





# HSC-25 ISLAND KNIGHTS: THE SIERRA IN GUAM

Story and Photos by Ted Carlson

**S**hips deployed in the western Pacific may have noticed a different bird in the sky during vertical replenishment operations as Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 25 completed its transition from the H-46D Sea Knight to the MH-60S Seahawk. The former Helicopter Combat Support Squadron 5 was officially redesignated HSC-25 on 24 October 2005. Based at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, the Island Knights perform support operations with 14 Seahawks and about 500 personnel.

The squadron's missions are the same as they were with the H-46, including VERTREP, amphibious search and rescue, naval special warfare support, and VIP flights. In the future, the Sierra will get airborne mine countermeasures systems, aircraft survivability equipment, and the ability to carry Hellfire missiles along with a forward-looking infrared system. Some of the MH-60Ss have

**Right, an MH-60S from HSC-25 operates in a remote landing zone during field training. Facing page, a Seahawk lifts rescue swimmers while training in the waters off Guam. The Island Knights are often called upon to conduct SAR operations around Guam and throughout the northern Marianas.**

been modified with internal litters for an air ambulance role in Kuwait.

It's the local support operations, however, that make HSC-25 different from other MH-60S units. The squadron provides a 24/7 SAR and medevac mission capability in Guam and around the northern Marianas. The Seahawk is also configured to carry water-dropping bambi buckets, and the Island Knight crews have participated in many fire battles around their home island.

"For SAR, we usually have two crews ready to go since many times the SARs around here are prolonged," HSC-25 CO Cdr. Shoshana Chatfield explained. "There are large areas of ocean and if an individual or fishing vessel is being sought, it may take some time." Other SAR operations performed by the Seahawks are local, according to Cdr. Chatfield, as rip currents and reefs make conditions dangerous for swimmers and kayakers. "We get called upon about twice a week for rescues around Guam."

The transition from the tandem-rotor Phrog to the tail-rotor system of the Seahawk went smoothly. "The people here did an excellent job of planning for the Sierra," Cdr. Chatfield said. "The Seahawk is light, has a lot of power, and has been very reliable. While the internal pallet capability is less than the H-46, the maximum external lift load capability is the same or better. Plus, the MH-60 makes a superior rescue platform when compared to the H-46."

As a forward-deployed unit that serves the needs of both the Seventh and Fifth fleets, HSC-25's mission is very fluid. Det 6 is permanently assigned to *Essex* (LHD 2). When *Essex* is in her homeport of Sasebo, Japan, the det operates out of MCAS Iwakuni. Other dets support Military Sealift Command ships around Guam and Japan. There are always two helicopters on hand that are never deployed and are instrumental in helping maintainers and aircrews achieve their qualifications before they go on sea-going detachments.

The Island Knights are no strangers to world events. HSC-25 had three dets that were called upon immediately following the Indonesian tsunami on 26 December 2004. There was little time to spare and squadron members



were thrust into action. In addition, a fourth det stood up on 1 January and departed the next day.

VERTREPs, search and rescue operations, and disaster relief are just a few of the tasks that challenge HSC-25. Yet this unit continues to answer the call with the MH-60S Seahawk just as it did with the Phrog in years past. "I am proud of the sustained dedication of the HSC-25 squadron members," Cdr. Chatfield concluded. "Often we get tasked and I wonder how are we going to accomplish that, but the people here always make it happen." ✈

Ted Carlson is a professional photojournalist specializing in Naval Aviation.

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