



**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**  
HELICOPTER MINE COUNTERMEASURES SQUADRON 15  
9020 OCEAN DRIVE  
CORPUS CHRISTI, TX 78419-5000

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From: Commanding Officer, Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron 15  
To: Director, Naval History and Archives, 1242 10<sup>th</sup> Street SE, Washington Navy  
Yard, Washington DC 20374-5059

Subj: HM-15 CALENDAR YEAR 2003 COMMAND HISTORY REPORT

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST. 5750.12G

Encl: (1) HM-15 Calendar Year 2003 Command History Report

1. Per reference (a), enclosures (1) through (4) are provided

  
P. A. LLOYD

## COMMAND HISTORY CY2003

### 1. Command Composition and Organization.

Command Short Title: HELMINERON FIFTEEN (HM-15)

Command Mascot: Blackhawk

UIC: 55201

Mission: To maintain a world-wide 72-hour Airborne Mine Countermeasures (AMCM) rapid deployment posture and four aircraft forward deployed AMCM and VOD capability in the Arabian Gulf.

#### Organizational Structure.

##### **Immediate Senior Operational Command:**

Commander Mine Warfare Command, RDML Michael P. Nowakowski, USN

##### **Immediate Senior Administrative Command:**

Commander Helicopter Tactical Wing, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, CAPT Kenneth J. Burker, USN

##### **Squadron Commanding Officer:**

APR 02 – MAR 03, CDR Steven J. Richey, USNR

MAR 03 – Present, CDR Paul A. Lluy, USN

##### **Permanent Duty Station:**

Naval Air Station Corpus Christi

##### **Type of Aircraft:**

Sikorsky MH-53E "Sea Dragon" Helicopter

##### **Number of Aircraft:**

	<u>Side #</u>	<u>BUNO</u>
1.	TB00	163052
2.	TB01	164792
3.	TB03	164770
4.	TB04	164768
5.	TB05	164766
6.	TB06	164764
7.	TB07	162507
8.	TB10	162497
9.	TB11	162513
10.	TB12	162508
11.	TB13	162510
12.	TB15	164773

2. Chronology.

13JAN – 19MAR	OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM
19MAR – 30APR	OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
27MAR	Change of Command
1JUN – 11JUN	Exercise NAUTICAL UNION 03
14JUL – 25JUL	Exercise COOPERATIVE TELOS 03
22JUL – 31JUL	MK-105 MOD4 Beach Operations
15OCT - 25OCT	MK-105 MOD4 Beach Operations
31OCT – 13NOV	Exercise ARABIAN GAUNTLET 04 / MIREM 27
15NOV – 21NOV	Exercise BELL BOTTOMS 04
6DEC – 16DEC	Exercise GOMEX 04-1

3. Narrative.

**OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM AND OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (13JAN – 30APR):** HM-15's ability to rapidly deploy an Airborne Mine Countermeasures (AMCM) and heavy lift combat logistic capability anywhere in the world within 72 hours of notification was put to the test twice during recent forward deployed operations in support of OEF and OIF. Following receipt of SECDEF deployment orders in February 2003, four of HM-15's MH-53E Sea Dragon helicopters were disassembled, and 200 tons of equipment and 135 squadron personnel were airlifted via six C-5 Galaxy aircraft to Bahrain in support of the Commander, Fifth Fleet requirements. Two weeks later, a second SECDEF deployment order resulted in the rapid airlift deployment of four more MH-53E helicopters, 235 personnel and 400 tons of AMCM weapons systems and support equipment to Sigonella, Sicily via nine C-5A Galaxy and three contracted civilian aircraft to support Commander, Sixth Fleet mine countermeasures requirements in the northern approaches to the Suez Canal. The near concurrent deployment of eight aircraft, 370 personnel and 600 tons equipment via AMC airlift to two separate AOR's in support of OEF and OIF marked a first in the history of AMCM rapid deployment operations. Squadron achievements during this period marked an unprecedented milestone for HM-15. Never before had a HM squadron's Maintenance Department coordinated the tear down, C-5 transport, build-up and functional testing of eight MH-53E aircraft in two separate AOR's.

