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HELICOPTER ATTACK (LIGHT) SQUADRON THREE

THE "SEAWOLVES"

PAST....PRESENT....FUTURE?

1 DECEMBER 1971

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

AIRCAV: A U.S. Army term used to describe a unit of helicopters and troops that insert into contested zones for the purpose of sweeping an area and destroying enemy positions and troops.

Area of Operations: A geographical limit, determined by aircraft capabilities and ground commander over-all objectives, in which a detachment is called upon to employ firepower. Commonly referred to as 'AO'.

COSV: Communist Party Vietnam; the political front established to provide communist doctrine and policy decisions to communist aggressors in South Vietnam.

Detachment: Organizational unit normally consisting of two gunships, 9 pilots, and 9 enlisted men. Responsible for aerial support of FWMAF's in detachment area of operations. Commonly called a "DET".

Fire Team: A term used to describe the tactics and capabilities of two gunships operating together.

FWMAF: Free World Military Armed Forces.

Hootch: Commonly used term to describe a small wooden structure.

LOC: Line of communication; any waterway or route used for the transportation of supplies and personnel.

MACV: Military Assistance Command Vietnam; a service organization that provides military guidelines for U.S. military units in Vietnam.

PSP: Perforated Steel Plating; used to build dry runways in areas heavily invaded with water.

SEAL: Sea, Air, Land; specially trained units that carry out reconnaissance and clandestine operations. A SEAL platoon will normally consist of 18 men capable of sustaining themselves in enemy territory for an extended period of time.

Tran Hung Dao: Code name given to major long range campaigns carried out by Vietnamese Naval units. Tran Hung Dao was historical Naval leader in the Vietnamese battle against the Chinese for national autonomy.

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VARS: Visual Aerial Reconnaissance missions flown in support of CTF-115, Market Time. The missions are flown to report suspicious boat activities off the Delta's coast and halt infiltration into the Republic of Vietnam by sea.

YRM: Yard Repair Boat Medium; specially configured river boats from which a helicopter fire team can operate.

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HISTORY OF  
HELICOPTER ATTACK (LIGHT) SQUADRON THREE

Helicopter Attack (Light) Squadron THREE, or HA(L)-3 is the only helicopter attack squadron in the Navy. HA(L)-3 arose from the peculiar nature of guerrilla warfare in Vietnam and has played a major role in the Free World campaign to deny the Viet Cong use of the all important waterways of the Delta, while insuring their continued use to the local population and government personnel.

Vietnam military, political and economical developments in early 1966 led to the establishment of HA(L)-3. On April 10, the first River Patrol Boats (PRBs) went into action on the then treacherous Delta waterways, and it soon became apparent that quick reaction close air support would be indispensable if such river operations were to continue. At first, Army gunships provided the necessary assistance, but later the need for precise inter-unit communications, unity of command, and other considerations led to the decision to form a Navy helicopter unit responsible to the River Patrol Force (CTF 116).

Subsequently, eight UH-1B Hueys were borrowed from the Army in the summer of 1966, with U.S. Naval personnel manning the aircraft and the Army providing the pilot and crew training, ordnance, and maintenance. Four detachments (Dets), each containing eight aviators and eight crewmen from Helicopter Combat Support Squadron ONE (HC-1) at Imperial Beach, California, went into operation on September 19, 1966. Detachments were based at Tan Son Nhut (XS 819961), Bien Hoa (XT 993135), Vinh Long (XS 055321), and Soc Trang (XR 051610). (Refer to Appendix I, Item A)

The first major battle involving HA(L)-3, or the "SEAWOLVES", as they were now called, took place on 31 October 1966. In a coordinated attack by PRBs and Hueys near My Tho (XS 500449), over 50 of 75 enemy sampans and junks were sunk, and the enemy suffered heavy casualties.

