thailand and Taiwan were also briefed. They reacted favorably.

Ready to Go

On May 29, 1967, the unit at Kadena was ready to fly an operational mission. Under the command of Air Force Col. Hugh C. Slater, 260 personnel had deployed to the Black Shield facility. Except for hangars, which were a month short of completion, everything was in shape for sustained operations. The next day, the detachment was alerted for a mission to take place on May 31.

This first Black Shield mission followed one flight line over North Vietnam and another over the demilitarized zone separating North and South Vietnam. It lasted three hours and thirty-nine minutes, and the cruise legs were flown at Mach 3.1 and 80,000 feet.

Results were satisfactory. Seventy of the 190 known surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites in North Vietnam were photographed, as were nine other priority targets. No radar signals were detected, indicating that the first mission had gone completely unnoticed by both the Chinese and North Vietnamese. By mid-July the A-12 reconnaissance flights had determined with a high degree of confidence that there were no surface-to-surface missiles in North Vietnam.

Fifteen Black Shield missions were alerted between May 31 and August 15, 1967.

Seven of the fifteen were actually flown. Of these, four detected radar tracking signals, but no hostile action was taken against any of them.

CIA project headquarters in Washington planned, directed, and controlled all operational missions. Weather in the target areas was constantly watched. Each day at 4:00 p.m. Washington time, a mission alert briefing was held. If the forecast appeared favorable, Kadena was alerted and provided a flight route.

The alert preceded the actual takeoff by twenty-eight to thirty hours. Twelve hours before takeoff, target weather was reviewed for a second time. If it remained favorable, the mission generation sequence continued. Two hours before takeoff, a go/no go decision was made and communicated to the field. The final decision depended not solely on weather over the target area but also on weather in the refueling areas and at the launch and recovery base.

The A-12's operations and maintenance at Kadena began with the alert notification. A primary aircraft and pilot and a backup aircraft and pilot were selected. The aircraft were thoroughly inspected and serviced, all systems checked, and the cameras loaded into the aircraft.

Pilots received a detailed route briefing in the early evening before the day of flight. On the morning of the flight, a final briefing was held, including information on the condition of the aircraft and its systems, last-minute weather forecasts, relevant intelligence, and changes in the flight plan.

Two hours before takeoff, the primary pilot had a medical examination, got into his suit, and was taken to the aircraft. If any malfunctions developed on the primary aircraft, the backup could execute the mission one hour later.

A typical route profile for a Black Shield mission over North Vietnam included a refueling shortly after takeoff south of Okinawa, the planned photographic pass or passes, withdrawal to a second aerial refueling in the Thailand area, and return to Kadena. So great was the Oxcart's speed that it spent only twelve and a half minutes on two passes. Because of the A-12's turning radius of eighty-six miles, however, officials knew that on some mission profiles it might be forced to intrude into Chinese airspace during its turn.

Once the Oxcart had landed back at Kadena, the camera film was removed from the aircraft, boxed, and sent by special plane to the processing facilities. Film from earlier missions was developed at the Eastman Kodak plant in Rochester, N. Y. By late summer 1967, an Air Force center in Japan was processing the film in order to place the photointelligence in the hands of American commanders in Vietnam within twenty-four hours of completion of a Black Shield mission.

Missiles Are Fired

Between August 16 and December 31, 1967, twenty-six A-12 missions were alerted. Fifteen were flown. On September 17, one SAM site tracked the vehicle with its acquisition radar but was unsuccessful with its Fan Song guidance radar.

During an A-12 flight in October, a North Vietnamese SAM site launched a single,unsuccessful missile—the first time a missile had been fired at the Oxcart. Mission photography documented missile smoke above the SAM firing site, the missile itself, and its contrail. The A-12's electronic countermeasures equipment appeared to perform well against the missile firing.

On another October flight, pilot Dennis Sullivan detected radar tracking on his first pass over North Vietnam. Two sites prepared to launch missiles, but neither did. During the second pass, however, at least six missiles were fired at Sullivan's aircraft, each confirmed on mission photos by missile vapor trails. Sullivan saw these vapor trails and witnessed three missile detonations. Postflight inspection of the aircraft revealed that a piece of metal had penetrated the lower right wing fillet area and lodged against the support structure of the wing tank. The fragment was not a warhead pellet but may have been a part of the debris from one of the missile detonations observed by the pilot.

In the first three months of 1968, the Oxcart operation was alerted fifteen times and flew six missions. Four of these were over North Vietnam and two over North Korea. The first mission over North Korea on January 26, 1968, occurred during a tense period, only three days after the Communist seizure of the US Navy ship Pueblo. Black Shield aimed to discover whether the North Koreans were preparing any large-scale hostile move on the heels of this incident. Chinese tracking of the flight was apparent, but no missiles were fired at the plane.