Within six days of the aircraft arriving in Bahrain, the newly established HM-15 DET TWO was flying Vertical Onboard Delivery (VOD) and combat support flight operations supporting three CVN's, eight large deck L-Class ships, nearly 140 other ships in the Northern Arabian Gulf, as well as Coalition forces inside Kuwait and Iraq. DET TWO was tasked with several direct combat support missions during OIF, including the first sorties flown by Navy rotary wing aircraft North of Umm Qasr during the initial days of the war. At the peak of operations, the Blackhawks of DET TWO amassed 145 combat support VOD missions to ships in the Northern Arabian Gulf. One-way transit distances for these missions

exceeded 200NM with an average payload average of 12,000 lbs. to include critical supplies (oversized F-14, F-18 and AV-8 aircraft engines that only the MH-53E can handle), parts, mail, and passengers. During a 56 day period, HM-15 DET TWO transported over one million pounds of cargo and mail, and over 1500 passengers directly contributing to the sustainment of Navy combat operations in Iraq. Additionally, HM-15 provided direct combat support missions inside Iraq, including the transportation of over 155 Enemy Prisoner's of War (EPW's) from overcrowded U.S. Navy ships into forward encampments inside Iraq. Deemed a mission of Operational Necessity, two MH-53E helicopters transited over hostile territory and overcame widespread sandstorms, lightning and low visibility to deliver the first 120 EPW's to a newly established Coalition base camp inside Southern Iraq. Both of the aircrews involved in the missions were subsequently awarded combat decorations for heroism for their actions from Commander, Fifth Fleet.

While HM-15 DET TWO was operating in the Fifth Fleet AOR, HM-15 DET ONE was busy in the Sixth Fleet AOR providing vital AMCM countermine protection to Coalition ships operating in the eastern Mediterranean Sea and the northern approaches to the Suez Canal. Shortly after arriving in Sigonella, Sicily, DET ONE quickly rebuilt and flight tested its helicopters and soon embarked USS CLEVELAND (LPD 7) which served as the Mine Countermeasures Support (MCS) ship. The DET ONE Blackhawks were attached to CTF 62 as part of a multi-national Mine Countermeasures force, consisting of Explosive Ordnance Detachment (EOD) and Surface MCM assets from the U.S. and several NATO countries. This composite MCM force completed the most detailed route survey of the Northern approaches to the Suez Canal ever conducted. The presence of a robust AMCM capability ensured access through this key strategic waterway during OIF combat operations.

In addition to providing vital AMCM capability, DET ONE was tasked to conduct VOD missions in support of the HARRY S. TRUMAN (CVN 75) and THEODORE ROOSEVELT (CVN 71) Carrier Battle Groups and USS IWO JIMA (LHD 7) ARG. Concurrent with DET TWO operations in the Arabian Gulf, DET ONE transported much needed oversized cargo for units operating in the Mediterranean Sea. Again, the requirement to transport oversized CVN warfighting cargo left the MH-53E helicopter as the Navy's only capable option. A credit to their flexibility, HM-15 DET ONE received urgent tasking by Commander, Sixth Fleet to provide a detachment of two aircraft for emergent VOD support for the 26<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) offload at Souda Bay, Crete. The 26<sup>th</sup> MEU needed assistance off-loading armed Marines and bulk ammunition from moored ships to the Souda Bay airfield. This small detachment moved 198 personnel and 183,500 pounds of equipment in just a few days. The Sailors of DET ONE accepted the tasking with great pride and flawlessly executed their mission.

For their exceptional efforts, BZ messages were sent directly to the personnel of DET ONE from RADM Harvey, Commander, Cruiser Destroyer Group 8 (CCDG 8/USN Theodore Roosevelt Battle Group Commander) as well as Commander, 26 MEU and Commander, Amphibious Squadron 6 (CPR 6).

**CHANGE OF COMMAND (27 MAR):** CDR Paul A. Lluy, USN, relieved HM-15's Commanding Officer (CDR Steven J. Richey, USN) at the annual Change of Command ceremony. The ceremony was held at the USN Aviation Unit in Bahrain. CDR Andrew Buduo III, USN, assumed Executive Officer duties for HM-15.

