



FACT SHEET

U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet 20TH SPECIAL OPERATIONS SQUADRON

Mission

The 20th Special Operations Squadron (20th SOS), located at Hurlburt Field Fla., is one of nine flying squadrons within the 1st Special Operations Wing. Known as the "Green Hornets," the 20th SOS flies the [MH-53J/M Pave Low III/IV](#), the Air Force's most sophisticated helicopter.

The primary mission of the 20th SOS is to conduct day or night low-level penetration into hostile enemy territory, to accomplish clandestine infiltration and exfiltration, aerial gunnery support and resupply of special operations forces throughout the world. These operations involve tactical low-level navigation, night vision goggle operations, airland and airdrop techniques and over-water operations. The unique capabilities of the MH-53M Pave Low allow the 20th to operate from unprepared landing zones in any type of terrain and from otherwise inaccessible areas.



Background

The 20th SOS was formed as the 20th Helicopter Squadron (HS) in 1956 to perform traditional helicopter missions with H-21s for the Tactical Air Command. In 1965, the unit's CH-3E helicopters were transferred to Southeast Asia and the squadron began unconventional warfare and special operations as the Pony Express. In 1967, when joined by the UH-1F/P helicopters formerly assigned to Project Lucky Tiger, they became the "Green Hornets." It was on one of these 20th HS missions that Captain James P. Fleming earned the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroism during combat.

The Green Hornets continued to perform unconventional warfare missions for seven distinguished years, until inactivation of the 20th Helicopter Squadron in 1972. Upon reactivation in 1976 at Hurlburt Field, the unit mission remained unconventional warfare and special operations using UH-1N gunships and CH-3Es. The HH-53H Pave Low replaced the CH-3E in 1980, providing a long range, heavier lift helicopter capability. The crews used the Pave Low avionics to arrive over target on time and undetected, where they performed terminal operations wearing night vision goggles.

In 1983, the UH-1Ns began two years of outstanding support as part of then Vice President George Bush's South Florida Drug Enforcement Task Force, participating in Operation Bahamas, Antilles and Turks (BAT). The Op BAT Hueys flew hundreds of daring over-water missions from the Bahamas before transferring to Homestead Air Force Base, Fla., in 1985.

In 1986, the Green Hornets flew the specially equipped and highly capable MH-53H Pave Low and started flying the upgraded MH-53J Pave Low III in 1988.

In December 1989, members of the 20th SOS were mobilized as part of a joint task force for Operation Just Cause, successfully restoring democracy in Panama.

Among the first units to deploy to Operation Desert Shield in August 1990, 20th SOS crew members and aircraft led U.S. Army AH-64 Apaches in the air strike, opening the air war in Operation Desert Storm. A 20th SOS crew rescued Navy Lt. Devon Jones, logging the first successful combat rescue of a downed Airman since the Vietnam War. The crew deservedly earned the MacKay Trophy for their accomplishments.

Squadron personnel deployed in support of Operation Restore Democracy in Haiti, providing support to a National Command Authorities resolution. Members of the 20th SOS, participating in operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, went into harms way in attempting a rescue of two downed French crewmen, receiving two Purple Heart Medals and the coveted Cheney Award.

Green Hornet crews were also involved in the search and rescue operations resulting from the CT-43 crash in which Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and his party lost their lives. These same crews deployed shortly thereafter to support the American Embassy evacuations in Monrovia, Liberia - airlifting more than 2,000 evacuees to safety. The squadron deployed crews and aircraft to Southwest Asia in support of Central Command and Operation Desert Thunder in February 1998. The Pave Low gave the theater commander a night, all-weather personnel recovery capability, unparalleled in the U.S. inventory.

In 1999, the Pave Low III's were upgraded to the MH-53M Pave Low IV. The M model brought more technology and vastly superior avionics to the mission, furthering the capabilities and resources available to the crews flying the world's most sophisticated helicopter. These new technologies were battle tested during Operation Allied Force when the Green Hornets rescued downed pilots from an F-117 and an F-16, earning two Silver Stars and numerous Distinguished Flying Crosses.

