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SPREADS ITS WINGS



HOW THE OV-10 SQUADRON, BLUE AIR TRAINING, AND CALIFORNIA AEROFAB ARE RETURNING A FLEET OF NORTH AMERICAN BRONCOS TO THE SKY FOR A NEW MISSION

BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

Increasing communist aggression in Southeast Asia, particularly Vietnam, during the early 1960s saw the American government begin an unprecedented spending program to acquire all sorts of new weapon systems, including aircraft. The new and popular buzz term was COIN — standing for Counter-Insurgency — and it was applied to a variety of military technologies but when it came to aviation, COIN was being used for a proposed low-cost, relatively lightweight aircraft that could be utilized to combat guerrillas in their own environment. The initial COIN project assumed that said guerrillas would be a step above spear-tossing savages and certainly not capable of fielding any sort of meaningful anti-aircraft system.

This led to another term — LARA, standing for Light Armed Reconnaissance Aircraft, whose initial configuration was finalized during

September 1963. This new aerial warrior was to have twin engines and carry a crew of two while being able to tote four 500-pound iron bombs and four M60 7.62mm machine guns. This would give LARA a close support capability although its primary task was initially specified as reconnaissance. However, the demands on LARA just kept increasing. A Tri-Service (USAF/USN/USMC) panel was formed to add their input and LARA now had to be capable of carrying 2400-pounds of cargo or six paratroopers/stretchers while being able to operate from aircraft carriers *without* any special catapult equipment. The panel wanted LARA to fly at 300 knots (350 mph) and be fully STOL (short takeoff and landing) capable with a takeoff run of just 800 feet. As one final demand, someone on that panel also wanted LARA to be easily convertible to an amphibian!

To give an idea of just how many

American aeronautical companies were in business during June 1964, *nine* corporations submitted designs to compete for the LARA contract. And these designs were a mixed bag — the Goodyear GA-39 was sort of a seaplane fighter with overwing pod-mounted engines placed on struts. Then there was the Beech PD-183, Douglas D-855, Helio 1320, and Lockheed CL-760. These were followed by a Martin design that had twin-booms, a single fuselage and an inverted V tail with engine exhaust ducted through the booms. The Hiller K16, North American NA-300, and Convair Model 48 all sort of looked alike but this gives one the idea of the incredible amount of rival talent bidding for the riches of the contract.

Interestingly enough, Convair was first out of the starting gate since they decided to create their own company-funded aircraft — the Model 48 that carried the name Charger. Convair had started earlier so they were able

BT Burger flies lead in OV-10D+ BuNo 155493/NX97854 with Matt Nightingale on his wing in OV-10D BuNo 155474/N16854. The OV-10D has a span of 40-ft, length of 44-ft, height of 15-ft 2-in, with a total wing area of 291-sq-ft. In military configuration, the OV-10D has an empty weight of 6893-lbs, gross of 9908-lbs, and a max takeoff weight of 14,444-lbs. Power comes from Garrett T76-G-420/421 turboprops of 1040-shp each.