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NARRATIVE-1970

Helicopter Attack (Light) Squadron THREE, nicknamed the "Seawolves" is headquartered at Binh Thuy, located in the heart of the Mekong Delta, 85 miles southwest of Saigon, Republic of Vietnam. HA(L)-3 is the only light attack helicopter squadron in the U. S. Navy.

Captain Reynolds Beckwith had command of HA(L)-3 from 5 April 1969 to 14 April 1970, when relieved by Captain Martin J. Twite, Jr., USN. Operationally, HA(L)-3 comes under the command of Task Force 116 and is designated as Task Group 116.7. The squadron is composed of the home base at Binh Thuy and nine detachments located throughout the Mekong Delta, represented as Task Units 116.7.1 through 116.7.9.

The primary mission of HA(L)-3 is to provide quick reaction armed helicopter close air support for all naval forces operating in Military Region IV and the southern section of Military Region III, RVN. Together with these naval forces, HA(L)-3 opposes the insurgent communist guerrilla forces moving men and supplies on the inland waterways that lace the Mekong Delta. Secondary missions include: (1) Fire support for other U.S. and Free World friendly forces in the Delta, (2) Insertion and gunship support for Seal operations, (3) Daily armed reconnaissance flights of assigned areas of operations, (4) Overhead and escort cover for both troop convoy and ship movements, (5) Gunfire spotting for Army artillery or Naval Gunfire, (6) Medical evacuations from confined landing areas, often under enemy fire, and last but equally important (7) Combat logistic flights of personnel and material throughout the Delta region of Vietnam.

As of 31 December 1970, HA(L)-3 was assigned 35 Bell Iroquois Helicopters consisting of 27 UH-1B models, 2 UH-1C models, 4 UH-1L models, and 2 HH-1K models. The UH-1B and the UH-1C models are used as attack Helicopter gunships. The UH-1L and HH-1K models are employed for combat support missions.

The UH-1L and HH-1K "Sealord" combat support aircraft operate from Binh Thuy and provide logistical support to virtually every Navy unit in the Mekong Delta. During 1970 the Sealords carried 7,287 passengers, 254,791 pounds of cargo, on 6,110 missions. In addition to combat logistic support missions the unarmored Sealords were utilized to insert and extract ground troops and Seal units. They have also been employed as airborne command posts providing a platform from which to direct combined air and ground operations.

The home base supports nine detachments of armed helicopter gunship detachments located throughout the Mekong Delta and lower region of Military Region III, RVN. As of 31 December the squadron had an allowance

DECLASSIFIED
Enclosure (2)

CONFIDENTIAL
DECLASSIFIED

of 161 officers, of which 157 were pilots, and 429 enlisted personnel. Additionally one technical representative from Bell Helicopter Corporation was assigned to the squadron for technical advice.

The nine gunship detachments are circumferentially located around the home base at Binh Thuy. This enables the home base to be a central focal point logistically, operationally, and geographically.

Detachment ONE is located at Nam Can on the southern tip of the Ca Mau Peninsula. Up until 1 September, it was operating off an LST and an advanced tactical support base called Sea Float. The living conditions of Sea Float precluded permanent staging and crew berthing so the crews rotated on a 24-hour on and a 24-hour off basis. Detachment ONE was relocated to Solid Anchor at Nam Can on 1 September 1970. The land fill for this base was transported in by barge and a permanent land based detachment formed. Additions were made to the living conditions at Solid Anchor until now it is quite habitable, with central messing and running water. Solid Anchor's area of operations is the southwest Ca Mau Peninsula and supports Naval Craft, SEAL units and Vietnamese Marines in the Cau Lon River and southern Mekong Delta area. The support provided by Detachment ONE is part of an effort to establish the government of South Vietnam in this area for the first time in many years. Solid Anchor provides security for the nearby village of Nam Can, which allows the local people to sell their goods to government agencies rather than at a fixed price to the Viet Cong.

Detachment TWO is located at Nha Be. Actually part of Military Region III, their mission is to keep the Long Tau Shipping Channel open and patrol the Rung Sat Special Zone. Detachment TWO flies overhead cover for all special interest ships including ammunition ships and tankers. Should a ship be sunk in the channel, Saigon would be cut off from the sea until the ship could be refloated and removed. Detachment TWO has been located at Nha Be ever since the squadron was formed in April of 1967.

