

HMM-265: 40 Years with Phrogs



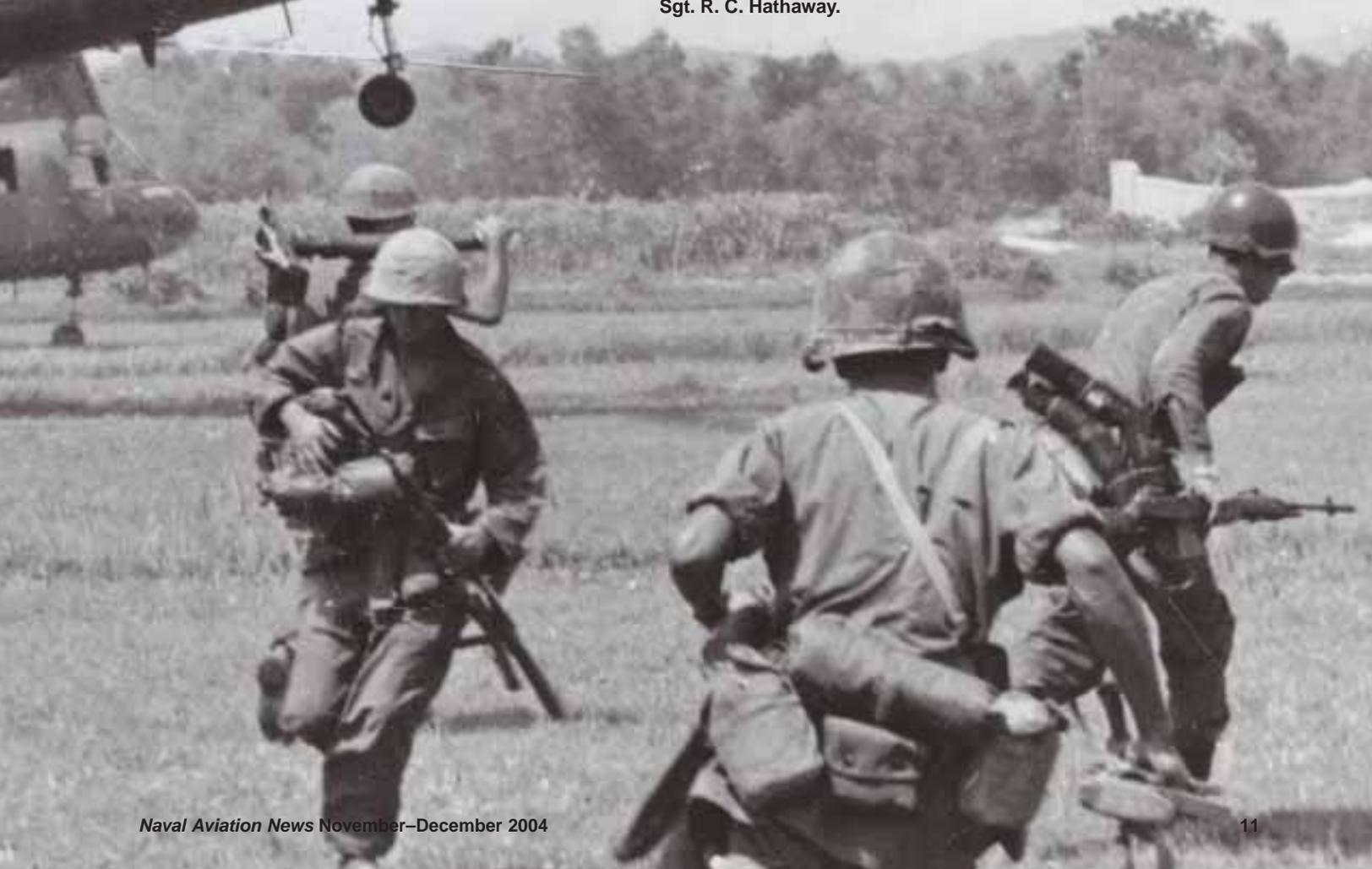


In June 2004, the *Dragons* of Medium Marine Helicopter Squadron (HMM) 265 marked their 40th anniversary with the CH-46 Sea Knight. The “Phrog,” as the tandem-rotor assault support helicopter is affectionately known, has taken Marines into battle, provided humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in Third World countries, and has stood ready to respond on a moment’s notice in the global war on terrorism. As the first operational squadron to receive the CH-46A, the *Dragons* have enjoyed a long history of excellent service with the Phrog, and the partnership continues today.

