

SEAWOLF DET 5 CHANGES COMMAND DURING
"HOT TURNAROUND"

On the afternoon of the 16th of December the Seawolves created what may likely be another first when Cdr. Robert C. Strange relieved Lcdr. Ernest F. Yaeger as Officer in Charge of HA(L) 3 Detachment 5 on the flight deck of the YRBM 16 in Chau Doc Province, RVN, while the attack helicopter in which Cdr. Strange was co-pilot was being rearmed and refueled during a "hot turnaround." Earlier in the afternoon Cdr. Strange and Lcdr Yaeger were reviewing a few papers and completing arrangements for the change of command when the claxon sounded and the Seawolves were scrambled to provide air strike support for a Vietnamese border outpost near An Phu Village on the Upper Bassac River nearly on the Cambodian border. The outpost was under mortar, recoilless rifle, and automatic weapons fire and expected a ground probe from the battalion-sized unit of Viet Cong. Scrambled early in the afternoon, the Seawolves of Det 5, joined by their sister fire team of two helicopter gunships from Det 9, placed heavy and highly accurate rocket and machine gun strikes during the next three and a half hours in the face of severe ground fire, and returning to the area of contact several more times. 12/16/68

It was during the last of the hot turnarounds--just as originally planned at 1600 sharp--that, while the gunners and the flight deck crews from the YRBM 16 reloaded the helicopter's rockets and miniguns and refueled the aircraft, Cdr. Strange from the cockpit assumed responsibility for and relieved Lcdr Yaeger of Seawolf Det 5. The bird rearmed, and the change of command completed,

the fire team returned to the battle to continue their attacks on the Viet Cong, driving them into strategic retreat. During the attacks the Seawolves expended a near record amount of ordnance and inflicted heavy damage upon the enemy while US and Vietnamese units suffered virtually no casualties.