

Green Hornets swarm for last time

Hurlburt Field's 20th Special Operations Squadron deactivated after 52 years

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HURLBURT FIELD - Three weeks ago, the 20th Special Operations Squadron flew its final mission in the MH-35 Pave Low helicopter over Iraq. On Friday, the squadron was deactivated after leaving a legacy of victory and bravery.

Hundreds of current and former squadron members met at Hurlburt Field for the ceremony with a Pave Low serving as a backdrop.

Col. Brad Webb, commander of the 1st Special Operations Wing, described his feelings as "bittersweet" following the ceremony.

"I've been flying the Pave Low since 1987, so there are folks here that I've known since I was a first lieutenant."

While the day was a joyous reunion for old friends, some said it was sad to see the end of an era.

"It's sad, but it's not about the plane. It's about the people," Webb said.

During the ceremony, Webb described the culture of the "Green Hornets" as brave and sacrificial. A plaque was dedicated to honor the 12 squadron members who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. Webb said those airmen were the giants on whose shoulders the rest of the squadron could stand on.

Col. Dennis B. Pannell, commander of the 1st Special Operations Group, said that although the day might be lined with sadness, it should be recognized as a celebration victory and reflection on the remarkable achievements of the squadron and the Pave Low.

"The history of the 20th SOS is well documented and is replete with examples of acts of conspicuous bravery in defense of the U.S. and our allies," Pannell said.

Lt. Col. Eugene V. Becker, commander of the 20th SOS, said the final mission, which used all six available Pave Lows and their crews, represented the epitome of the MH-35's capabilities. However, he added that the helicopter's capabilities paled in comparison to those of the men of the 20th SOS. Becker added that the pride of the 20th SOS always has been about the men who have been willing to face all dangers.

The squadron was formed in 1956 as the 20th Helicopter Squadron and was activated at Hurlburt Field in 1976. Its primary mission was to conduct day or night low-level flights into hostile

territory to accomplish clandestine infiltration and exfiltration, aerial gunnery support and resupply of special operations forces.

The 20th SOS at Hurlburt is one of eight flying squadrons within the 1st Special Operations Wing.

Webb referred to the Pave Low as the "most relevant helicopters that have ever existed."

The 20th SOS has "made a name for themselves by displaying courage under fire" in Vietnam, Haiti, Iraq during Operation Desert Storm, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Liberia and most recently in Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition to conduction humanitarian aid missions both stateside and overseas, said Pannell.

The last Pave Low helicopter left Hurlburt on Sept. 16 en route to Hill Air Force Base, Utah, after being retired the same month. However, one will stay close to home. Tail No. 73-1652 is on display at the Air Force Armament Museum