

Dec. 16, 1993

Don C. Thomson
Historian/Curator
HA(L)-3 Seawolf Assn.

James R. Babcock
Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.

Dear Jim,

In response to your letter of October 27, 1993 I can relate the following information:

Our squadron, Helicopter Attack(Light)- Three, HA(L)-3, was a U.S. Navy squadron that was formed in Vietnam in 1966 and stood down in early 1972. It was comprised of about 650 men and 40 helicopters during it's later years. We were known as the "Seawolves" and, over the years, our reputation grew in the southern part of Vietnam. Today we are legend to all those who served in the U.S. Navy's Brown Water Navy in South Vietnam.

The Seawolves were authorized 33 UH-1 gunship helicopters which were supplied by the U.S. Army via an inter service letter of agreement. We also had an element of our squadron that flew up to nine unarmed "slicks" (UH-1L, TH-1L, & HH-1K Models). They used the call sign "Sealords". These helicopters came from the Navy's own helicopter inventory. They were used for logistic (Ash & Trash) missions, insertions, extractions and other Seal Team missions and whenever we needed aircraft with the increased carrying capacity provided by the larger -13 engines in those aircraft.

The primary Seawolf Mission was to support the U.S. Navy's "Brown Water" Riveriene craft, plying the waterways of South Vietnam, with rapid-reaction air cover and close air support. Secondary missions ran the gamut of all the types of helicopter missions flown in that war. We flew water to troops in the field, medivacked out the wounded, flew reconnaissance and interdiction, did artillery and Naval gunfire spotting, flew endless secret Seal Team missions, supported the Vietnamese Navy and other of their forces under attack, trained South Vietnamese pilots and whatever else was needed.

Your letter stated that your organization is in possession of UH-1B number 62-1985, body number 505, manufactured 16 April, 1963 and that it was received by you from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources in June of 1993. You further stated that it had 17 bullet hole patches on it. In relation to this aircraft I can state the following:

In June and July of 1970 I flew UH-1B's 62-1976, 62-2000 and other similar numbers that were sister aircraft to yours. At the time I was undergoing a UH-1 transition course with the Army at Ft. Rucker, Alabama.

I flew your very aircraft, UH-1B 62-1985, on May 22, 1971 as the Fire Team Leader (FTL) of a two aircraft Fire Team. My call sign that day was "Seawolf 39". The "3" stood for Combat Detachment Three and the "9" stood for the senior FTL at that detachment. So we flew out of Detachment Three which, at that time, was located at the "Long Strip" on the East side of the town of CaMau (Old Name was Quan Long). This town is located just about in the middle of the Southern Ca Mau peninsula of the Mekong Delta in Southern Military Region IV (IV Corps). Ca Mau was the Headquarters of the ARVN 21st Infantry Division which was definitely one of the better ones. Ca Mau also had a Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) base and other U.S. and ARVN forces and advisors including the Providence Chief.

We lived in the old French Compound in Ca Mau and commuted via a stolen Army Jeep and one old beat-up gray Navy pick-up truck from our compound to our bunker building at the long strip. At night we kept smudge pots burning at each end of the long strip so we could find it on those incredibly dark nights in Vietnam.

On May 22, 1971 I flew your aircraft on a 4.0 hour flight coded in my Navy Log Book as a "1T2" which is "Daylight/Attack/Target of Opportunity or Armed Reconnaissance". Later that same day I flew a 5.0 hour flight in your aircraft and that flight was coded "1X4" which is "Daylight/Air Defense of Other Forces/ Combat Air Patrol Over Other Friendly Surfaces or Bases". We hot refueled at various locations during these flights and had a meal break between the two flights. My copilot on these flights was LTJG Jack Cassidy who is still in the U.S. Navy. I am currently flying AH-1E Cobra Gunships for the Missouri Army National Guard.

On the flights in your aircraft that day I was giving Fire Team Leader (FTL) training to the Attack Helicopter Aircraft Commander (AHAC) flying in the right seat of the trail aircraft. I always tried to show ourselves to "Mister Charles",

as we called the Viet Cong, every time that I was on duty by patrolling our entire area of operations (A.O.). It served as a constant reminder to the VC/NVA that we were there and ready for them. It also helped to train the crews and helped us to uncover many of the daytime activities of the enemy. It pressured him into having to be more careful and operate more at night which also made things more difficult for him.

My recollection is that on the second flight that day that we flew the entire U Minh Forrest area near the central western coast of the Ca Mau Peninsula and adjacent to the Gulf of Thailand (Siam). We refueled at the 31st Light Command Post (31st LCP) of the 21st ARVN Division in the U Minh Forrest and I bid farewell to Colonel White who was the U.S. Army advisor there. I was being transferred the next day back to headquarters in Binh Thuy. I am sorry that I can't recall any particulars as to air strikes that we put in that day.

On June 19, 1971 I flew your aircraft again at our headquarters in Binh Thuy as a maintenance test pilot. It was a 1.3 hour flight coded "1L2" which means "Day/Maintenance/Test Flight". It was, no doubt, coming out of a 100 hour maintenance service. The entire flight would have been flown in the immediate vicinity of the Navy Binh Thuy airfield.

I hope that this information on your UH-1B is what you were looking for. If you need additional information on your aircraft I could put a note in our next "Wolfgram" asking our members for facts concerning it. Undoubtedly some of our members will remember many of those 22 bullet holes that appeared between May of 1971 and January, 1972. Your aircraft must have been just about the very last UH-1B that our squadron received. It almost surely would have come directly from a phase or rework at Corpus Christy Army Depot, via a C-133 cargo aircraft, to Cam Ranh Bay. Our pilots dropped off our old B Models there and flew the ones received from Corpus back to Binh Thuy. But by 1971 we were receiving C Model aircraft which had the larger fuel tank and the 540 rotor head.

- Once we had put 100 hours on a newly arrived C Model we would change out the -11 engine and replace it with a dash 13 engine which gave the new aircraft designator M or, as we called them, "Mike" Models. The Mike Model, with more fuel and a much bigger engine was really a lethal and versatile war machine. From 9 to 30 July, 1971 I flew, as a maintenance test pilot, 4 B Model flights, 4 C Model flights, so the composition of our aircraft types were changing rapidly.

I suggest that you look to see if there is evidence of the Corpus Christy Army Depot brightly colored sticker or decal. It has probably been painted over by now but you should still be able to see the outline of it. I believe it was located on the pilots side, the right or starboard side of the aircraft, on the vertical side of the center pedestal or consol down and perhaps just aft of the circuit breaker panel and close to the floor of the aircraft. With the right seat occupied and feet on the floor, not on the rudder pedals, it would be near the outside of your left calf or ankle. The Corpus Christy Army Depot is still a major Army helicopter rework facility and they may well have records relating to the work done on your aircraft before it was shipped to our squadron in Vietnam.

Would your organization be willing to trade your UH-1B to the HA(L)-3 Seawolves for a UH-1M that flew in Vietnam? My organization has placed UH-1's in the San Diego Air and Space Museum and the Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola and another outdoors in Pensacola but none of those aircraft were actually used by our squadron in Vietnam. I believe that we have potential access to another UH-1M that we could trade to you for your B Model. I would appreciate you feeling out your organization on such a swap and letting me know. It would mean a lot to many of our members to have one of our own birds come home to roost.

I trust that the forgoing information proves interesting if not actually useful. I will look forward to hearing further from you on the aircraft swap. If that does not take place I could provide you with an official detailed history of our squadron.

Best Regards,

Don C. Thomson
Seawolf 19/39 Historian/Curator
HA(L)-3 Seawolf Association