



ORIGINS OF THE ARMY SECURITY **AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE**

MISSION AND SACRIFICE

AGENCY AND INSCOM

The U.S. Army has supported its fighting forces with signals intelligence since World War I. The first permanent organization to do this was established in 1930 as the Signal Intelligence Service. During World War II, the SIS (renamed the Signal Security Service in 1943 and later the Signal Security Agency—SSA) exploited the communications of both Germany and Japan, shortening the war and saving many thousands of Americans lives.

The SSA was reorganized as the Army Security Agency (ASA) at Arlington Hall Station, Virginia, on 15 September 1945. Operating under the command of the Director of Military Intelligence, the new agency had a sweeping charter. It exercised control functions through a vertical command structure, ASA established a worldwide chain of fixed sites—"field stations"- while maintaining large theater headquarters in the Far East and in Europe.

In 1949, all three military cryptologic services were centralized under the new Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA), the precursor of today's National Security Agency. ASA transferred most members of its large civilian headquarters staff to AFSA in this process. However, because of the need once again to support troops in actual combat in the Korean War, ASA again expanded, deploying tactical units on a large scale to support the Army in combat. For the first time, ASA grew to include groups and battalions in its force structure.

In 1955, ASA took over electronic intelligence (ELINT) and electronic warfare functions previously carried out by the Signal Corps. Since its mission was no longer exclusively identified with intelligence and security, ASA was withdrawn from G-2 control and resubordinated to the Army Chief of Staff as a field operating agency.

In the 1960's, ASA was again called upon to assist US forces in the field. On 13 May 1961, the first contingent of Army Security Agency personnel arrived in south Vietnam (setting up as organization at Tan Son Nhut Air Base) to provide support to the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group and help train the South Vietnamese Army. During the early years of conflict, ASA troops in Vietnam were assigned to the 3rd Radio Research Unit. Their primary mission was to locate Viet Cong transmitters operating in the south. This mission was in its early stages when one of their direction finding (DF) operators, SP4 James t. Davis, was killed in a Viet Cong ambush on a road outside of Saigon. The date of the ambush, 22 December 1961, made Davis the first American soldier to lose his life during the Vietnam War.

The death of Davis brought home to the ASA the dangers of proceeding into the jungle with short-range equipment to locate VC transmitters that might be only a few miles away. Since radio wave propagation in Southeast Asia required that DF equipment be very close to the transmitter, the obvious answer was to go airborne. ASA engineers began working on the problem, and by March 1962 they had their first airborne DF platform, a single engine aircraft that flew low, slow and had room for only a few people.

In the fall of 1962, one veteran arrived in Vietnam assigned to the 3rd Radio Research Unit. He recalls that after Davis was killed operating a jeep-based PRC-10 direction finding unit, someone decided that this function could be better handled from the air. Within days, soldiers in the unit were calling it TWA (Teeny Weeny Airlines).

With the introduction of large U.S. ground combat elements into the South Vietnam in 1965, the ASA organization in-country expanded. The 3rd RRU was replaced by the 509th Radio Research Group, which commanded three battalions and company-size direct support units assigned to tall Army divisions. One of the 509th's subordinate battalions was the 224th Aviation Battalion (Radio Research), which pioneered in the introduction of Special Electronic Mission Aircraft (SEMA) to the battlefield. At the height of the war, the 509th Radio Research Group commanded some 6,000 ASA personnel in-country. Meanwhile, the agency itself had greatly expanded, reaching strength of 30,000 and attaining the status of a major Army field command in 1964.

However, the massive drawdown of the Army after the Vietnam War led to pressures to achieve economics by the consolidation of intelligence functions. In 1975, the Army Chief of Staff accepted the recommendations of the Intelligence Organization and Stationing Study and agreed to a wholesale reorganization of Army intelligence. The decision was made to create multidisciplinary military intelligence organizations within the Army at both the tactical and departmental levels. As a result, ASA was effectively dismembered. ASA's tactical units were

resubordinated to the local commander, its functional responsibilities for training and research and development spun off to other major army commands (MACOMS), and its headquarters and fixed sites used as the nucleus of a new intelligence and security MACOM. On 1 January 1977, Headquarters, U.S. Army Security Agency was redesignated as Headquarters, U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command.