**Exercise - NAUTICAL UNION 03 (01 – 11 JUN 2003):** In support of Commander, Mine Countermeasures Division THIRTY ONE (CTG 55.4), the newly assigned HM-15 permanent MCM detachment in Bahrain had its first opportunity to test its AMCM effectiveness during an operational exercise. HM-15 Detachment TWO demonstrated its ability to successfully support the MCM tasking while simultaneously providing a continuous VOD capability within the 5th fleet AOR. HM-15 DET TWO MH-53E assets, with required personnel and support equipment, was tasked to conduct exploratory mine hunting operations using the AN/AQS-14A side-scan sonar. The objective was to counter ground and moored mines as a result of scenario driven covert mining operations. Precursor AMCM missions were completed as tasked prior to Surface Mine Countermeasures (SMCM) assets entering the minefield thereby reducing the overall risk to the MCM triad. This multi-national exercise marked the first sustained HM-15 AMCM operations in the Arabian Gulf since 1992. With only 51 maintainers and 21 aircrew, DET TWO accomplished an impressive sortie completion rate of 83% and a FMC rate of 93.7% while hunting 252 linear miles of Q-Routes in the Northern Arabian Gulf. The successful completion of this exercise also marked the first HM-15 AMCM operations with the Royal Saudi Naval Forces utilizing the AN/AQS-14A side-scan sonar, enhancing overall training and mission readiness within the command.

**Exercise - COOPERATIVE TELOS 03 (14 –25 Jul 2003):** HM-15 provided four Tactics Officers at CMWC request to support this ground breaking NATO mine countermeasures combined Command Post Exercise (CPX) (the first in the history of naval mine warfare to include NATO and Partnership for Peace countries). COOPERATIVE TELOS was conducted at NS Ingleside TX and pushed forward the frontiers of joint and combined mine countermeasures operations with NATO and Coalition allies. Executing a mock OPLAN, U.S. and Allied MCM forces demonstrated innovative and creative uses of modern day sensors using real world environmental parameters improving interoperability and broadening MCM tactical employment.

**MK-105 MOD4 Beach Operations (22– 31JUL & 15–25OCT):** Prior to CY02, the HM-15 did not possess a location to conduct MK-105 training in the South Texas area and the AMCM community did not conduct MK-105 magnetic

minesweeping launch and recoveries from the shoreline or beach. Consequently, the Navy spent significant amounts of TEMADD funds to send HM- 15 detachments to CSS Panama City FL semi-annually to conduct required MK-105 pilot, aircrew, and ground personnel training. In an effort to reduce associated costs, HM-15 initiated a plan in coordination with local and federal law officials to establish guidelines and procedures to gain authorization to conduct MK-105 sled training operations from specifically designated beaches in the local South Texas region. As a result, several MK-105 beach training evolutions have been conducted in the local South Texas over the past two years in lieu of CSS. The ability to perform MK-105 operations locally reduces the squadron's requirements for two additional detachments per year to Panama City, Florida, thereby creating recurring annual savings of \$400,000.

**Exercise - ARABIAN GAUNTLET 04 / MIREM 27 (31 Oct – 13 Nov 2003):** Another opportunity for DET TWO to demonstrate its ever-expanding AMCM capability occurred during Mine Warfare Readiness and Effectiveness Measuring (MIREM) 27 conducted concurrently with exercise ARABIAN GAUNTLET 04. In support of Commander, Mine Countermeasures Division THIRTY ONE (CTG 55.4), the DET 2 AMCM detachment once again proved its operational effectiveness. The tasking of the technical-oriented exercise focused on data collection of AQS-14 sonar effectiveness against various threat mines at different sonar depths. The scope of operations was three times that of NAUTICAL UNION and required sustained AMCM operations over two weeks. Early planning efforts resulted in impressive aircraft and mission system readiness allowing for a 100% sortie completion rate and the completion of 110 tracks covering an area of 256.88 square nautical miles and 518 linear miles. This high equipment readiness combined with intelligent scheduling allowed HM-15 DET TWO to complete all assigned tasking ahead of schedule. The detachment's success led to follow-on tasking to search for exercise bottom mines in a field originally assigned to a submarine that was unable to acquire the contacts. HM-15 DET TWO's highly skilled aircrew and tacticians successfully re-acquired all the exercise mines.

**Exercise - BELL BOTTOMS 04 (15-21 Nov 2003):** Exercise Bell Bottoms 04 was a Command Post Exercise (CPX) that took place at The Belgian - Netherlands Mine Warfare School (EGUERMIN) in Brussels. Prior BELL BOTTOM exercises were conducted without AMCM representation which was noted as a deficiency in all previous After Action Reports. In order to improve NATO understanding of AMCM employability, HM-15 participated in the highly regarded NATO exercise. Essentially, the CPX was follow-on to COOPERATIVE TELOS 03 conducted in JUL 03 without the partnership for peace countries. The crisis area was generic, however it was based upon a Nova Scotia / Newfoundland geography. Simulated environmental data such as water depth, bottom types and meteorological conditions as well as additional harbors were produced in order to fit in the scenario and permit Mine Warfare and

Amphibious Warfare Operations. NATO officials were enthusiastic about AMCM participation and have requested future AMCM integration.