The State Department was reluctant to endorse another mission over North Korea for fear of diplomatic repercussions if the aircraft came down in hostile territory.

Brig. Gen. Paul Bacalis then briefed Secretary of State Dean Rusk on the details of the mission and assured him that the aircraft would pass over North Korea in no more than seven minutes. General Bacalis explained that even if some failure occurred during flight, the aircraft would be highly unlikely to land either in North Korea or in China. Secretary Rusk made some suggestions to alter the flight plan, thus becoming the project's highest-ranking flight planner.

Between April 1 and June 9, 1968, two missions were alerted for overflights of North Korea. The only mission that actually gained approval was flown on May 8. As it turned out, that flight was also the Oxcart's last. The problem was expense.

Beginning of the End

For years, the Bureau of the Budget had voiced concern at the past and projected costs of the A-12 and its two-seat Air Force version, the SR-71. It questioned the requirement for the total number of aircraft represented in the combined fleets and doubted the necessity for a separate CIA A-12 fleet. Several alternatives were proposed to achieve a substantial reduction in the forecasted spending, but the recommended course was to phase out the A-12 program.

Throughout the Oxcart program, USAF had been exceedingly helpful. It gave financial support, conducted refueling, provided operational facilities at Kadena, and airlifted Oxcart personnel and supplies to Okinawa for operations over Vietnam and North Korea. It also ordered from Lockheed a small fleet of A-11s, which on being finished as two-seat reconnaissance aircraft would be named SR-71. These would become operational about 1967.

The stated mission of the SR-71 was to conduct "post strike reconnaissance," that is, to look the enemy situation over after a nuclear exchange. The likelihood of using them in that capacity appeared small, but the Air Force's SR-71s were of course also capable of ordinary reconnaissance missions.

Even for these purposes, however, the A-12 possessed certain clear advantages over the SR-71. It carried only one man and thus had room for a much bigger and better camera as well as for various other collection devices that at the time could not be carried by the SR-71. It was certainly the most effective reconnaissance aircraft in existence or likely to be in existence for years to come. In addition, it was operated by civilians and could be employed covertly or at least without the number of personnel and amount of fanfare normally attending an Air Force operation.

The Air Force's procurement of SR-71s eased the path of Oxcart development because it meant that the financial burden was shared with the Air Force, and the cost per aircraft was reduced by producing greater numbers. In the long run, however, the existence of the SR-71 spelled Oxcart's doom, for reasons that appear to have been chiefly financial.

In the months after it first performed its appointed role over North Vietnam on the last day of May 1967, the Oxcart demonstrated both its exceptional technical capabilities and the competence with which its operations were managed. As word began to get around that Oxcart was to be phased out, high-level officials began to feel uneasy.

Concern was expressed by Rostow, key congressional figures, members of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, and members of the President's Scientific Advisory Committee. The phaseout lagged. A new study of the feasibility and cost of continuing the Oxcart program was completed in the spring of 1968, and four new alternatives for keeping it operational were proposed.

In spite of these belated efforts, in May 1968 Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford reaffirmed the decision to terminate the Oxcart program and store the aircraft. The President confirmed the Secretary's decision.

Early in March 1968, USAF SR-71 aircraft began to arrive at Kadena to take over the Black Shield commitment, and by gradual stages the A-12 was placed on standby to back up the SR-71. After Oxcart's last operational mission, the Kadena detachment was advised to prepare to go home.

Project headquarters selected June 8, 1968, for redeployment. In the meantime, A-12 flights were to be limited to those essential for maintaining flying safety and pilot proficiency. After Black Shield aircraft arrived in the US, they would proceed to storage. Those already at base were to be stored by June 7.

In its final days overseas, the Oxcart program suffered yet another blow, as inexplicable as it was tragic. On June 4, Aircraft No. 129, piloted by Jack Weeks, set out from Kadena on a check flight necessitated by a change of engine. Weeks was heard from when he was 520 miles east of Manila. Then he disappeared.

Search-and-rescue operations discovered nothing. No cause for the accident was ever ascertained, and it remains a mystery to this day. The official news release identified the lost aircraft as an SR-71, and security was maintained. A few days afterward, the two remaining planes on Okinawa returned to the US and were placed in storage with the remainder of the Oxcart family.

In a ceremony at the project's secret Nevada base on June 26, 1968, Lockheed A-12 designer Clarence "Kelly" Johnson lamented the end of an enterprise that had inspired his most outstanding aircraft design. The Oxcart design had won him the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964 and the National Medal of Science in 1966 for his contributions to aerospace science and national security.

