

COMMAND HISTORY OF HELICOPTER MINE COUNTERMEASURES SQUADRON FIFTEEN (HM-15)

Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron FIFTEEN (HM-15) was established on 2 January 1987. The first of two deployable, Airborne Mine Countermeasures (AMCM) squadrons to receive the Sikorsky MH-53E "Sea Dragon" helicopter, a derivative of the RH-53D and CH-53E helicopters. On 21 April 1987, HM-15 was ordered by the Chief of Naval Operations to execute a duty station change from Norfolk, VA, to Naval Air Station Alameda, CA, effective 1 October 1987.

The BLACKHAWKS of HM-15 began initial squadron flight operations in July 1987, with the receipt of their first MH-53E. On 28 September 1987, three squadron aircraft departed NAS Norfolk, and arrived at NAS Alameda, on 1 October 1987, officially reporting for duty under operational and administrative control of Commander, Anti-Submarine Warfare Wing, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

November 1987 marked a major flight training milestone for HM-15, as initial AMCM flight training commenced, employing the MK-105 Magnetic, Influence Minesweeping System (Hydrofoil), the MK-104 Acoustic, Influence Minesweeping System, and the AN/SPU-1W Shallow-Water, Magnetic, Influence Minesweeping System. In December, the squadron disassembled and loaded two MH-53E helicopters into a USAF C-5A Galaxy aircraft, certifying the MH-53E air transport capability for the Navy and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

From January through June of 1988, squadron flight and ground training continued to focus heavily on AMCM operations, using the AN/AQS-14 Side-Scan Minehunting Sonar System and the MK-103 Mechanical Minesweeping System. By June, the squadron had developed requisite proficiency in all mission areas and was selected by the Chief of Naval Operations to perform operational flight support for Commander, Operational Test and Evaluation Force, for Follow-on Test and Evaluation of the MH-53E helicopter.

In July 1988, the squadron successfully completed a Mine Warfare Readiness Certification Inspection (MRCI) and in August achieved Initial Operating Capability. In October 1988, the first HM-15 detachment deployed to NAS North Island to conduct minesweeping operations. In September 1989, the squadron embarked onboard the USS TRIPOLI (LPH-10) for PACEX-89, a joint exercise conducted throughout the Western Pacific with our Allies from Japan, Korea, and the Republic of the Philippines. Since then, the squadron has fielded numerous detachments throughout the West Coast.

In October 1989, HM-15 exercised its secondary mission of vertical onboard delivery by providing airlift for disaster relief efforts following the devastating Loma Prieta earthquake in San Francisco, CA, thereby earning the Humanitarian Service Medal.

From January 1991 through April 1992, HM-15 deployed a three aircraft, 100-man detachment to the Persian Gulf in direct support of Operations DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM. The BLACKHAWKS transported over 3.2 million pounds of cargo and more than 4,000 personnel in support of combat units in theater.

In July 1992, the squadron successfully exercised "split-site" operations from the USS JUNEAU (LPD-10) and NAS North Island during Exercise TANDEM THRUST-92, Commander Mine Countermeasures Group ONE's first integrated (Air, Surface, and EOD) mine countermeasure exercise. This was the first deployment of the MH-53E aboard an LPD-class ship, where the squadron simultaneously employed mechanical, influence, and minehunting systems.

In the fall of 1992, HM-15 was designated the lead squadron for developing AMCM tactics for use in the Very Shallow Water (VSW) environment. VSW tactics continue to be crucial to the ability of the Navy to project force "Forward...From the Sea." A series of five developmental amphibious exercises were undertaken, culminating in Exercise KERNEL RAIDER 93, in the fall of 1993.

Tasked by COMINWARCOM, the squadron redirected its operation's focus and conducted trial operations designed to provide Amphibious Readiness Groups (ARGs) an organic MCM capability, by embarking four aircraft to sail with the ARG when involved in mine countermeasures operations. Additionally, the squadron conducted Exercise CASUAL GANDER from NAS Whidbey Island, WA, to develop deep water minehunting procedures and tactics to allow hunting in the deeper Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs)—normal transit channels that our forces would use to speed to a conflict area. Exercise RIMPAC 94 saw the squadron implement these new procedures underway, integrated with surface and EOD MCM assets. Follow-on JCS tasking in Korea, later that year, enabled the squadron to build upon their earlier experiences in developing minehunting procedures in SLOCs.

During mid-year 1994, the CNO directed the reshaping of the AMCM force structure by ordering the integration of the BLACKHAWKS of HM-15 with its reserve sister squadron, the GOLDEN BEARS of HM-19. This was the first integration effort of its kind in the U.S. Navy, creating a squadron of over 750 regular, TAR, and Selected Reserve personnel. On 5 November 1994, the "new" HM-15, the largest helicopter squadron in the Navy, with 17 MH-53E aircraft, stood ready to complete rapid-response AMCM operations anywhere in the world.