**Exercise - GOMEX/ESGEX 04-1 (06 –16 Dec 2003):** This exercise was the squadron's first homeguard detachment since returning from OIF. The exercise took place in the Panama City/Eglin exercise range under the OPCON of COMCMRON TWO. It was also the first opportunity for AMCM, SMCM, and EOD assets to operate with the USS WASP Expeditionary Strike Group supporting amphibious operations against a fictitious foreign adversary. HM-15 supported COMRONRON TWO in clearing and AOA architecture of exercise bottom and moored mine threats prior to the arrival of the ESG. Missions included MK-103 (live cutter), AQS-14 and MK-104 operations. HM-15 also provided logistical support for the ESG including Flag/DV transport for C2F and local dignitaries. HM-15 successfully flew over 176 hours during the detachment in direct support of MIW tasking with a 95% sortie completion rate. The det cleared 766 linear NM of AOA architecture, moved 120 VIP passengers including Commander Second Fleet and 6,300 pounds of internal cargo. HM-15 also successfully completed 36.5 hours of day/night DLQ's aboard USS SHREVEPORT and USS WHIDBEY ISLAND.

HM-15 received tasking from MCMRON TWO embarked USS YORKTOWN (CG 48) during the ESGEX phase of the exercise. This was the first time the MIWC embarked a CRUDES asset while successfully tasking the MCM triad. On 12 DEC 03, HM-15 responded to emergent ESG tasking by rapidly locating four of four exercise re-seeded bottom mines planted in the ESG OPAREA in the vicinity of USS WASP. During a major portion of the exercise, SMCM casualties and high wind and sea states left HM-15 as the only Triad unit providing MIW support to meet the ESG timelines. This was a key lesson learned during the COMCM RON TWO outbrief to PHIBGRU TWO and CMWC.

4. Supporting Documents.

- A. OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM Press Release (Enclosure 1)
- B. MK-105 Press Release (Enclosure 2)
- C. GOMEX 04-1 Press Release (Enclosure 3)
- D. CDR Paul A Lluy, USN, Biography (Enclosure 4)

## **HM-15 BLACKHAWKS SHINE DURING OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM**

By: LTJG Schwarze, HM-15 PAO

Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron Fifteen's (HM-15) ability to rapidly deploy an Airborne Mine Countermeasures (AMCM) and heavy lift combat logistic capability anywhere in the world within 72 hours of notification was put to the test twice during recent forward deployed operations in support of Operations ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) and IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). Following receipt of SECDEF deployment orders in February, four of HM-15's MH-53E Sea Dragon helicopters were disassembled, and 200 tons of equipment and 135 squadron personnel were airlifted via six C-5 Galaxy aircraft to Bahrain in support of the Commander of Fifth Fleet requirements. Two weeks later, a second SECDEF deployment order resulted in the rapid airlift deployment of four more MH-53E helicopters, 235 personnel and 400 tons of AMCM weapons systems and support equipment to Sigonella, Sicily via 14 C-5 aircraft to support the Sixth Fleet mine countermeasures requirements in the Suez approaches. The near concurrent deployment of eight aircraft, 370 personnel and 600 tons equipment via AMC airlift to two separate AOR's in support of OEF and OIF marked a first in the history of AMCM rapid deployment operations.

