

# Texas Mohawks

**After a long and successful career with the US Army, the Grumman OV-1 Mohawk is facing retirement. Chris Neill, of Focal Plane Imagery, reports on its retirement from the 504th MI Bde/15th MI Bn at Fort Hood, Texas.**

## retire

Right: Mohawk 62-5874 flies over the Texas landscape showing off the full-colour artwork applied to the port side of the aircraft. (Photos Greg L Davis/FPI)

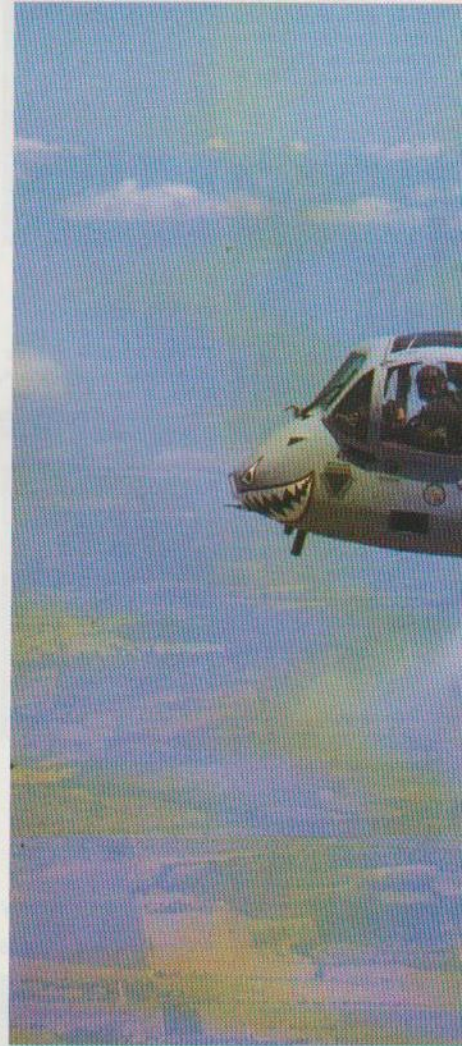
ON SEPTEMBER 17, 1993 the United States Army retired the OV-1D Mohawks assigned to the 504th Military Intelligence Brigade (504th MI Bde)/15th Military Intelligence Battalion (15th MI Bn) located at Fort Hood, Texas. The OV-1D's retirement from the 504th/15th MI marks the beginning of the US Army's withdrawal of the Mohawk from active duty service for replacement by Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). The 504th/15th took unusual measures for US Army units, to ensure that the OV-1D's retirement did not go unnoticed and applied

colourful commemorative markings to one of the unit's last aircraft.

### Mohawk's Service Record

The Grumman OV-1 Mohawk was originally purchased by the US Army in 1959 and has been in frontline service ever since. Widespread use in South East Asia helped build the Mohawk's reputation as a useful aircraft, since it regularly operated under harsh field conditions and had a knack of bringing its crew home safely thanks to its heavily-armoured cockpit and

Right: OV-1D Mohawk 62-5874 of the 504th MI Bde/15th MI Bn at Ft Hood, Texas, prior to its recent retirement is seen wearing shark's mouth markings reminiscent of its service in Vietnam.





overall ruggedness.

During the *Cold War*, the Mohawk monitored the Communist front in Europe to ensure that any movements of armour etc were well noted by NATO forces. Currently OV-1s serve in South Korea to monitor the highly-volatile border which separates North Korea from South Korea. The OV-1 is expected to remain in service with the US Army in Korea until 1996.

### **504th MI Bde/15th MI Bn Background**

Activated at Fort Bragg, North Carolina on February 25, 1966, the 15th MI Bn was one of only four Aerial Exploitation Battalions in the United States Army. The 15th has its roots in the 131st MI Company and the 131st Aviation Company. Using the OV-1 Mohawk, both units served with distinction in South East Asia using the specialised imagery intelligence collection systems of the aircraft which include: photographic, infrared, and Side-Looking Airborne Radar (SLAR). After undergoing several organisational changes in the late 1960s and early 1970s the 15th MI Bn was reorganised in 1972 under the 504th MI Bde and located at Fort Hood, Texas.