In 2001, terrorism brought great tragedy to our nation and the Green Hornets were quick to respond in the initial recovery efforts at the Pentagon and Ground Zero in New York City supporting Operation Noble Eagle. But our work did not stop there. The 20th rapidly deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, engaging in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan with continuing endeavors into Iraq as the Global War on Terror continues.

To date, the Green Hornets have flown direct assaults on numerous high profile targets and effected the rescue and exfiltration of hundreds of US and allied soldiers. Included among these heroic actions are the daring daylight medevac of 32 injured soldiers in the midst of a battle and the rescue of a downed aircrew deep in hostile territory, which earned the squadron its second MacKay Trophy.

Lineage

Constituted 20th Observation Squadron (Light) on 5 Feb 1942; Activated on 2 Mar 1942; Redesignated 20th Observation Squadron on 4 Jul 1942; 20th Reconnaissance Squadron (Fighter) on 2 Apr 1943; 20th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron on 11 Aug 1943; Inactivated on 27 Nov 1945; Consolidated (19 Sep 1985) w/20th Helicopter Squadron, which was constituted on 24 Feb 1956; Activated on 9 Jul 1956; Discontinued, and inactivated, on 8 Mar 1960; Activated on 24 Sep 1965; Organized on 8 Oct 1965; Redesignated 20th Special Operations Squadron on 1 Aug 1968; Inactivated on 1 Apr 1972; Activated on 1 Jan 1976.

Assignments

Air Force Combat Command, 2 Mar 1942; Army Air Forces, 9 Mar 1942; 76th Observation (later, 76th Reconnaissance; 76th Tactical Reconnaissance) Group, 12 Mar 1942; III Reconnaissance Command, 23 Aug 1943; Army Air Forces, India-Burma Sector, 26 Dec 1943 (attached to 5306th Photographic and Reconnaissance Group [Provisional], 26 Dec 1943-17 Jan 1944, and to Tenth Air Force, 17 Jan-7 Mar 1944); Tenth Air Force, 7 Mar 1944 (attached to 5320th Air Defense Wing [Provisional], Mar-May 1944); 8th Photographic (later, 8th Reconnaissance) Group, 25 Apr 1944; Army Air Forces, India-Burma Theater, Oct-27 Nov 1945; Eighteenth Air Force, 9 Jul 1956 (attached to 314th Troop Carrier Wing, 9 Jul 1956-); Ninth Air Force, 1 Sep 1957-8 Mar 1960 (remained attached to 314th Troop Carrier Wing to 16 Jul 1959; attached to 354th Tactical Fighter Wing, 16 Jul 1959-8 Mar 1960); Pacific Air Forces, 24 Sep 1965

2d Air Division, 8 Oct 1965 (attached to 6250th Combat Support Group, c. 10 Dec 1965-8 Mar 1966); 14th Air Commando (later, 14th Special Operations) Wing, 8 Mar 1966; 483d Tactical Airlift Wing, 1 Sep 1971-1 Apr 1972; 1st Special Operations Wing, 1 Jan 1976; 1st Special Operations (later, 16th Operations) Group, 22 Sep 1992-15 November 2006. 1st Special Operations Group, 16 November 2006-.