During this period of operation, the first of specially configured helicopter capable Landing Ships (Tank) (LSTs) the USS JINNING COUNTY arrived at Vung Tau (YS 300473) facility soon to become the SEAWOLVES temporary headquarters. In conducting their far flung operations throughout the Mekong Delta, HA(L)-3 was to utilize many LSTs as landing platform bases in order to insure both mobility and proximity to their own operations area, and to decrease chances of enemy ground and mortar attack.

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By the end of 1966, the SEAWOLVES still depended on the Army for major maintenance, as well as the preponderance of training. In January 1967, the River Patrol Force, through its Operation GAME WARDEN, announced that 22 aircraft, 94 officers, and 240 enlisted personnel would be provided in order to establish a completely new squadron to replace the existing detachments from HC-1. At that time, seven detachments were envisioned with a central Naval Maintenance Facility created at Binh Thuy (WS 804140), where GAME WARDEN headquarters would be. Meanwhile, the squadron would be based at Vung Tau (YS 300473), where Navy and Army maintenance personnel could work together in maintaining aircraft.

On 1 April 1967, HA(L)-3 was formally established by LCDR Joseph B. HOWARD with Commander Robert W. SPENCER assuming command of the squadron in May. For the first 18 months of the squadron's existence, the heaviest concentration of detachments was in the heart of the lower Delta from Binh Thuy (WS 804140) to Vinh Long (XS 055321) and Dong Tam (XS 425435). (Refer to Appendix I, Item E). There are four major rivers which run through the Delta, all of which are branches of the Mekong; the Bassac, Co Chien, Nam Long and My Tho. To cover these waterways and their tributaries, six detachments deployed from various bases throughout 1967 and most of 1968. From Binh Thuy, Det SEVEN covered the lower Bassac, assisted by Det ONE which, was also deployed from an LST. Det THREE guarded the Co Chien from its base in Vinh Long. Det FOUR was based aboard an LST in the Nam Long until moving to Dong Tam in early 1969, and Det SIX covered My Tho, also from Dong Tam. Det FIVE at one time or another covered each of these rivers, according to the changing tactical situation and enemy threat.

Detachment TWO has been at Nha Be (XS 937800) since the days of the original HC-1 detachments. Their vital assignment has been to support operations in the Rung Sat Special Zone, the treacherous maze of swamp and canals that surrounds the vital shipping channel leading from the city of Saigon to the sea. This area has long been the target of Viet Cong ambush and mine activities. Det TWO became a "double det achievement" with four aircraft, and a corresponding increase in pilots and crewmen, in June of 1969 to ensure the required coverage.

Captain Arthur H. MUNSON succeeded Commander SPENCER in May of 1968 as Commanding Officer of HA(L)-3, and during his tour, the squadron continued to fulfill its basic mission. The command also undertook other expansion and transition through the summer and early fall of 1969. As a result of the increase in aircraft and personnel, all parts of the Delta were far more accessible to SEAWOLF reaction and surveillance operations.

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Toward the end of 1968 the need for a concentration of detachments in the lower Delta began to lessen, due to increased pacification of much of the area. In early fall, Det FIVE moved to Rach Gia (WS 105045) on the Gulf of Thailand, and in November the detachment moved aboard the YRBM-16 stationed near Chau Doc (WS 245715) on the upper Bassac only a few miles from the Cambodian border. Det FIVE's move signalled the beginning of a new phase in River Patrol Force operations; the interdiction of enemy troop and supply units into the Delta from the north. (Refer to Appendix I, Item C). In early 1969 Det THREE moved to the far northwest corner of the Delta, Ha Tien (VS 445485) on the Gulf of Thailand, while Det SIX replaced Det THREE in the area of Vinh Long, taking up station aboard an LST. Later Det THREE moved to Moc Hoa (XS 039902) and then to a ship in the upper Mekong not far from Det FIVE.

The task of shutting off infiltration routes between the Vam Co Tay and Vam Co Dong rivers was code named Operation SLINGSHOT, and HA(L)-3 played a major role in its eventual success. Det FOUR and SIVLN played a major role in this undertaking. Det FOUR participated in Operation SLINGSHOT from November 1968, while located at Dong Tam, and in early 1969 they moved to Duc Hoa (XS 594968) to be closer to their operation area. They moved again in June to Ben Luc (XS 618758), on the Vam Co Dong River, and at present are still participating in Operation SLINGSHOT, which has developed into one of the most successful campaigns in which the squadron has participated.