By 28 January 1995, HM-15 successfully completed an MRCI, receiving its "proof of concept" certification from COMINWARCOM as being fully integrated and ready for deployment as an "integrated force." On 15 April 1995, the squadron deployed aboard USS TRIPOLI (LPH-10), for Exercise KERNEL BLITZ 95. During this exercise, HM-15 achieved the first-ever, simultaneous launching of three MK-105 minesweeping platforms in thirty minutes; setting a new benchmark for AMCM MK-105 operations from an LPH-class ship.

On 20 May 1995, HM-15 deployed to South Korea for Exercise RSO&I 95, exercising its 72-hour rapid-response capability. Follow-on tasking, to participate in minesweeping and minehunting operations around the South Korean peninsula, came in the form of Exercise FREEDOM BANNER 95, validating AMCM Expeditionary Mine Warfare Operations for the first time in twelve years.

In the fall of 1995, the BLACKHAWKS began to execute their plan for the squadron's relocation from NAS Alameda, CA, to NAS Corpus Christi, TX, as a result of the Base Realignment and Closure decision to close NAS Alameda. On 30 June 1996, HM-15 officially changed its permanent duty station to NAS Corpus Christi, TX, becoming the first air element to collocate to the Mine Warfare Center of Excellence. On 01 October 1996 HM-15 shifted operational and administrative chain of command from the Pacific to the Atlantic Fleet.

In recognition of outstanding operational excellence, and safety awareness, the squadron has earned the Battle "E," two CNO Safety Awards, two Meritorious Unit Commendations and four COMHELTACWINGPAC Semi-Annual Retention Excellence Awards.

HELICOPTER MINE COUNTERMEASURES SQUADRON 15

“Blackhawks”

CDR JOHN A. BROWN, CO

CDR VITO W. JIMENEZ, XO

HISTORY

Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron 15 was established on January 2, 1987, in Norfolk, VA, and moved to NAS Alameda, CA, October 1, 1987, subsequent to initial ground and flight training in the MH-53E Sea Dragon helicopter. After nearly 9 years of operations under the direction of Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, HM-15 relocated to NAS Corpus Christi, TX, and the U.S. Atlantic Fleet June 30, 1996, due to a BRAC directed, permanent change of duty station. HM-15 continues to operate under the operational control of MCMRON-1, providing a world-wide, 72-hour, rapid-response airborne mine countermeasures capability, with primary responsibility to the Pacific AOR. The squadron can support two independent, forward-deployed detachments, totaling 8 aircraft, while maintaining a third, home-based detachment, to train Selected Reserves and carry out MH-53E FRS training for newly assigned pilots and aircrew.

AIRCRAFT

12 MH-53E Sea Dragons

MANNING

Active Duty Officers- 36, Enlisted- 535
Selective Reserve Officers- 18, Enlisted- 110
Total Personnel- 709

MISSION

- 72-hour AMCM rapid response capability
- Support up to 2 forward deployed AMCM detachments
 - Support a third detachment for training

HELICOPTER MINE COUNTERMEASURES SQUADRON 15

The "Blackhawks" Have

Been there....

- * DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM
- * KERNEL RAIDER '93
- * RIMPAC '94
- * RECEPTION, STAGING, ONWARD
MOVEMENT & INTEGRATION '95
- * PANAMA CITY, FL '97
- * TANDEM THRUST '92
- * CASUAL GANDER '94
- * KERNEL BLITZ '95
- * FREEDOM BANNER '95
- * MERCURY '96

Done that....

- * Battle Efficiency "E"
- * CNO Safety Award (2)
- * Meritorious Unit Commendation (2)
- * CHTWP Semi-Annual Retention Award (4)

And are Going!

- * BLUE HARRIER '97
(HM-14 AUGMENTATION)
(MAR-MAY 97)
- * KERNEL BLITZ '97
(JUN-JUL 97)

HELICOPTER MINE COUNTERMEASURES SQUADRON 15

“CHRONOLOGICAL EVENTS”

01 JANUARY 96

Commenced move from NAS Alameda to NAS Corpus Christi, TX.

15 APRIL 96

First aircraft arrived to NAS Corpus Christi, TX.

30 JUNE 96

Squadron permanent change of station complete with shift of UIC 55201 from NAS Alameda to NAS Corpus Christi, TX.

8-12 JULY 96

Participated in Exercise Mercury in the Gulf of Mexico.

31 JULY 96

All personnel complete with PCS transfer from NAS Alameda, CA.

28 SEPTEMBER 96

Change of Command: CDR J.F. Vuolo relieved by CDR J.A. Brown.

01 OCTOBER 96

Operational and Administrative Chain of Command shifts from U.S. Pacific Fleet to U.S. Atlantic Fleet.

08 NOVEMBER 96

Completed COMHELTACWINGLANT Total Quality Review and Aircraft Material Condition Inspection.

13 DECEMBER 96

Completed COMNAVAIRLANT Aircraft Maintenance Material Team Inspection.