### **Desert Shield and Desert Storm**

As the Coalition forces built up in the Gulf following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the US Army

lacked reconnaissance assets, directly under its command, that could be available 24 hours a day. The proven capabilities of the OV-1D Mohawk meant that of all the army units alerted and deployed from Fort Hood, Texas, the 15th

was one of the first!

During *Desert Shield* and *Desert Storm* the 15th MI Bn was attached to the 525th MI Bde and was the primary intelligence collection asset for the XVIII Airborne Corps. The 15th

*Below: This view of the Mohawk's observer position gives an indication of the excellent visibility afforded by the aircraft's bug-eye canopy. (Chris Neill/FPI)*





Above: The flight-line of the 504th MI Bde/15th MI Bn's last five OV-1D Mohawks at Robert Gray Army Airfield, West Fort Hood, Texas.

completed 929 aerial intelligence collection missions and achieved a mission completion rate of 99.1%. Operating at the highest operational tempo of any battalion-sized aviation element in the Gulf, the unit's pilots racked up 5,537 combat flight hours out of over 10,500 hours flown while deployed. This accomplishment reportedly breaks all previous records of hours flown by a single aircraft type operated by one unit in the US Army while

deployed overseas. No aircraft was lost to enemy fire during the conflict. However, two Mohawks were lost in separate accidents, one of which occurred when the crew was forced to eject after running out of fuel while orbiting a runway closed by an aircraft mishap. The 15th MI Bn returned to its Fort Hood home, which is located in central Texas, in April 1991 after spending more than 200 days in South West Asia.

### Mohawks Retired

At the request of the unit's commanders, FPI designed and applied special commemorative markings to OV-1D serial 62-5874 to ensure that the 504th/15th's retirement of the OV-1D didn't go unnoticed.

The aircraft was adorned with a full-colour shark's mouth reminiscent of the Mohawk's service in the Vietnam era. In acknowledgement of the aircraft's manufacturer, 'GRUMMAN', was applied to the starboard nose gear door. The serial was shadowed and a full-colour Mohawk Indian was applied to the outside of the vertical stabilisers.

Each engine cowling was adorned with a pennant-style flag; the port side wearing the American flag and the starboard wearing the Texan flag.

Each drop tank wore markings signifying the brigade and the battalions association with the Mohawk. The tank on the port side read '15th MI Bn OV-1D 1972-1993'. The starboard tank read '504th MI Bde OV-1D MOHAWK'. The wording on each tank was accentuated by the placement of stars at the front and back. 'ROBERT GRAY ARMY

AIRFIELD' was applied to the port side of the rear fuselage in acknowledgement to the unit's home.

The Mohawks were either retired from service (and sent to Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ), turned over to the remaining OV-1D units, or sold to foreign countries through the Foreign Military Sales programme.

As the unit's Mohawks became scarce, 62-5874 became the flag-ship symbolising the unit's pride. It was the last to be retired from service with the 504th MI Bde/15th MI Bn on September 17, 1993, and was turned over to another unit with the celebratory markings still applied. During a brief ceremony, Gen William C Page Jr, one of the US Army's first Mohawk pilots, reflected on the Mohawk's outstanding service record, and his long association with the aircraft, as part of the dedication of an OV-1D mounted in front of the 504th MI Bde/15th MI Bn headquarters building.

This event closed the books on the unit's long association with the Mohawk and also began the retirement of the US Army's only fixed-wing, turbo-prop aircraft equipped with ejection seats. This ceremony also marked the retirement of General Page who was the Deputy Commanding General of the US Army's III Corps at Fort Hood, Texas.

With the retirement of the OV-1D, the unit was downsized to a headquarter's element. Expectations that the UAV would replace the OV-1D in the autumn of 1993 were not met. The 504th MI Bde/15th MI Bn will now receive the UAVs in the autumn of 1994, since the US Army's UAV programme is undergoing further refinement.



Mohawk '874 flies over Buchanan Lake in central Texas on a routine training sortie. (Photos Greg L Davis/FPI)