Det SEVEN also operated in the Giant Slingshot area, having moved from Binh Thuy to Tay Ninh (XT 203510) in June, 1969. For some time, intelligence reports had mentioned Tay Ninh as a prime enemy objective for use as a possible provisional capital. Near the border northwest of Saigon, Tay Ninh was considered highly vulnerable until allied forces moved into the area in large numbers and finally achieved an increased security level for the surrounding country side.

Under Captain Reynolds BECKWITH, who succeeded Captain MUNSON as Commanding Officer in April 1969, the transition and expansion of the squadron continued. The redeployment of detachments from the lower Delta was nearly complete, and the squadron headquarters was moved from Vung Tau to the more centrally located Linh Thuy in May. In early July the first new detachment since the squadron's establishment was created (Det EIGHT), and it was sent to assist Det SIVLN in the Tay Ninh area. The creation of additional detachments was made possible by the acquisition of eleven new aircraft in June and July of 1969, and further expansion followed in September, with the creation of Det NINE at Binh Thuy.

These first months saw a new center of operations develop in far western Vietnam. Det ONE had been deployed in the lower Bassac until early 1969, when it was sent to the southernmost corner of Vietnam, the Ca Mau peninsula, to provide support for Operation SIA FLOAT. The crux of this operation was to contest the Viet Cong's long standing

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control over the Southern delta by moving a string of barges into one of the waterways. The barges would act as a sphere of influence for the national government and serve as a market for local farmers who otherwise would be forced to sell their crops to the Viet Cong at enemy dictated prices.

Operation SEA FLOAT marked the start of a campaign to drive the enemy from his previously secure strongholds in western Vietnam, which gathered momentum in mid 1969. Soon after its formation, Det EIGHT moved from Tay Ninh to an LST off the coast of Rach Gia. Early in September, Det SIX, the last of the original lower Delta detachments, joined Det EIGHT at Rach Gia on another LST. Later that same month, the Det SIX's mobile base steamed southward to the mouth of the Song Ong Doc, placing Det SIX midway along the coast between Dets EIGHT and ONE. Finally in early September, Det THREE moved to a point off Ha Tien (VS 445425) in the Gulf of Thailand. Thus a total of four detachments now guarded the western coast of South Vietnam.

Upon its formation, Det NINE moved to the same station (aboard a YREM) in the upper Mekong that Det THREE had once occupied. This left four detachments still guarding against border infiltration, with Det TWO continuing operations in the Hung Sat Special Zone.

Following the establishment of Det NINE in September 1969, the area of operation for all but one of HA(L)-3's detachments remained basically the same, with detachments occasionally moving locations, but covering the same general areas. This period of time, from September 1969 to October 1971, enabled each detachment to become well established, and extremely effective as indicated by an increase in strike results. (Refer to Appendix II).

On the 9th of May 1970, shortly after Captain Martain J. TWITT took command, Operation Tran Hung Dao XI, the Cambodian Campaign, began. The objective of the Cambodian operations was to hit VC/NVA staging and supply areas, disrupt their LOCs and find and destroy the Communist Party South Vietnam Headquarters. The role to be played by HA(L)-3 was to furnish quick reaction helicopters for boat operations along the Mekong River. Recently acquired U.S. Navy SEALORD (unarmored HUEY utility helicopters) aircraft were utilized in passenger pickups and emergency medical evacuations (MEDEVAC). Elements of the first SEALORDs (PHRs, PCFs, and Helos) penetrated into Cambodia along the Mekong River to the Neak Loeng Ferry Landing (WT 320445), 21.7 miles from the Vietnamese border. Det EIGHT staged off the USS HUNTINGDON COUNTY (LST 838) from Long Xuyen (S 521416) to just inside South Vietnam, near the Cambodian border on the Mekong, and assumed the duties of the primary tactical air support for the Naval units inside Cambodia. Dets FIVE and NINE acted as the secondary and reserve units. Dets FOUR and SEVEN were involved in the Parrots Leak Operation during the early part of the Cambodian Operation. Det THREE, at Ha Tien, also contributed in the venture along the Mekong.