HMM-265 was established on 1 October 1962 at Marine Corps Air Facility (MCAF) Jacksonville, N.C., flying the UH-34 Seahorse. A Marine Corps requirement had been developed for a medium-lift, twin-turbine troop/cargo assault helicopter to replace the piston-engine UH-34. On 29 June 1964, CH-46A BuNo 150942 arrived at HMM-265, and in July the squadron began accepting Sea Knights. To commemorate their new aircraft, the *Dragons* unveiled a new insignia on 1 October. The design, created by PFC Charles D. Lyles, has been the squadron’s official insignia ever since.

In April 1966, HMM-265 was transferred to Camp Pendleton, Calif., and then deployed to the western Pacific to participate in the war in Vietnam. On 22 May, the squadron arrived at the Marble Mountain Air Facility located southeast of

A CH-46A from HMM-265 carries Marines into action north of Phu Bai, South Vietnam, during Operation Hastings in 1966. Photo by Sgt. R. C. Hathaway.





Da Nang with 22 CH-46As, and was assigned to Marine Air Group 16, 1st Marine Air Wing.

In addition to daily missions transporting Marines and cargo, the *Dragons* performed multiple battalion insertions to allow the 3d Marine Division to conduct search and destroy missions in the An Hoa region, and supported the 4th Marines as they battled for the Nui Cay Tre (Mutter) Ridge.

In July 1967, HMM-265 became the special landing force (SLF) helicopter squadron embarked with the Seventh Fleet's amphibious ready group, tasked with conducting helicopter search and destroy missions against Viet Cong targets along the coast. In August, HMM-262 relieved HMM-265 as the SLF squadron. On the 31st a CH-46 from HMM-262 disintegrated in flight while conducting a routine medical evacuation to *Tripoli* (LPH 10). The next day, a CH-46A experienced a similar failure at Marble Mountain Air Facility. It was determined that the helicopters' tail sections fell off while in flight. In September 1967, all CH-46s in Vietnam were grounded and rotated to Okinawa, Japan, for structural modification. Improvements to the CH-46A included the addition of armor and

guns, while the higher powered T-58-GE-10 engines and new "droop snoot" cambered rotor blades provided increased power and lift. This variant was designated CH-46D.

The *Dragons* resumed duties as the SLF squadron in May 1969 with CH-46Ds, conducting amphibious raids in support of various operations. After three years in Vietnam, the squadron was relocated to Santa Ana, Calif., on 10 October 1969. The squadron was deactivated on 13 November 1970.

On 1 September 1977, HMM-265 was reactivated at Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, establishing a presence in the Pacific that continues today. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the *Dragons* participated in the development of Marine Amphibious Units, later Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU), as well as night flying while using night vision goggles (NVG). In April 1981, the squadron received its first CH-46E, and is still flying this model 23 years later. When the Unit Deployment Program to Okinawa



SSgt. Val Gempis

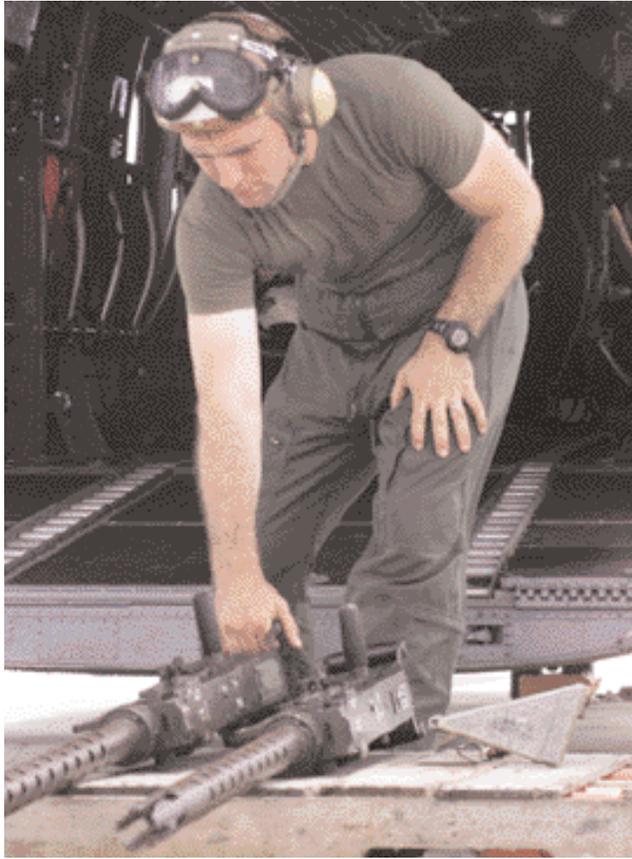
Clockwise from right, Cpl. Greg Grippo of HMM-265 speaks to a doctor in Bangladesh during a disaster relief operation in 1991. The *Dragons* bring a displaced mother and her daughters home to East Timor after they fled the unrest there months before. Crew chief Cpl. Doug J. Stewart looks out from a CH-46E during a flight supporting a training exercise in the East China Sea.