Detachment THREE is located at Ca Mau. It was relocated here on 5 August 1970 from an LST off Ha Tien. Previously Detachment THREE had night staged at Vinh Gia and the To Chau Civilian Irregular Defense Group Camp. There are two air strips at Ca Mau; the Long and Short Strips. Facilities at the Long Strip were minimal for quite a while. The Seawolves had to sleep in the open and eat C-rations. Conditions have steadily been improved. A permanent staging structure has been built and they live in the Province Senior Advisors' (PSA) compound. Detachment THREE operates in the southern and eastern U Minh Forest, the Dan Doi Secret Zone, in Solid Anchor's area of operation, and throughout the southern Ca Mau Peninsula. Detachment THREE often provides mutual support for Detachment ONE and Detachment SIX in the Ca Mau Peninsula.

CONFIDENTIAL
DECLASSIFIED
Enclosure (2)

DECLASSIFIED

Detachment FOUR is based out of Ben Luc. They support the PBR's and other Riverine Warfare units. Operation Giant Slingshot, their primary mission, is to interdict Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops infiltrating into South Vietnam from the Parrot's Beak and Angel's Wing area of Cambodia. They also place strikes on Luffelbag activations.

Detachment FIVE was relocated from the YRBM-20 to the YRBM-16 which is now located south of Chau Duc on the Basac River. It operates an interdiction program known as Tran Hung Dao I, ostensibly to keep the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese from infiltrating from Cambodia into South Vietnam. However, the operations also include work in the Tram Forest and Seven Mountains area.

Detachment SIX initially staged off an LST at the mouth of the Song Ong Doc River. In February, they commenced night staging ashore at New Song Ong Doc because of the impracticability of LST night operations in the Gulf of Thailand. Their area of operations is defined as 5000 meters either side of the Song Ong Doc River from the Gulf of Thailand to Ca Mau, but in actuality, they range north into the U Minh Forest and south to "VC Lake". Their mission is to keep the Song Ong Doc River open to traffic and also serve as a blocking force for Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops attempting to travel south to Solid Anchor. On 20 October ATSB Song Ong Doc was totally destroyed by an enemy mortar and rocket attack. Detachment SIX relocated aboard the USS GARRETT COUNTY (LST-736) in the Gulf of Thailand and became fully operational both day and night aboard the ship.

Detachment SEVEN moved from Ben Luc to Dong Tam and began supporting operation Tran Hung Dao 8 and 14. Basically Detachment SEVEN represents air support for the riverine forces in an attempt to establish the government of South Vietnam influence in Kien Hoa Province. Kien Hoa is the seat of the origin of the Viet Cong movement. Detachment SEVEN supports Seals, boats and the Army in the area.

Detachment EIGHT operated from a LST off Rach Gia until 6 February, 1970. Because of the impracticability of LST night operations, they moved to Rach Gia, and operated from the short strip while living in the town of Rach Gia. As part of Operation Searchturn, Detachment EIGHT acts as the second line interdiction program. Viet Cong move through Detachment FIVE's area of operation into Detachment EIGHT's area and then south to the U Minh Forest. Technically Detachment EIGHT patrols between Long Xuyen and Rach Gia, but actually they work the Three Sisters Mountains around to the U Minh Forest.

Detachment NINE is stationed on the YRBM-21 at An Long. Last fall they moved to Moc Hoa in order to be more centrally located within their area of operation. However, the Monsoons soon made the living conditions

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED
CONFIDENTIAL

at Moc Hoa intolerable and they were forced to relocate at Ben Luc in the spaces previously occupied by Detachment ELEVEN. These spaces had been stripped clean so Detachment NINE moved back to the YRBM-21. It is noteworthy that during this time Detachment NINE always had an up fireteam. Operation Barrier Reef finds Detachment NINE as part of the interdiction program set up along the Cambodian border. They also patrol the Grand Canal referred to as the "Ditch". Recently they began periodically working with SEALs in operations at Bac Lieu.