Within six days of the aircraft arriving in Bahrain, the newly established HM-15 Detachment Two was flying Vertical Onboard Delivery (VOD) and combat support flight operations supporting three CVN's, eight large deck L-Class ships, nearly 140 other ships in the Northern Arabian Gulf, as well as Coalition forces inside Kuwait and Iraq. Detachment Two was tasked with several direct combat support missions during OIF, including the first sorties flown by Navy rotary wing aircraft North of Umm Qasr during the initial days of the war. At the peak of operations, The BLACKHAWKS totaled 145 combat support VOD missions to ships in the Northern Arabian Gulf at one-way transit distances exceeding 200NM and an average payload of 12,000 lbs. of critical supplies, parts, mail, and passengers, including oversize F-14, F-18 and AV-8 aircraft engines that only the MH-53E can handle. During a 56-day period, HM-15 Det Two transported over one million pounds of cargo and mail, and over 1500 passengers - directly contributing to the sustainment of Navy combat operations in Iraq. Additionally, HM-15 provided direct combat support missions inside Iraq, including the transportation of over 135 Enemy Prisoner's of War (EPW's) from overcrowded U.S. Navy ships into forward encampments inside Iraq. Deemed a missions of Operational Necessity, two MH-53E helicopters transited over hostile territory and overcame widespread sandstorms, lightning and low visibility to deliver the first 120 EPW's to a newly established Coalition base camp inside Southern Iraq. Both of the BLACKHAWK aircrews were subsequently awarded combat decorations for heroism for their actions on 24 and 25 March from Commander Fifth Fleet.

While HM-15 Detachment Two was operating in the Fifth Fleet AOR, Detachment One was busy in the Sixth Fleet AOR providing vital AMCM countermine protection to Coalition ships operating in the eastern Mediterranean Sea and Suez approaches. Shortly after arriving in Sigonella, Sicily, HM-15 Det One quickly rebuilt and flight tested its helicopters and soon embarked USS CLEVELAND (LPD 7) which served as the Mine Countermeasures Support (MCS) ship. The Det One BLACKHAWKS were attached to CTF 62 as part of a multi-national Mine Countermeasures force, which consisted of Explosive Ordnance Divers (EOD) and Surface MCM assets from the U.S. and several



NATO countries. This composite MCM force completed the most detailed route survey of the Northern approaches to the Suez Canal ever conducted. The presence of a robust AMCM capability ensured the access of this key strategic waterway during OIF combat operations.

In addition to providing vital AMCM capability, Detachment One aircraft were also tasked to conduct VOD missions in support of the HARRY S. TRUMAN (CVN 75) and THEODORE ROOSEVELT (CVN 71) Carrier Battle Groups and USS IWO JIMA (LHD 7) ARG. Concurrent with Det Two operations in the Arabian Gulf, Detachment One transported much needed oversized cargo for units operating in the Mediterranean Sea. Again, the requirement to transport oversized CVN warfighting cargo left the MH-53E helicopter, as the Navy's only capable option. A credit to their flexibility, HM-15 Detachment One received urgent tasking by Commander Sixth Fleet to provide two aircraft for emergent VOD support to the 26<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) offload at Souda Bay, Crete. The 26<sup>th</sup> MEU needed assistance off-loading armed Marines and bulk ammunition from moored ships to the Souda Bay airfield. This small detachment moved 198 personnel and 183,500 pounds of equipment in just a few days. The Sailors of HM-15 accepted the tasking with great pride and flawlessly executed their missions.

The superb results and four-star accolades received by both detachments, were a tribute to the work ethic and dedication of the HM-15 Blackhawk aircrews and both aircraft and MCM maintenance professionals. As a direct reflection of HM-15's accomplishments, COMINWARCOM and COMNAVAIRLANT selected HM-15 to remain in Bahrain as the permanent forward deployed MH-53E AMCM and heavy-lift VOD capability in the Fifth Fleet AOR.



A HM-15 MH-53E Helicopter over Kuwait City.

