Navy Retires Its Last Special Operations Helicopter Squadron



SAN DIEGO, California (June 30, 2023) MH-60S Seahawks assigned to the “Firehawks” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 85 fly near San Diego during the squadron’s final flight prior to its deactivation ceremony. Navy Reserve squadron HSC-85 is the Navy’s last helicopter squadron dedicated to Naval Special Warfare (NSW) and Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR). (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Ryan LeCompte)

*****

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy’s only helicopter squadron dedicated to support of special operations forces has made its final flight.

Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 85 (HSC-85), a reserve squadron

based at Naval Air Station North Island, California, made its final flight on June 30, 2023, prior to its deactivation ceremony, according to a release from Commander, Naval Air Force Reserve.

HSC-85 was equipped with MH-60S Seahawk helicopters to support “Naval Special Warfare forces and other special operations forces training and readiness,” according to the Department of the Navy’s 2023 budget highlights book. The Navy proposed retirement of the squadron with the service’s 2023 budget request. The Navy estimates the program savings would amount to $312.5 million over the Future Years Defense Plan.

HSC-85 originally was established as Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron 85 (HS-85) in 1970 at NAS Alameda, California, and equipped with the SH-3A Sea King helicopter, later upgrading to the SH-3D and SH-3H versions. The squadron moved to NAS North Island in 1993 and in October 1994 was redesignated Helicopter Combat Support Squadron 85 (HC-85), shifting to the roles of search and rescue, logistics and range support.

The squadron was redesignated HSC-85 in February 2006 and equipped with MH-60S helicopters. In 2011, special operations support became its primary role, and it was equipped with an older version of the Seahawk, the HH-60H. The Navy planned in 2016 to deactivate HSC-85 and its East Coast counterpart, HSC-84, but HSC-85 survived. The squadron in 2018 upgraded to the Block III version of the MH-60S.