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Operation Than Hung Dao XI was officially terminated with the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Cambodia on 30 June 1970 and was considered extremely successful in its achievements in reducing the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese pressure on the Republic of Vietnam's borders.

The one major detachment relocation during the above period was Det THREE. Det THREE moved from Ha Tien to Ca Mau (WR 196142) on 5 August 1970. Facilities at the Ca Mau long strip were nonexistent, with crewmembers sleeping on the PSP and cooking their meals over fuel oil fires. However, after a relatively short period of time a hootch was built at the strip and quarters were made available at the MACV compound in Ca Mau City.

As areas of the Delta became more pacified, the need for a strong concentration of detachments in any one particular regions became less important. In May of 1971, with the squadron now under the leadership of Captain Charles O. LONGSTROM, Jr., Det SIX moved from an LST off the coast of the U-Minh, at the Song On Doc, to Phu Loi (XT 862158) Army Air Field north of Saigon. This move left the southern tip of the Ca Mau Peninsula to be covered by Dets ONE and THREE. Det SIX was given the responsibility of covering the Saigon River, a major infiltration route into the northern Saigon area.

Det NINE, in late June of 1971, moved from the YRBM-21 at Tan Chau (WS 260935) to an LST off Kien Hoa and Vinh Binh Provinces on the eastern coast of the Delta. This left Det FIVE at Chau Doc solely responsible for Mekong River convoys to Phnom Penh, the Seven Mountains, and the western Plain of Reeds. Det NINE became very active supporting Army units in attempting to clean out the Ben Dai (XS 9219), Thanh Phu (XS 6700), and Long Tean (XR 6775) Secret Zones. Due to weather conditions off the coast in October 1971, Det NINE relocated to Binh Thuy and has served as an all purpose detachment supporting Det FIVE on convoy operations, and other detachments during peak activity periods. The Det NINE fire team also stages out of Thanh Phu at night to support its old AO in Kien Hoa and Vinh Binh Provinces. At this time the nine HA(L)-3 Detachments have the capability of covering more of the Delta Region than ever before. (Refer to Appendix I, Item D). So much for SEAWOLF Gunship operations.....

As previously stated, in January of 1970, eleven HH-1K and UH-1L "Huey Slicks", or SEALORDs were added to the squadron's inventory of aircraft. These Navy owned helicopters, in contrast to the Gunships on loan from the Army, were given the task of providing logistic support to the squadron's detachments and supporting various U.S. Navy and Free World Force units, thereby conserving vitally needed gunship flight time for its primary combat role.

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The SEALORDS, based at squadron headquarters in Binh Thuy, have been instrumental in maintaining the detachment gunships in an "Up" status. This often involves night missions over extremely hostile territory, and under adverse weather conditions, carrying vital parts and personnel to the detachments. Often unheralded, these SEALORDS flights are an important contributing factor in the SEAWOLVES outstanding record of destruction of enemy forces in the Delta.

The SEALORDS have as another primary mission the support of Delta Naval Forces and the Vietnamese Tran Lung Dao Commands. This involves transporting key personnel and equipment to outlying bases, quick reaction support missions, example: flying fire fighting and other emergency equipment to bases in danger of destruction, carrying VIPs on fact finding missions, and providing area commanders aircraft for visual reconnaissance of their areas of operation.

SEALORDS also are involved in combat missions. These missions normally involve two SEALORDS inserting and extracting U.S. Navy SEAL Teams of fourteen to eighteen fully equipped combat troops. The coordination of two SEALORDS, a SEAWOLF fire team, and a SEAL platoon conducting covert operations in enemy held territory, has proved to be one of the most successful applications of U.S. Naval assets in a guerrilla warfare environment. Approximately 150 such missions have been successfully completed. Also in the realm of actual combat, SEALORDS have been called upon to execute medical evacuations in life or death situations, often taking enemy fire during the operations.

