

Helicopter Attack (Light) Squadron THREE (HAL-3)

Project Proposal

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

This paper will provide a critical, thesis-driven analysis of the history of the U.S. Navy's Helicopter Attack (Light) Squadron Three (HAL-3) from 1966-1972. Formed during the Vietnam Conflict out of a need to provide dedicated close air support for the Navy's Patrol River Boats (PBRs) and other brown water craft in 1966, HAL-3 became a crucial element of Navy's riverine interdiction operations in the Mekong Delta. In addition to close air support, HAL-3 also became involved in convoy protection, coastal surveillance, agent and sniper insertion and SEAL support. In addition to providing a chronological narrative of HAL-3 operations during the Vietnam War, this paper will also analyze several elements of HAL-3's history, including its formation, its mission effectiveness, and its administration. Questions to be addressed are as follows: Why was HAL-3 required? Couldn't the CAS function be performed more effectively by other services, especially the Marine Corps? How effective was HAL-3 in the CAS support role? Why did its mission expand? How well did it perform its other rolls? How well did HAL-3's administrative, maintenance, and supply organizations function? Was their too much bureaucracy or too little? Overall, should the Navy have ventured into the light attack helicopter mission to begin with in 1966 or was their an alternative route that might have been more effective and less costly?

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

As an introduction to the "Brown Water Navy," this project will open with an overview of the Navy's involvement in the area of the Mekong Delta leading up to the period of the commissioning of HAL-3. It will include a description of the geography of the area and the political, economic and military situation in the region during the 1965-66 period. Additionally, this introduction will provide an overview of Operation Game Warden which had been inaugurated in 1966 as well as the SEALORDS plan which began in late 1968. Overall, the purpose of this background section is to illuminate the various factors which lead to HAL-3's establishment.

Part II will cover the transfer of Army UH-1 Hueys to Helicopter Combat Support Squadron ONE (HC-1) and their respective detachments. Additionally this will also analyze HC-1's growing role in the Delta and the subsequent need for and then creation of HAL-3.

Part three will provide an administrative overview of the newly formed squadron of HAL-3, including the squadron's home base locations, chain of command, administrative organization, maintenance organization, and supply organization. In addition, the units table of organization and equipment (TO&E) will be reviewed and analyzed in light of the unit's expanding mission during the war.

Part IV will be a chronological narrative of SEAWOLF operations. This section will cover everything from close air support, to convoy protection, to SEAL support activities.

Part V will attempt to answer the questions posed in the Project Overview based on the data collected from the sources listed below.

SOURCES

As of this date, there seems to be an abundance of sources available. The NHC Aviation History Archives have all of HAL-3's administrative and operational files from their decommissioning in 1972. From the administrative files in this archive, I should be able to attain much of what is needed for the Administrative Overview portion of the project, such as chain-of-command, detachment locations, personnel assigned to each detachment, and a description of the maintenance and supply organization of the unit. The operational files should provide statistical information (# of sorties per month, ammunition used, etc). The operational message traffic will probably be where we find information on specific operations and their outcome. Additionally, the Aviation History Branch's HAL-3's command histories will provide general information such as CO and OIC info for specific detachments at specific times.

The NHC Operational Archives are going to be used when I have more specific dates on certain operations. Task Force 116 would have produced thousands of messages so once I find specific dates from the HAL-3 message traffic, I will be able to find related correspondence in the AR.

The NHC Ship's History files for LSTs that HAL-3 was attached to will provide reports on how many "scrambles" the squadron was ordered out on. This is about the extent of the use of these files.

Interviews and published articles by former SEAWOLVES make up a portion of the sources. Most of these will be used in supporting the operational chronology. I already have numerous email addresses of former SEAWOLVES (however, these will have to be checked to make sure they are valid).

OUTLINE

I. Introduction

- A. Navy involvement in Mekong Delta and the Rung Sat Special Zone (general river ops).
 - 1. Geography of the area.
 - 2. Political, economic and military importance of the Delta region during the 1965-66 period.
- B. Overview of specific operations:
 - 1. Operation Market Time
 - 2. Operation Game Warden
 - 3. SEALORDS Plan

II. PBRs and the increasing realization by COMNAVFORV of the need for NAVY (not Army) combat air support.

- A. The need for a dedicated Navy helo squadron to provide air cover in support of Operation Game Warden.
 - 1. Determination as to why Army gunships could not support these types of operations.
- B. Transfer of UH-1s to HC-1, their detachments, and subsequent formation of HA(L)-3.
- C. Training.

III. Administrative and maintenance overview.

- A. Chain of command and locations.
- B. Administrative organization.

- C. Maintenance organization.
- D. Logistics / supply organization.
- E. Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E).

IV. HAL-3's UH-1s and their armament/weapons (using visuals).

- A. M-60 machine gun (mounted and hand-held).
- B. Rocket pods / 2.75 inch rockets.
- C. M-79 grenade launchers (hand-held).
- D. .30-cal machine gun.
- E. .50-cal machine gun mount.

V. SEAWOLF OPERATIONS (chronological narrative of HAL-3 operations will be provided from the following):

- A. Data from HA(L)-3 files in Aviation Archives (30+ boxes).
- B. Data from ship's history files of USS GARRETT COUNTY, HARNETT COUNTY, HUNTERDON COUNTY, JENNINGS COUNTY and WINDHAM COUNTY (LSTs that HAL-3 was attached to).
- C. Data from TF-116 (Operational Archives).
- D. Other primary materials (interviews; published articles by former Seawolves).

VI. Conclusion.

- A. The overall significance of HAL-3 in the history of Naval operations in Vietnam.

VII. Appendices

- A. Chronology of HAL-3 significant events.
- B. Chronology of HAL-3 Commanding Officers and OICs of detachments.
- C. List of HAL-3 detachments and their bases/ships.
- D. Sideviews of UH-1s used by HAL-3.
- E. List of HAL-3 Navy Cross recipients and their respective citations.

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