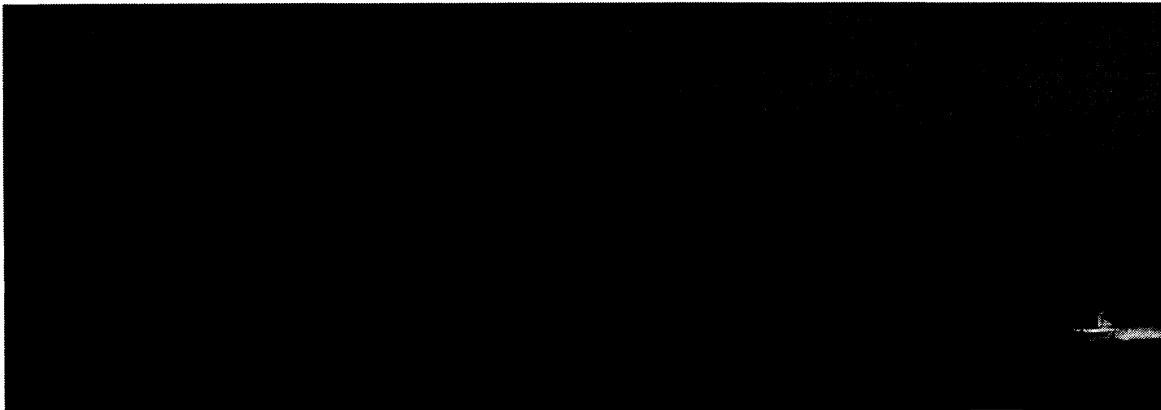
## **SLED OPERATIONS DRAW A CROWD**

By: LTJG Schwarze, HM-15 PAO

As the crowd gathered, eyes transfixed upwards, a very large, very loud helicopter hovered over the sand dunes pulling a contraption the size of a semi-truck out of the water and onto the beach. Luckily, it was not an amphibious invasion but an important training exercise conducted by Helicopter Mine Countermeasure Squadron Fifteen (HM-15).

HM-15's quarterly training exercise was conducted off the coast of Mustang Island State Park near Corpus Christi, Texas from October 16, 2003 to October 24, 2003. This training is necessary for HM-15, also known as the Blackhawks, to maintain proficiency in its mission of protecting friendly military and civilian shipping from destruction by sea mines. The "helicopter" is a MH-53E "Sea Dragon"; the largest helicopter in the U.S. Military. The "contraption" is the MK-105 magnetic influence-sweep "sled". Many sea mines do not need to contact a ship to detonate. Instead, they rely on the magnetic signature associated with a large metal hull to sense when a ship is close by. The MK-105 sled is a sophisticated and powerful electric generator that produces a similar magnetic field designed to trick a sea mine into detonating.

Training to conduct MK-105 sled operations in a remote location, such as a beachhead, is key to the unit maintaining maximum flexibility. This capability prevents the need to use the large Naval ships required to carry multiple MH-53E helicopters and their various equipment to the fight. Navy ships of that size, typically an Amphibious Assault ship, are in short supply and are put at unnecessary risk of being struck by a mine when tasked to support mine countermeasures operations.



**A HM-15 MH-53E Helicopter pulling the MK-105 weapon system.**

The streaming and recovery of the MK-105 sled is a complex ballet of aircraft, personnel on the beach, and personnel in small boats called "RHIB's (Rigid Hull Inflatable Boats). Boatswains Mates generally make up the three person boat crews, which tend the "Sled" when it is not towed by an aircraft. These hearty Sailors sometimes spend 14 hours on the water. Construction Battalion personnel (SeaBee's) also play a critical role. What do Seabees do in an aviation squadron? Prior to the exercise, they will prepare the remote site for operations. Tasks they perform include laying out runway matting on the beach, moving all the heavy equipment needed for the exercise (i.e.

generators, cranes, forklifts, and the MK-105 itself), and smoothing out the beach's surface. All these personnel are necessary for HM-15 to be remote-site capable and explain why the Blackhawks are one of the largest squadrons in the Navy.

The MH-53E is used primarily for Airborne Mine Countermeasures (AMCM). AMCM missions include mine sweeping, mine neutralization, and floating mine destruction. Additional mission capabilities include the transportation of personnel and cargo, often called Vertical Onboard Delivery or VOD.

The next time you see a large black helicopter towing the sled through the Corpus Christi Bay, give a friendly wave. It is not an invasion, it is only the Blackhawks of HM-15 clearing a safe passage for shipping.

