

HSL-37 Seahawks Deliver in Revolutionary Deployment

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When expeditionary strike group (ESG) 1, led by flagship *Peleliu* (LHA 5), sailed for the Arabian Gulf in September 2003, it represented a major change in naval deployments by combining the capabilities of an amphibious ready group and a Marine expeditionary unit (MEU) with strike escort ships. This team formed the vanguard of future naval deployments in its ability to participate in both small- and large-scale engagements in open-water, littoral and amphibious operations.

The *Easyriders* of HSL-37 Detachment 1, MCAS Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, embarked on *Port Royal* (CG 73) with two SH-60B Light Airborne Multipurpose System (LAMPS) MK III Seahawks. Capable of detecting, tracking and engaging both surface and subsurface contacts, the HSL detachment's assets brought critical warfighting capability to the expeditionary strike group.

Terrorists in the Fifth Fleet operating area rely on clandestine methods to travel and raise funds. One of the ways they accomplish this is aboard the numerous fishing and commercial vessels that transit those waters. ESG-1 took on the critical role of interdicting the movement of terrorist personnel, weapons and contraband. When intelligence was received about possible terrorist activities on one of these vessels, an SH-60B launched from *Port Royal* and localized the vessel using live forward-looking infrared sensor (FLIR) video. The Seahawk provided continuous FLIR coverage of the vessel which was monitored live by warfighting commanders, intelligence in *Peleliu's* joint operations center and



This photo was taken from an HSL-37 Det 1 SH-60B Seahawk on close approach for landing on board *Port Royal* (CG 73) in the Arabian Gulf. Photo by LCdr. John Vourliotis.

individuals ashore. This enabled more in-depth, real-time risk analysis and situational awareness across all layers of the operation. If the vessel was deemed hostile, a force reconnaissance team from the 13th MEU deployed to board it, while Marine helicopters provided armed air support. The SH-60B also provided armed support as needed.

On similar missions, real-time FLIR video played a valuable role for Marine Corps and naval special warfare snipers riding in the cabin of the SH-60B.

On 31 December 2003, ESG-1's successful apprehension of 15 possible al Qaeda suspects and a ship's hull loaded with over a ton of hashish at an estimated street value of \$11 million destroyed another link in the chain of worldwide terrorism.

The LAMPS MK III SH-60B has again and again augmented the capabilities of the Navy's warships.



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Above left, an HSL-37 Det 1 Seahawk provides FLIR coverage of a dhow suspected of drug trafficking, while, above, boarding teams of the 13th MEU from *Port Royal* approach the vessel. Left, the dhow was taken under tow following its seizure for carrying 2,800 pounds of narcotics, far left. Below, *Port Royal* heels during a starboard turn.



The Seahawk provided the ideal platform for conducting surface surveillance and control missions for the entire ESG. The SH-60B's versatility as an extended sensor and weapons delivery platform is complemented by the standard capabilities that a helicopter asset brings, search and rescue and vertical replenishment. In many

ways it mirrors the capabilities of the ESG—well armed, multifaceted and lethal.

HSL-37 Detachment 1's SH-60B Seahawks on board cruiser-destroyer ships with future expeditionary strike groups will continue to expand on new technologies to increase their adaptability to meet the ever-changing threats in today's world. ✈️



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