Currently there are eight SEALORDS in the squadron inventory, three of the original eleven having been lost during operational commitments. Statistics concerning the SEALORDS are listed on page 9.

In the past year, October 1970 through October 1971, (particularly since August 1971) the level of enemy initiated activity has decreased significantly, causing a corresponding decrease in SEAWOLF scrambles and requirements. (Refer to Appendix III). The absence of U.S. controlled river patrol craft, U.S. advisors on the boats, and U.S. SFALS has left the SEAWOLVES supporting primarily VNN assets and ARVN troops in the field, and scramble situations involving attacks on isolated RF/PF fortifications.

In July 1971, under the coordination of Commander Don NICHOLS, a Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) Indoctrination and Familiarization (I&F) program started. The purpose of the program was to teach the Vietnamese SEAWOLF tactics, including night and instrument flying, and problems involved in quick reaction gunship support of other Vietnamese units while operating from outlying bases and airfields. The first VNAF class, consisting of ten pilots and ten gunners, underwent the squadron's pilot and aircrewman's ground school syllabus the first two weeks in July. Then a pilot/gunner team was sent to each detachment, with the exception of Det TWO which received two pilots and two gunners, where they were rapidly

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assimilated as SEAWOLVES. This first group finished it's SEAWOLF tour on 30 September 1971 with each participant logging approximately 75 flight hours. The qualifications attained by these Vietnamese aviators were, seven Attack Helicopter Aircraft Commanders (AHAC), two Attack Helicopter Pilots (AHP), and nine aircrew gunners, four of these gunners additionally qualified as plane captains.

A second group started the ground school syllabus on 20 September 1971. This unit is composed of an equal number of personnel as in the first group, with two pilots from the first group remaining on detachment because of their exceptional abilities and prospective attainment of Fire Team Leader (FTL) qualifications. This group will spend an additional month with the SEAWOLVES to terminate their tour on 31 January 1972. As with the first group, each Vietnamese pilot and gunner will fly a minimum of 25 or more hours per month.

The success of the HA(L)-3 Vietnamese Air Force I&F program in terms of personal achievement has been exceptionally impressive. By the 31st of January the Vietnamese Air Force "SEAWOLVES" assigned to HA(L)-3 are expected to have eight qualified Fire Team Leaders (FTL), ten Attack Helicopter Aircraft Commanders (AHAC), two Attack Helicopter Pilots (AHP), eleven plane captains, and nineteen aircrew gunners. These men will provide a strong nucleus for VNAF support of Vietnamese Naval craft and ARVN ground forces in the Mekong Delta should that service assume a role similar to one now being provided by the US Navy SEAWOLVES.

In order for the Vietnamese mission and tasks of the US Navy SEAWOLVES and SEALORDS to be assumed by VNAF, there are immediate steps that must be taken. These include the take-over of current HA(L)-3 forward operating locations (FOL) by VNAF with already qualified Vietnamese personnel, and the establishment of a Vietnamese logistic helicopter operating position in close proximity with Vietnamese Delta Naval Command Headquarters in Binh Thuy. As a minimum step toward Vietnamese assumption of HA(L)-3 mission, the forward operating locations (in MRIV) at Ca Mau, Rach Gia, Dong Tam, and Nha Be (MRIII) should be taken over or manned by VNAF. If the financial burden of maintaining these four locations is not within the limits of VNAF, then the positions should be maintained by the ARVN and VNN in support of the VNAF aircraft and crews operating there. With these four locations and the increased capability of VNAF's "H" model aircraft vice the "E" model aircraft currently being flown by this squadron (HA(L)-3), the area of operations now covered by the SEAWOLVES can still be adequately supported, although some increase in "overhead" response time in scramble situations will be experienced. Mekong River convoy support could be accomplished by gunships based at Binh Thuy staging out of Chau Lang or other locations on the border. Authorization for Vietnamese to land at Neak Leeng (WT 320445), Cambodia negates the necessity for a detachment along the Cambodian border although retention of a current facility

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such as Chau Doc would allow additional flexibility should that situation change appreciably.