RADIO RESEARCH UNITS IN VIETNAM

Radio Research units (RRU) operated in Vietnam under the direction of the U.S. Army Security Agency (ASA) Group. During this time, these operations were classified and operated under the auspices of the 3rd RRU, activated on 23 May 1961. Its ASA nomenclature was the 400th USASA Operations Unit (provisional) until 23 September 1961 when it was redesignated the 82nd USASA Special Operations unit. The 3rd RRU assets included detachments specifically incorporated the RU-6a, RU-1A, and the RU-8D platforms, mission gear, and crews. On 1 November 1964, the unit was redesignated as the 53rd USASA Special Operations Command and on 1 June 1966 was again redesignated as the 509th USASA Group and as the 509th Radio Research Group (RRG).

On 1 June 1966, the 224th Aviation Battalion (Radio Research) was activated under the command of the 509th RRG. It consisted of four companies:

- the 138th Aviation Company (RR) at Da Nang in support of I Corps tactical zone of operation
- the 144th Aviation Company (RR) at Nha Trang in support of II Corps tactical zone of operation
- the 146th Aviation Company (RR) at Saigon in support of III Corps tactical zone of operation
- the 156th Aviation Company (RR) at Can Tho in support of IV Corps tactical zone of operation

On 3 July 1967, the 1st Radio Research company (Aviation) was assigned to the 224th Aviation Battalion (RR) to provide direct support to the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), flying six RP-2E aircraft from Cam Ranh Air Base, Vietnam, on 13-hour missions.

By June 1969, the 224th Aviation Battalion (RR) with its headquarters company and five operational aviation companies had over 1,100 personnel and eighty aircraft. This battalion and the LEFT BANK elements within the two radio research companies supporting the 1st Cavalry Division and the 4th Infantry Division comprised the initial fleet of the Army airborne signals capability in Vietnam.

THE RU-8D AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE

The U-8 Seminole was first introduced into the Army's inventory during the Korean War. This twin-engine aircraft was used for transportation of commanders and staff officers.

ASA first used the plane as airborne direction finding platform in Vietnam. The system became operational in January 1963. The RU-8 offered advantages over the RU-6 Beaver. For the first time the 3rd Radio Research Unit had an all-weather capability.

With its ability to carry three crew members (pilot, copilot and intercept operator), the plane had enough room for navigational equipment. Unlike the RU-6, a crew would no longer be dependent upon visual landmarks to conduct operations.

The RU-8 was one of the most flexible and efficient aircraft in the ASA's inventory. Because it could operate in mountainous regions, obtain greater altitude, and offered increased speeds, the RU-8 quickly became the workhorse in ASA's airborne direction finding effort in Vietnam. In Vietnam, there was twice as many RU-8's as any other platform in ASA's inventory and as such they became the backbone of Army airborne direction finding in Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. In 1968, forty-four systems were scattered among three companies: 138th Aviation company (RR), 144th Aviation company (RR), and the 146th Aviation company (RR).

By 1971, unit drawdowns were beginning. On 30 September 1971 the 144th Aviation Company at Nha Trang was deactivated. More followed with the relocation of the 156th Aviation Company from Can Tho to Fort Bliss, Texas. By 1 May 1972, this left the 224th Aviation Battalion with two companies, the 138th and 146th.

When the word was received from the Commander USMACV in June 1972 that support to Allied forces was still needed, the 224th was in the process of turning in its remaining RU-8D's. For the next several weeks the emphasis was upon retrieving planes from turning in and cannibalizing others for spare parts. But within ten days the first U-8 was back in the air, and within three weeks the level of missions had returned to normal.

The RU-8s continued operating until the 28 January 1973 cease-fire and were among the last platforms to leave Vietnam. Following Vietnam, the RU-8s would remain as part of the 138th Aviation Company (USAR) stationed in Orlando, Florida.