

5 Mar. 91

Seawolf Presentation

Tonight I'd like to tell you a little about a Navy Flight Squadron called HA(L)-3 and known widely as the "Seawolves" and often just called "the Wolves". I'm the Historian/Curator of the HA(L)-3 Seawolf Association which is a veterans group of individuals who served in HA(L)-3 in Vietnam. We organized in 1986 and have currently located over 500 of the 2,500 to 3,000 men who served in the squadron. We had our first reunion in K.C. in 1987 and in 1989, at our second reunion donated a HU1E gunship helicopter to the Naval Air Museum in Pensacola and tonight that helicopter is sitting right outside the front door of that museum. Our next reunion will be this coming June in San Diego and we are expecting a couple of hundred members plus their families. We have at least five members living in the K.C. area. Tom Padon, of this ANA chapter is one of those.

Now to get from our veterans Association to the original squadron I'd like to begin by telling you just a little about the squadron and then put on a video tape about the squadron.

To begin with the squadron was conceived as a rapid reaction close air support to the RVN Brown Water Navy ^{RIVERINE AND COAST PATROL FORCES} which consisted of PBR's, Swift boats, Monitors, Alphas, Tango's (Reworked LCS's) and literally dozens of other modified and converted WW II boats and ships. This also included the 800 and 1,100 series LST's, LCM's, YRBM's (Yard Barge Medium) and so on. HA(L)-3 was also envisioned as supporting landing craft and providing armed reconnaissance and support to special mission groups as seals and to fly medivacs and psy-ops missions in MR III and MR IV.

Several things made this squadron unique in the annals of Naval Aviation. First the squadron was the Navy's first and only active duty attack helicopter squadron. After Vietnam they formed two reserve squadrons to support the SEALS but those have now been converted to Combat SAR units. Secondly the squadron was commissioned and decommissioned in Vietnam and no one ever served in HA(L)-3 stateside. Thirdly it was a big squadron with about 600 officers and men. Fourthly we flew, for the most part Army helicopters, Fifthly we flew combat missions in Vietnam for five straight years totaling 79,000 combat missions. Sixthly, and most importantly, our legend, the legend of the Seawolves, came from the fact that ours was a dream mission. Our mission was to be the seventh calvary and come riding at a gallop, bugles sounding the charge, to drive off the Indians attacking the beleaguered circle of covered wagons, in this case the river patrol boats or PBR's. We did it over and over

again, thousand of times, day after day and became very, very good at it. We new that we were good and everyone else knew it also but with a mission like that, how could we loose. The Swift boats and PBR's were absolutely necessary, were well trained and fierce fighters, but, often the enemy held the advantage over them; that is, until, the Seawolves showed up and then, with the boat boys, the balance was tipped in our favor and then, as Patton said, we held them by the nose and kiked them in the back side. Ask any River Rat of the old Brown Water Riveriene Navy of the Mekong Delta about the Wolves and he'll tell you of the legend of the Seawolves. We were just lucky enough to draw the right hand to be there. And gentlemen I want to emphasize that this was the most exciting fun flying imaginable and there was lots and lots of it to go around. The danger was real and present but not overwhelming. We felt, at the time, that it was probably the last of the ground level, eyeball to eyeball, seat of the pants, no holds barred type of flying, that would come along; in view of the high-tech marvels that were already being introduced. One thing is for sure and that is that after flying in HA(L)-3 our stateside Navy flying seemed boring.

The squadron was authorized 33 UH-1 armed gunships and 11 Navy UH-1 "slicks" or normally unarmed helicopters. The latter were used for combat assaults, cargo, passengers, resupply, SEAL inserts & extractions, Psy-Ops broadcasts and leaflet drops, etc. The Gunships were call sign Seawolf and the "slicks" were call sign "Sealords". The squadron seldom had it's full compliment of aircraft do to losses. The Sealords aircraft had been beefed up to carry two 500 pound fuel/air explosives which were seldom, if ever, used. The gunships normally flew in a light fire team which consisted of two aircraft. The lead aircraft had copilot controlled gattling-type mini-guns mounted on each side of the aircraft as well as 14 2.75 inch FF aerial rockets normally fires by the pilot. The right door gun was an aviation 50 cal. and ^{Bunker Buster} the left gun either one, or a pair of M-60 machine guns. The trail aircraft was identical except that it either had twin M-60's or a gatling type mini-gun in place of the 50 cal in the right door. The interior of the gunships was literally filled with ammo, M-79 grenade launchers, spare barrels, M-16 rifles and various napalm, phosphorus, marking and incendiary grenades. Each aircraft carried at least 6,000 rounds of 7.62 ammo and 700 plus rounds of 50 cal. We were using 19 mil. rounds of 7.62 and 2 mil. rounds of 50 cal. and 108,000 rockets annually.

By decommissioning the squadron had flown 131,000 flight hours, 79,000 missions, inflicted 4,000 confirmed enemy killed, 9,000 sampans damaged or

destroyed, 10,000 structures damaged or destroyed, flown 1,530 medivacs, carried 37,000 passengers and over a million pounds of cargo. As of Jan. 1st , 1972 the squadron personnel had earned:

5 Navy Crosses
 31 Silver Stars
 2 Legion of Merits
 219 DFC's
 5 Navy & Marine Corps Medals
 101 Bronz Stars
 15,964 Air Medals
 156 Purple Hearts
 142 Vietnamese Crosses of Galantry
 PUC (6 Dets)
 MUC (2 Dets)

The squadron earned a Navy Unit Commendation and a Vietnamese Meritorious Citation with Palm. President Nixon awarded the PUC to the entire squadron, as virtually his last act in office before resigning after the Watergate scandal. It was only the second time that an entire squadron had been awarded the PUC. Bob Halderman said that awarding the Wolves the PUC was the first time the President had smiled in weeks. The squadron had 42 KIA's and lost an equal number of aircraft.

The squadron operated out of one headquarters in the Delta and nine detachments mostly in IV Corps. This was done in order to minimize the reaction time in countering enemy actions in each area of operation. The unit was formally commissioned in April 1967 after beginning ops Sept. 19, 1966. It began VNAF indoctrination and familiarization in July 1971 and was officially decommissioned or disestablished in March of 1972.

1st PBR OPS
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