With VNAF gunships based in four outlying locations and a fire team in Binh Thuy (VNAF or at the present U.S. Navy facility), the Vietnamese pilots and crewmen who have already flown as SEAWOLVES could be assigned to each location. This would place four experienced men at each location for the purpose of providing on-the-job training to follow-on Vietnamese personnel in night and instrument flying and gunship tactics. It is hoped that a minimal number of aircraft (two UH-1H Slicks) and crewmembers based at either of the Binh Thuy locations for the logistic support of Naval units operating in the Delta. If possible and feasible, existing SEAWOLF facilities at Nam Can, Chau Doc, Ben Luc, Phu Loi and Binh Thuy could be also taken over to provide for additional staging and maintenance support for both gunship and logistic helicopter operations. However, except for possibly the ready-made intermediate maintenance facilities that a portion of the present U.S. Navy Binh Thuy Complex would offer (Refer to Appendix IV) to the critically overloaded VNAF Fourth Air Division Base at Binh Thuy, these additional bases or sites are considered "niceties" but not "necessities".

The basis of these recommendations rests on the fact that the Vietnamese will have adequate aircraft availability to accept the SEAWOLF mission. However, if this is not the case, there are alternatives that can be implemented to still provide the needed support. Following the daylight AIRCAV Pack Operations, gunships upon which only minor maintenance (refuel, rearm, minor checks, etc.) must be performed could be diverted to the already mentioned forward operating areas for the required maintenance. Then these aircraft could be utilized by the Vietnamese SEAWOLVES for night operations and scrambles as required. This mode of operation would also relieve the VNAF of a manpower drain, as the men on the forward operating locations would be flying only at night and a two crew allocation would not be necessary. Another alternative would be to stage fire teams at the forward operating locations on a rotating basis. This would be done with operational commitments and overlapping coverage of AOs taken into consideration.

In conclusion, the primary mission of quick reaction helicopter gunship support for ground units has been carried out by the U.S. Navy SEAWOLVES in a manner that has established a proud tradition of success and accomplishment. Through the SEAWOLVES' Vietnamese Indoctrination and Familiarization program a firm foundation has been laid for the outstanding record of HA(L)-3 to be continued by the Vietnamese Air Force and its most capable personnel. It is considered that this would substantially assist all RVN Armed Forces, particularly the Vietnamese Navy, in their valiant fight to destroy communist aggression and return the Republic of Vietnam back to peaceful pursuits.

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CURRENT INFORMATION CONCERNING HA(L)-3

DECEMBER 1971

Commanding Officer: Captain C. O. BORGSTROM, Jr., USN

Squadron Headquarters: Binh Thuy, RVN

Number of Gunships (SEAWOLVES): 33

Number of Logistics Support Helos (SEALORDS): 08

Number of Officers: 136

Number of Inlisted: 436

NOTE: Above figures are "allowance" not "on board"

Detachment locations (Current):

Det 1: Solid Anchor Base (VN Navy, Nam Can) VQ 998674

Det 2: Nha Be (VN Navy) (3 helicopters) XS 937800

Det 3: Ca Mau (Long Strip) (ARVN Base) WR 196142

Det 4: Ben Luc (VN Navy Base) XS 618758

Det 5: Chau Doc Op Base (VN Navy Base) WS 245715

Det 6: Phu Loi (U.S. Army Base) XT 862158

Det 7: Dong Tam (ARVN Base) (Old Reliable Strip) XS 408435

Det 8: Rach Gia (ARVN Base) (Short Strip) WS 105045

Det 9: Binh Thuy (U.S. Navy Base) WS 804140

Statistics on SEALORD operations to date:

12,123 missions flown.

22,552 passengers carried.

629,723 pounds of cargo carried.

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