At the same ceremony, Vice Adm. Rufus L. Taylor, deputy Director of Central Intelligence, presented the CIA Intelligence Star for valor to pilots Kenneth S. Collins, Ronald L. Layton, Francis J. Murray, Dennis B. Sullivan, and Mele Vojvodich, Jr., for participation in Black Shield. The posthumous award to pilot Jack W. Weeks was accepted by his widow.

Colonel Slater and his deputy, Col. Maynard N. Amundson, received the USAF Legion of Merit. The Air Force Outstanding Unit Award went to the members of the Oxcart Detachment (1129th Special Activities Squadron, Detachment 1) and the USAF supporting units.

The wives of these pilots were at the ceremony, where they—and their husbands' commanding officers—learned for the first time of the activities in which these men had been involved for nearly a decade.

May 31, 1967

EC-47 PROJECT *DRILL PRESS*

Project **DRILL PRESS** was planned and implemented in response to a USAF Second Air Division (2d AD) requirement for airborne tactical communications intelligence (COMINT) support targeted against Viet Cong ground forces operating in South Vietnam.

George Hollis, C-47 ABERU DRILL PRESS, 1967

This article is condensed from a Special Historical Study of Project DRILL PRESS, July 1965 - May 1966, prepared by Thomas N. Thompson, dated 1 December 1967. The study was recently declassified. References to Second Air Division are condensed from The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, The Years of the Offensive 1965 - 1968, authored by John Schlight, dated June 2, 1989.

Background

Air Force assistance in South Vietnam was principally of two kinds: close air support of troops on the battle-field, by both tactical fighters and B-52s, and the airlift of supplies and personnel. In addition, the Air Force performed many other important missions that included reconnaissance, intelligence, psychological warfare, defoliation, destruction of enemy reinforcements and supplies, medical evacuation, and pacification and civic action.

Traditional photographic reconnaissance was hampered in Vietnam by the triple-tiered jungle canopy that covered much of the country, the frequent poor weather, and the Viet Cong proclivity to move and operate at night. Throughout the early years, both the Air Force and the Army searched for better techniques. They had some success with infrared cameras, which photographed heat radiating from human bodies and campfires. However, photography could not keep up with the mobile enemy, and early in 1965, the Air Force was experimenting with improved airborne detection equipment that could plot the location of Viet Cong radio transmitters on the ground.

The Air Force's focal point within Vietnam at this time was the Commander of the 2d Air Division in Saigon, Lt. Gen. Joseph H. Moore. Like his boss, MACV commander General William C. Westmoreland, Moore had seen extensive combat experience in World War II. He flew numerous tactical missions in the Philippines and Australia, and in Europe during the Normandy invasion and the subsequent campaigns across northern France and the Rhineland. In January 1964, he moved from his position as operations director of the Tactical Air Command (TAC) to take over the 2d Air Division in Vietnam. Moore, a boyhood friend of Westmoreland, was now serving both as MACV air component commander for South Vietnam and as the Thirteenth Air Force's forward commander for missions in the rest of Southeast Asia.

Requirement

The search for a complement to photo and infrared reconnaissance within South Vietnam turned even more to electronics. The enemy's widespread use of radios in the field was tailor-made for eavesdropping. 2d AD described its requirement and operational concept as ". . . effective targeting against Viet Cong tactical units in the field. ABERU (airborne emergency reaction unit) aircraft are required to fly near areas of suspected Viet Cong tactical units to intercept low-powered Morse and voice communications." The requirement concept of operations specifically referenced the EC-47 HAWKEYE airborne radio direction finding (ARDF) aircraft that had already located Viet Cong targets - and the air division felt this could be expanded and improved on. Lt Gen Moore was aware of the Tactical Air Command BLUE SKY/ROSE BOWL C-47 COMINT collection aircraft that were being moved out of Korea. . .and he wanted them reconfigured and put to use against the Viet Cong as quickly as possible. The commander figured to fly 300 night hours per month eventually with the four C-47s, but he wanted one immediately and three later, complete with USAFSS Morse and Annamese linguist qualified mission crews.