During May and June of this year Detachments FOUR, FIVE, NINE, EIGHT, and THREE operated in Cambodia in support of Trang Hung Dao XI, the mission was to seek out and destroy enemy arms and supplies caches in the VC sanctuaries of Cambodia. The "Sealords" combat support aircraft played a vital role in providing Command and Control functions and lifting vital parts and material to the river boats engaged in the operation.

The squadron continually updates all areas of operation. Publishing the first official tactics manual in May, HA(L)-3 borrowed the tactics from the Marine Corps and the Army who had previous experience in this area. Beginning in August an all Navy operation began with Sealord aircraft inserting U.S. Navy SEAL teams with Seawolf gunship support. This combination proved so effective that it is now a common occurrence and a matter of routine to coordinate SEAL operations in this manner.

The Navy and HA(L)-3 developed their tactics variation with the inception of the door mounted .50 cal machine gun and the door mounted mini-gun, which provides superior coverage and firepower when breaking off from the target. At the same time it enables a greater flexibility in the direction of break and target reorientation patterns. A new mount of channeled aluminum was instituted in the door mounted mini-gun system, greatly decreasing the weight of the system. The mount is balanced to fire at a ninety degree angle the aircraft's longitudinal axis should the gunner lose control. Maintenance has been simplified in that the cumbersome wiring of the mini-gun brain has been replaced by a standard squadron control box which fits into an ammunition can under the gunner's seat, making it a simple matter to troubleshoot the system.

The free gun or Bravo Model M-60, configured to be hand held and fired off the shoulder was replaced by the Delta Model which incorporates a butterfly grip and requires a mount for firing. The fixed machine gun Sagami mount on the Delta Model was a vertical pole which attached to the forward edge of the hard mount and held the M-60 in a longitudinally horizontal plane. This configuration caused the spent brass to be ejected from a left door gun directly toward the synchronized elevator and tail rotor. To prevent brassing of the tail rotor, the Odom Mount was developed, which has a point of attachment at right angles to the vertical pole (instead of on top of it) and brass is ejected away from the synchronized elevator and tail rotor.

CONFIDENTIAL
DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED
CONFIDENTIAL

Development continued from this point, resulting in a dual mounted or twin M-60 configuration. Attachment to the vertical mount places the M-60's on either side of the pole. The guns are rotated ninety degrees along the longitudinal axis so that one ejects brass upwards and the other down. The dual mount puts out twice the firepower of a single M-60 and provides for continuous protection should one gun go down.

A brass deflector for the pylon mounted mini-gun was acquired from the U.S. Army supply. This slightly curved metal blade directs the flow of spent brass down and away from the synchronized elevator and measurably assists in the prevention of brassed tail rotors.

Maintenance is incorporating into operational UH-1L and UH-1K Sealord aircraft beefed up hard mounts capable of handling either two nineteen shot rocket pods or two five hundred pound bombs. A sighting system is placed in each chin bubble, as the bombs may be sighted from either seat. Experimental work has been conducted to determine the feasibility of clearing helicopter landing zones with this weapon. Present planning allows for the eventual conversion of all Sealord aircraft, greatly increasing the versatility of the squadron.

Evaluations were conducted with models 18, 19 and 20 door mounted 40mm grenade launchers. Model 19 is a high velocity system which proved unacceptable in that it damaged the airframe in which it was mounted. The model 20 low velocity system and model 18 "organ grinder" fired safely, but were reliable at only a short range, and therefore ineffective for harassment and interdiction (H & I) fire.

During 1970, 33,973 hours were flown in HA(L)-3 aircraft. Ammunition expended included 18,909,490 rounds of 7.62mm; 108,297 - 2.75 inch rockets; 41,718 rounds of 40mm grenades, and 1,951,956 rounds of .50 caliber machine gun ammunition.

Of the 429 men allotted by the Manpower Authorization for HA(L)-3, an average of 420 men were assigned for the year. Five first term enlistees reenlisted during the calendar year 1970, and fifteen career enlistees reenlisted during the same period. Advancements in rate included 52 men to E-4, 46 men to E-5, 2 men to E-6, one man to E-7, and one man to E-8.