Stations

Savannah AB, GA, 2 Mar 1942; Pope Field, NC, 28 Mar 1942; Vichy AAB, MO; 14 Dec 1942; Morris Field, NC, 8 May 1943; Key Field, MS, 31 Aug-8 Nov 1943; Camp Anza, CA, 11-c. 17 Nov 1943; Bombay, India, 26 Dec 1943; Camp Deolali, India, 28 Dec 1943; Guskhara, India, 5 Jan 1944 (flight operated from Kisselbari, India, 6-25 Mar 1944); Kisselbari, India, 26 Mar 1944 (operated from Dinjan, India, 1 May-20 Jun 1944; detachment at Tingkaw Sakan, Burma, 21 May-20 Jun 1944; operated from Tingkaw Sakan, Burma, 21 Jun-c. 10 Nov 1944; detachment at Myitkyina, Burma, 10 Jul-c. 25 Aug 1944); Myitkyina, Burma, c. 9 Nov 1944 (flight operated from Akyab, Burma, 12 Apr-22 May 1945); Nagaghuli, India, c. 20 Apr 1945; Dergaon, India, 6 Jul 1945; Piardoba, India, Sep-4 Nov 1945; Camp Kilmer, NJ, 26-27 Nov 1945; Sewart AFB, TN, 9 Jul 1956; Myrtle Beach AFB, SC, 16 Jul 1959-8 Mar 1960; Tan Son Nhut AB, South Vietnam, 8 Oct 1965; Nha Trang AB, South Vietnam, 15 Jun 1966; Tuy Hoa AB, South Vietnam, 5 Sep 1969; Cam Ranh Bay AB, South Vietnam, 25 Sep 1970-1 Apr 1972; Eglin AF Auxiliary Field No. 9 (Hurlburt Field), FL, 1 Jan 1976-.

Aircraft

A-20, DB-7, L-1, L-4, and P-43, 1942-1943; P-40, 1942-1945; L-5, 1942-1945; B-25, 1942-1945; P-51/F-6, 1945; H-21, 1956-1960; CH-3, 1965-1969; UH-1, 1967-1972; UH-1, 1976-1985; CH-3, 1976-1980; MH-53, 1980-.

Honors

Service Streamers
World War II
American Theater

Campaign Streamers
World War II
India-Burma
Central Burma
China Defensive

Vietnam
Vietnam Defensive
Vietnam Air

Vietnam Air Offensive
Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase II
Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase III
Vietnam Air/Ground
Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase IV
TET 69/Counteroffensive
Vietnam Summer-Fall, 1969
Vietnam Winter-Spring, 1970
Sanctuary Counteroffensive
Southwest Monsoon
Commando Hunt V
Commando Hunt VI
Commando Hunt VII
Vietnam Ceasefire

Southwest Asia
Defense of Saudi Arabia
Liberation and Defense of Kuwait

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers
Panama, 1989-1990

Decorations
Presidential Unit Citations
Southeast Asia
8 Mar 66-7 Mar 67
21 Jun 68-30 Jun 69

Southeast Asia (Army General Order No. 25, June 2001)
[1 Jun 67-31 Aug 68](#)
[1 Nov 68-31 Mar 72](#)

Gallant Unit Citation
[6 Oct 01-30 May 03](#)

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards with Combat "V" Device
10 Jan-12 Mar 66
1 Nov 66-1 Apr 67
16 Jun 67-20 Jun 68
1 Jul 67- 30 Jun 68
1 Jul 70-30 Jun 71
1 Sep 71-31 Dec 71
[1 May 82-30 Apr 84](#)
[1 Jun 97-31 May 99](#)
[1 Jul 03-30 Jun 05](#)

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards
1 Jan 76-31 Mar 77
6 Nov 78-2 Mar 79
15 Jul 79-15 May 80
16 May 80-30 Apr 82
1 May 85-30 Apr 87
1 May 88-30 Apr 90
16 Apr 92-15 Apr 94
1 Jun 95-31 May 97

[1 Jul 99-30 Jun 01](#)
[1 Jul 01-30 Jun 03](#)
[1 Sep 04-31 Aug 06](#)

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Crosses with Palm
1 Jan-30 Aug 68
16 Jun 67-1 Apr 72

Emblem Significance

Blue background represents the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The black disc denotes the night sky, which is the theater of operations of special operations units. The band represents the unit's heritage when organized in 1976 in tri-service support of an unconventional warfare mission. The stars reflect the nine primary functions of the unit and the nine aerospace employment principles of war. The red star signifies the unit's participation in Operation J-CATCH. The green hornet symbolizes the hovering capabilities of the rotary wing aircraft that the unit utilizes in a low-level environment. The hornet's "stinger" denotes the gunship weaponry.

Point Of Contact

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