Production

Throughout the 3-months of July-September 1965, a significant number of "agencies" were involved in specifying the COMINT equipment best suited to satisfy the 2d AD requirement. Since only 2 of the C-47 ABERU aircraft were available, these agencies also addressed the follow-on requirement for 2 additional aircraft with COMINT collection systems. Starting from the 2d AD requirement for "immediate tactical COMINT support", the coordinating and approving echelons of command included: the Department of Defense, the Army/Navy/USAF Secretaries and Joint Chiefs of Staff, the National Security Agency, MAJCOMs (Tactical Air Command/Air Force Systems Command/United States Air Force Security Service), as well as Pacific Air Forces, Pacific Security Region, and Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

Lt General Moore and 2d AD clearly favored the original 4-aircraft BLUE SKY/ROSE BOWL ABERU concept solution. Tactical Air Command made 2 of those aircraft (43-16254 & 43-49680) available in July, and USAFSS worked through the BIG SAFARI program to obtain needed collection equipments...and proposed to do the installation themselves. At the same time, USAFSS engineers suggested using the C-130 with modified ground mobile emergency reaction HF/VHF configured Little John huts in lieu of the additional C-47s requested by 2d AD. The NSA representative in Vietnam also proposed testing an Army Security Agency supported COMINT collection capability (Project DYE) installed on the C-123 aircraft. By mid-September, 2d AD accepted the proposal for USAFSS engineers at the 6940th Security Wing at Goodfellow AFB, TX to complete the first two C-47 ABERU equipment installations. They also accepted the 'C-130/Little John' proposal as the longer term solution. On 1 October 1965, the TAC provided BLUE SKY/ROSE BOWL aircraft were cleared and readied for new equipments by engineers at Goodfellow AFB, and TAC began preparing the airframes for the Vietnam theater. USAFSS began shipping the classified COMINT collection equipment to Yokota AB, Japan, and prepared for its immediate installation upon arrive of the TAC aircraft.

This reconfigured C-47 ABERU project was officially named DRILL PRESS on October 29, 1965.

Operations

The first DRILL PRESS C-47 arrived at Yokota on December 27, 1965. The second aircraft arrived in early January 1966. The USAFSS equipments were successfully installed and tested and the aircraft moved on to Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Vietnam. The HAWEYE ARDF aircraft was already there working with 2d AD and MACV. The DRILL PRESS back-end operation moved into the NSA, Pacific (NSAPAC) compound until the 6994th Security Squadron was activated in April. The front-end crews were assigned to Tan Son Nhut in PCS status while the back-end crews were all assigned from other USAFSS units in a TDY status. Phase I of the 120-day test was activated on January 25, 1966, and the first tasked mission was flown the next day.

DRILL PRESS missions were immediately successful in exploiting the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese tactical communications. There were still command and control issues to be worked out among the major U.S. players, but the COMINT collection results were improving almost with every mission. The subsequent NSA 120-day test report published on May 3, 1966, included these remarks, ". . . the unique DRILL PRESS potential lies in its capability to be deployed rapidly to an area of interest anywhere in the theater against targets hard to hear from the fixed ground sites and to recover at a location where the collected material can be quickly processed and exploited with other related information. NSA also admitted that the voice tapes were superior to most ground collections results. And finally, ". . .it is the NSA judgment that the DRILL PRESS test has demonstrated the usefulness of this collection resource and that when employed as an integral part of the SIGINT system in South Viet Nam, the ABERU aircraft can make unique and meaningful contributions. Therefore, we propose to terminate the test and commence regular operations. . ."

Success

From their very first operational mission, DRILL PRESS mission crews were constantly lauded for their outstanding tactical intelligence support to 7th Air Force (formerly 2d AD), MACV and the war fighters on the ground.

". . . Drill Press maintained uninterrupted surveillance of low echelon NVA communications in the DMZ area. Staging from their operating location at Hue/Phu Bai, the project provided USM-808 with an invaluable source of intelligence relevant to tactical activities in the area. On 26 *May,* the Commanding General, USASA, in a message to the Director, National Security Agency, commented:

Current Drill Press operations, flying against VC comms in and near the DMZ with USM-808 acting as CMA, are proving to be invaluable. Traffic, encrypted in readable systems. is intercepted on every sortie and immediately turned over to the cryptanalytic and linguistic personnel in the P&R section at USM-808 following the flight.

Targeted against those NVA targets known or suspected to be passing traffic in readable, low level crypto systems (PAVN 324B NVA Division and associated communications), Drill Press collected more than 78,000 minutes of manual Morse traffic. Eighty percent of this traffic was unique to USM-808 sources and 83.5 percent of the traffic was mission intercept. More than 3,150 messages were contained in the traffic, 64 per cent of which were readable and resulted in the generation of more than 2,160 intelligence reports."[1]

By May 1967, maximum monthly flying hours were increased from 125 to 150 hours per airframe and aircrews routinely "maxed out" their own flying hours. The aircrews, operations and maintenance personnel kept DRILL PRESS in the air providing unique COMINT tactical information to MACV and direct support units on the ground.

1. 6994th Security Squadron History, Jan-Jun 1967.