Eight special court martials were convened during 1970. Of the 8 cases, one involved the possession of marijuana, two were for unauthorized absences, four were for curfew violations, and one was dismissed. 108 cases of violation of UCMJ were heard at Captains Mast. 28 resulted in nonjudicial punishment. The others were dismissed. One other instance of possession of marijuana was transferred to Naval Support Activity, Saigon for legal processing. One Administrative Discharge Board was held which resulted in the awarding of an administrative discharge to the accused. Eleven offenses of unauthorized absence were reported. There were no desertions in 1970.

DECLASSIFIED
CONFIDENTIAL

Enclosure (2)

CONFIDENTIAL

In 1970 there were 8 successful autorotations caused by engine failures or other malfunctions. One aircraft was later destroyed by TACTICAL AIR STRIKES due to heavy enemy ground fire in the area. Two aircraft were known to have been shot down and destroyed. Two aircraft were ditched in water, one of which was sunk and unrecoverable. There were four hard landings which resulted in substantial damage, two compressor explosions which resulted in destruction of the engines and limited damage to the aircraft, and two aircraft damaged due to gunfire. There were six crashes other than those already mentioned. Casualties included 10 killed, three injured, and a total of eight aircraft completely destroyed in 1970.

A rather unique situation exists in the HA(L)-3 Material Control Division. Material Control utilizes both the Army and the Navy supply systems in procuring repair parts, ground support equipment and other supplies in support of squadron operations. Under various Interservice Support Agreements, the Army provides all repair parts for the UH-1B and UH-1C gunships; all replacement T-53 engines, both L-11 and L-13; armament systems and special combat support equipment, and repair parts for UH-1L and HH-1K aircraft on an emergency basis when the required items are not available in the Navy system. The Navy system is the primary source of repair parts for the UH-1L and HH-1K aircraft; provides all general maintenance supplies such as hand tools, lubricants, etc.; all common hardware items; flight gear and administrative supplies and habitability items.

The Fleet Aviation Support Unit (FASU), Binh Thuy, Supply Dept. serves as the local stocking and processing point for aircraft repair parts; general maintenance supplies and administrative supplies. FASU also serves as the primary liaison point between HA(L)-3 and supporting Army and Navy supply activities. The Naval Support Activity Detachment, Binh Thuy, Supply Dept. serves as local stocking and processing point for habitability items; clothing and personnel combat support equipment.

The supply chain varies depending upon the items required. For Army items, the chain is HA(L)-3 to FASU, Binh Thuy to the 611th Transportation Co. at Vinh Long, RVN, then to the Aviation Materials Management Center (AMMC) at Saigon. When the required item is not available in RVN, the requisition is passed by AMMC to various Army Supply Depots in the United States. Navy requisition for aircraft repair parts; general maintenance supplies; flight gear and administrative supplies are passed from HA(L)-3 to FASU, then to Naval Supply Depot, Subic Bay, P.I. Requisitions for items not available at Subic Bay are passed to various Naval Supply activities in the United States. Requests for habitability items and clothing are sent to NSAD Binh Thuy then to the Naval Support Activity, Saigon, and from there to various Naval supply points in the United States.

During calendar year 1970, HA(L)-3 Material Control Division personnel processed a total of 16,132 requisitions of all types of which 12,170 were Army requisition and 3,953 were Navy requisition. Operating fund expenditures for 1970 totaled \$516,079.33 of which \$366,615.02 was expended for fuel and \$149,464.31 went for NSA items. Average total cost per flight hour for the year was \$15.25 which compares very favorably with the A1RPAC average cost per flight hour of \$16.50 for this type aircraft.

CONFIDENTIAL
Enclosure (2)

CONFIDENTIAL

The major problem areas encountered by the Material Control Division can be loosely categorized under three headings; transportation, dual system operation and communications. Under transportation, considerable aircraft down time was due to supply delay which can be attributed directly to the length of the supply lines with attending transportation delays. Average delivery time for items requested from the 611th Transportation Co. at Vinh Long is 2.9 days; for items obtained from ANMC Saigon, the average delay is 9.4 days for FDP (NOR-S-G) which is equipment down for parts, and not operational ready - supply - grounded plus 28.6 days for Army Priority 2 (NORS-N) which is not operational ready - not fully equipped. Navy requisitions passed to NSD Subic Bay, P.I. averaged 10-12 days delay for top priority items and the delivery time for lower priority requisitions which are processed by NSD Subic Bay and for higher priority items which are passed to the United States for action is computed in weeks rather than days.