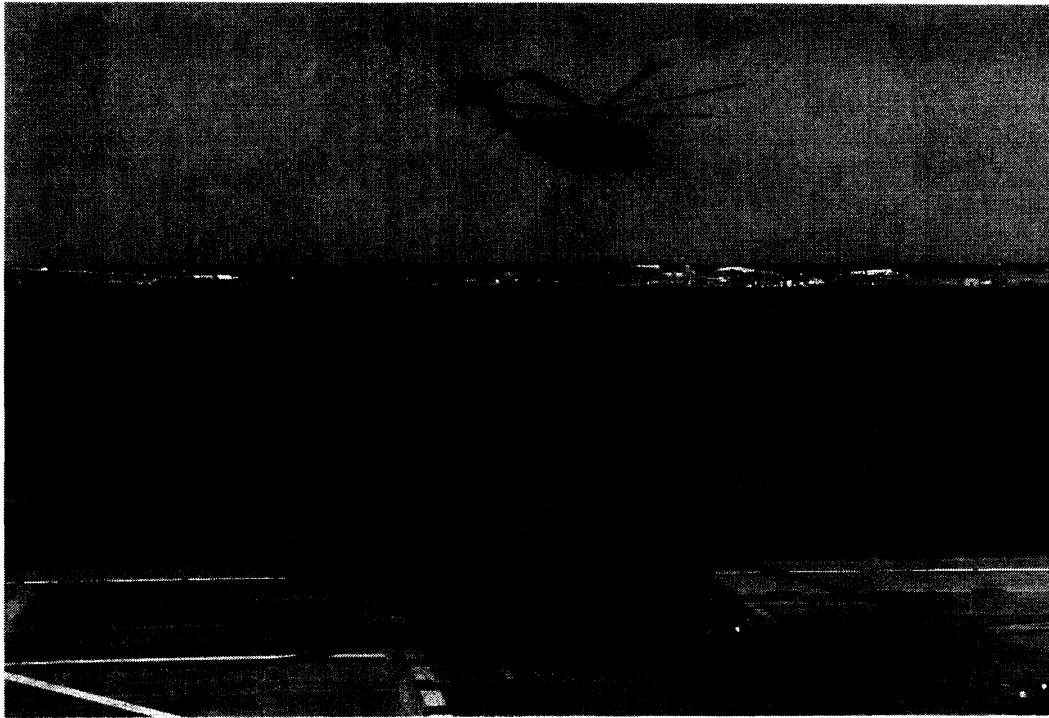
## **HM-15 BLACKHAWKS PARTICIPATE IN GOMEX 04-1**

By: LTJG Schwarze, HM-15 PAO

The Blackhawks of Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron FIFTEEN (HM-15) recently participated in GOMEX 04-1, a mine countermeasures (MCM) exercise held off the coast of Panama City Beach, Florida from 4-15 December, 2003. HM-15 provided the AMCM capability piece of the MCM Triad led by Commander, Mine Countermeasures Squadron TWO. GOMEX 04-1 was the first opportunity for Airborne Mine Countermeasures (AMCM), Surface Mine Countermeasures (SMCM), and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) assets to operate with the USS WASP (LHD 1) Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG). The ESG conducted mock amphibious operations against a foreign adversary while all participating MCM units focused on mine hunting and mine clearance of an Amphibious Operating Area (AOA) during the scenario based exercise.

This year's exercise included five MCM ships and two EOD units from Ingleside, Texas, as well as four MH-53E Sea Dragon helicopters and associated mine hunting and minesweeping equipment from HM-15. AMCM operations were conducted from 6 to 12 December, and included execution of MK-103 mechanical mine sweeping (with live explosive cutters), MK-104 acoustic mine sweeping and AN/AQS-14A side scan sonar mine hunting missions. Despite a higher than normal operational tempo, the Blackhawks of HM-15 superbly employed their weapons systems throughout the exercise. At the end of operations, HM-15 has searched or swept over 548 linear miles of the AOA ensuring unfettered access to the area for follow-on ESG amphibious operations. The highlight of the exercise occurred when HM-15 quickly located four exercise mines that had been covertly planted by opposing forces in the vicinity of the USS WASP. Throughout the exercise HM-15 was able to meet all AMCM tasking despite heavy wind and sea conditions which hampered other MCM operations.

The Blackhawks of HM-15 also provided logistics support for the ESG by transporting Flag Officers from both the Air Force and Navy and local dignitaries during ship visits from 13 to 15 December. Aircrews also accomplished unit level training by performing day and night deck landings on USS SHREVEPORT (LDP 12), USS WASP (LHD 1) and USS WHIDBEY ISLAND (LSD 41) on 13 and 14 December. Twenty pilots received qualifications or renewed their currency. HM-15 flew a total of 177 flight hours, completed 42 missions and achieved 25 aircrew sign-offs during the 12 days of the exercise.



**Two HM-15 MH-53E supporting Gomex 04-1 AMCM operations from Coastal Systems Stations Panama City, FL.**

The Blackhawks are proud of their performance and participation in the highly successful GOMEX 04-1 Fleet exercise. The ability of HM-15 to rapidly detect and counter all threat exercise mines during the exercise reinforced the importance of maintaining a robust dedicated AMCM capability to meet the current global mine threat.