



76th HS deactivates: 49-year "Huey" legacy concludes

by Senior Airman Stephen Cadette
30th Space Wing Public Affairs

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-- A ceremony inactivated the 76th Helicopter Squadron on Aug. 2 in the helicopter hangar and recognized the unit's historical contributions to Vandenberg's mission.

The 30th Operations Group Commander Col. Andre Lovett officiated over the ceremony, giving thanks to the Airmen and civilians of the squadron for their outstanding support and dedicated service.

As an iconic unit representing the epitome of flexibility in its service to the 30th Space Wing and the local community, Colonel Lovett said the men and women of the 76th HS "will always have a special place in the hearts of those who live and serve on the Western Range."

Before an audience comprising the 76th HS fliers and staff, families, and friends, Maj. Timothy Anderson stepped down as the final commander of the 76th HS, praising his team for their contributions and encouraging them to still bring laughter and joy to their work.

"Use the skills you learned and the love of what you do to enrich the Air Force," he said, with best wishes for his team in their futures.

With that, he furled the guidon along with Colonel Lovett and retired Master Sgt. Bob Strong, who came to Vandenberg in 1982 and retired in 1989 when the unit was Detachment 8, 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recover Squadron. The black and red sleeve slipped over the blue flag, and the 76th Helicopter Squadron became a part of Air Force history.

The 76th HS Airmen will go their separate ways, as will the four helicopters. On the day of deactivation, only two helicopters remained. They sat inside the hangar and flanked the audience. At the end of the ceremony they became officially assigned to the 37th Helicopter Squadron at F.E. Warren AFB, Wyo., said Capt. Kevin Weaver, 37th HS.

Since the 76th HS was renamed in 1993 from a detachment of the 37th ARSS, the assignment to F.E. Warren sends the last two birds home to roost.

"That brings them full circle," said Capt. Abbe Shafer. She said she was very sad to leave the people she worked with and the camaraderie of the 76th. But she'll have a memento when she takes on her new assignment with the 40th Helicopter Squadron at Malmstrom AFB, Mont. The third helicopter was also assigned to the 40th HS.

Similarly, the fourth helicopter will be assigned to Minot AFB, N.D., with Master Sgt. Wes Simpson, a flight engineer and the last person to carry the 76th HS guidon before the unit was inactivated.

The squadron retired after a 34 year history, in which the unit logged more than 35,000 hours of accident free flying hours. Although the helicopter squadron has historically supported high profile rescue and fire suppression missions, including humanitarian relief in the Gulf States in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the accomplishment of one mission at Vandenberg has been unique to only the 76th Helicopter Squadron - providing airborne surveillance and security in support of the space launch and the test range.

The technology used by the 76th HS for airborne surveillance, including standard and infra-red cameras, will be used in a similar fashion by the unmanned aerial vehicles of the 30th Security Forces Squadron. But the machines will never replace the men and women who made Vandenberg their home.

"The bottom line is they love what they do, they know how much it matters and they know how to have fun," Colonel Lovett said. "It's been an honor and a privilege, and we say goodbye with a heavy heart."

SIDEBAR: WHAT'S IN A NAME

The origin of the 76th HS is rooted in the 76th Aerospace Rescue and Recover Squadron, activated in 1952 at Hickam AFB, Hawaii. The 76th didn't become a part of Vandenberg until 21 years later.

Vandenberg's flight line officially opened in February 1959, and two H-13 helicopters were assigned, according to Jeffrey Geiger, the 30th Space Wing historian.

Then, in 1973, the Strategic Air Command's helicopter support was transferred to the Military Airlift Command's Detachment 8, 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recover Squadron. Its helicopters, including one VC-118A, one C-118A, and three UH-1F, were replaced with the UH-1N models by 1975.

The 76th ARRS, which had been deactivated at Hickam in 1975, was reborn at Vandenberg when the Det. 8 was renamed the 76th Rescue Flight. After being renamed the 76th Helicopter Flight in 1998, it became the final iteration in 2005, when it was re-designated as the 76th Helicopter Squadron.



VANDEMBERG AIR FORCE BASE, Calif. -- Thirtieth Operations Group Commander Col. Andre Lovett furls the 76th Helicopter Squadron's guidon flag with the unit's final commander Maj. Timothy Anderson during the 76th HS inactivation ceremony at the hangar on Aug. 2. The squadron supported space launch, land and water rescue, fire suppression and many diverse training missions. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Adam Guy)