

OPERATION DRILL PRESS

PART 1

Genesis and History

We in the USAFSS (U.S Air Force Security Service) command were a part of the U.S. Air Force, but apart from the Air Force due to the nature of our work and the skills required to perform our duties. In the USAFSS the most responsible positions were often assigned to enlisted personnel, sometimes even very low ranking persons because of their training, skills, and experience. Administratively we belonged to the Air Force. Operationally we belonged to NSA (National Security Agency) and we lived in a dark world of secrets. Now...

“We are a group of rapidly aging and steadily disappearing veterans, of a war that was fought with skills and talents not normally associated with the military, nor understood by the general public. Our pride is in accomplishments that are often secret, and memories are about things that happened, but will be officially denied.”

[Bill Mahan, 15 June 2008]

In The Beginning

There was a small operation, which was born and died during the Vietnam War. It was a quintessential USAFSS (U.S. Air Force Security Service) project called “Operation Drill Press”, also called the ABERU (Airborne Emergency Reaction Unit). This operation’s mission, manning, personnel and activities was truly representative of the USAFSS in almost every respect. It was operated by enlisted personnel, had no officers assigned to it, and its tasking came from the end-users on the battle field. Its roots go back to the beginnings of the USAFSS and the U.S. Air Force.

On 14 Jul 65, 2nd Air Division issued a requirement for tactical COMINT in SVN utilizing an Airborne Emergency Reaction Unit. These aircraft would fly near Viet Cong (VC) field units and capture low powered Morse and voice signals. The commander of 2nd AD figured to fly 300 night hours with four C-47’s, complete with language qualified USAFSS mission crews. 2nd AD described its requirements and operational concept as,