The dual system operation, of which the majority of repair parts are requested through the Army Supply System which although basically organized along the same lines as the Navy system, is in operation procedures, terminology and paperwork totally different. Supply personnel assigned to HA(L)-3 must undergo a comprehensive on-the-job training program before they gain enough knowledge and experience to work effectively under the Army System. Additionally, it requires the maintenance of dual order logs; supply catalogs; and status and turn-in files with attending expenditures of additional manhours for administrative functions which, in fact, add nothing to the overall effectiveness of the supply effort.

Communication difficulties encountered in this area are an outgrowth of the other two problem areas, current and comprehensive status and shipping data are extremely difficult to obtain on a continuing basis. Navy requisitions passed to NSD Subic Bay, P.I. require a delay of 4 days before status and/or shipping data can be obtained. There is no effective follow up and status transmitting procedure established under the Army Supply System. Army requisitions passed to ANMC Saigon for action must be followed up by telephone on a case by case basis if any adequate information as to availability and delivery date is to be obtained. The Army Supply System is in a constant state of flux relative to methods, procedures and source points for various components. Often these changes are not transmitted to HA(L)-3. The result is cancellation of requisitions due to improper ordering procedures and a constant need to revise existing systems.

As the U.S. Navy is completing the accelerated turnover of naval vessels to the Vietnamese, the long range program of replacing U.S. air support with Vietnamese pilots is becoming apparently more urgent. With this in mind, HA(L)-3 has started training Vietnamese air observers as permanent members of the helicopter fire teams to aid in co-ordinating the friendly ground troops and waterborne units with the air support missions of HA(L)-3's gunships.

Eleven Petty Officers and junior officers were accepted for the first program which was divided into two phases. The initial phase of the training syllabus was directed simply at training qualified air observers to

CONFIDENTIAL

Enclosure (2)

DECLASSIFIED
CONFIDENTIAL

serve as an air to ground interpreter. The second phase of the program has been expanded to emphasize pilot and cockpit familiarization along with the previous syllabus. The second phase is a more concentrated curriculum including 60 hours of ground school and tutoring in navigation, communications, tactics, aerodynamics, powerplants, and emergency procedures. Upon successful completion of their classroom work, each student is given twenty hours of special crew time in the jump seat for general flight observation, followed by thirty hours of left seat time and two 1.5 hour intensive training hops. Upon completion of the program, the students are granted a letter of designation and also are entitled to wear the U.S. Navy Air Crew Wings.

HA(L)-3 had one doctor assigned to the squadron, Dr. Guillermo Vasquez. The life of a Navy Flight Surgeon is busy, especially in a war zone. He not only provides for the medical care of the pilots and men of HA(L)-3, but also devotes considerable time to the care and treatment of the Vietnamese children at the Providence Orphanage in neighboring Can Tho.

The needs of the orphanage although not unique to homes for the homeless in Vietnam are perhaps magnified due to the fact that the children there are younger than those in most orphanages in Vietnam. It was these needs that caused Dr. Vasquez to write home, asking his family to do what they could in his home town. Dr. Vasquez also sent a tape recording home which described his work at the orphanage. The tape was aired through a local T.V. station, and as a result several hundred pounds of needed medical supplies were sent. In addition, he asked for baby bottles and nipples. Over 2,000 bottles and nipples have been sent.

There have been shipments of needed clothes collected around Lake Charles, Louisiana and mailed through Preferred Airlift Program (PAL). Through the efforts of Dr. Vasquez and other personnel of HA(L)-3 and surrounding squadrons in the Binh Thuy and Can Tho area, great strides have been made in helping this orphanage. Every Saturday Dr. Vasquez or an Army doctor visits the orphanage, and supply as much medical aid as available. It is through efforts such as these, that some of the pain involved in a war can be eased, and much better relations developed with the peoples of South Vietnam.

DECLASSIFIED

Enclosure (2)