Sgt. Bryce Piper



LCpl. Kathy J. Arndt



1st Lt. Scott W. Harris

Left, crew chief Sgt. Timothy D. Smith loads a CH-46E with 50-caliber machine guns for a weapons training exercise. Above, a flight deck crew member guides an HMM-265 Sea Knight to land on board Essex (LHD 2).

began in February 1985, the squadron sent detachments on a rotating basis with other CH-46 squadrons until the *Dragons* were relocated to MCAS Futenma, Okinawa, Japan, in early 1995.

Since reactivation, HMM-265 Sea Knight crews have served in countless exercises in the western Pacific while embarked on board amphibious ships. In 1990 and 1991, the *Dragons* were attached to the 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, Marine Aircraft Group 50. In Oman during Operation Desert Shield, they took part in the largest NVG troop lift ever in Marine Corps history. The squadron then embarked in amphibious vessels in the Arabian Gulf awaiting the start of combat operations. The *Dragons* were part of the 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade's amphibious feint to Kuwait, which succeeded in drawing the attention of Saddam Hussein's forces away from the actual attack that occurred inland. Later, en route to Hawaii, they were called upon to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to Bangladesh, flying 770 Phrog hours in 10 days.

The squadron had little time to rest before deploying to Okinawa in October 1991 to provide support to Marine Helicopter Squadron 1 for a presidential visit to Tokyo. The *Dragons* were then called to support Operation Full Accounting in Cambodia in 1992, assisting in the recovery of remains of U.S. service personnel lost during the Vietnam War.

Heightened tensions in the Arabian Gulf during fall 1998 brought the *Dragons* back on a no-notice deployment as the aviation combat element for the 31st

MEU. Their participation in Operation Desert Fox in the gulf and Kuwait from November 1998 through February 1999 showed that the United States was serious about backing up foreign policy. When the squadron returned, personnel had only a short break before deploying again with the 31st MEU. This time, the Marines helped end a bloody civil war on the small island country of East Timor during October 1999 and again during January and February 2000.

The *Dragons* maintain their sharp skills through vigorous training, and the squadron teamwork among pilots, crew chiefs, aerial observers and maintenance personnel keep aircraft that are older than most of the aircrew members flying safely. HMM-265's material readiness, impeccable safety records and high operational tempo have led to many honors, including selection as the Marine Corps Aviation Association's Squadron of the Year for 1992, 1999 and 2000, and the Chief of Naval Operations' Safety Award for 1978, 1979, 1984 and 1994 to 1997.

To continue to be the backbone of Marine Corps assault support, the Sea Knight has undergone major upgrades, including the addition of larger fuel tanks that increased the helicopter's range. Upgraded parts and more stringent and frequent inspections of critical parts have reduced the number of fleet-wide groundings and, more importantly, the number of mishaps caused by equipment malfunction. HMM-265's CH-46Es are scheduled to receive the latest engine reliability improvement program upgrades in the next year, which should allow Sea Knights to continue to serve as vital assets for years to come.

HMM-265 and the CH-46 have maintained a long association. First to field the Phrog, the *Dragons* remain ready and willing to serve anywhere, anytime, flying their loyal aircraft of 40 years, the CH-46 Sea Knight. ✈️

Special thanks to SSgt. Nicholas M. Dmitruchina for submitting this article.