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FRIDAY, **OCTOBER 24**, 2008 HURLBURTWARRIOR.COM

Tops in Blue



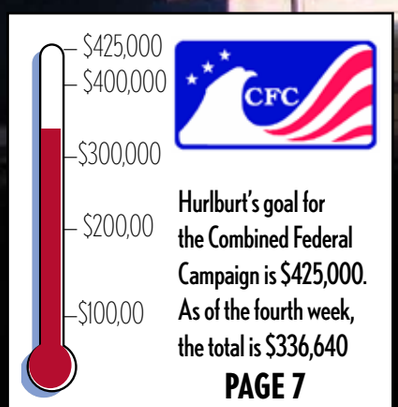
Hurlburt to see two of their own at the Air Force Expeditionary Entertainers shows locally

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File photo

A scene from last year's Tops In Blue show.



Hurlburt's goal for the Combined Federal Campaign is $425,000. As of the fourth week, the total is $336,640

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The 20th SOS deactivated at ceremony

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A Freedom Florida publication

20th Special Operations Squadron leaves legacy of bravery

Deactivation of squadron that flew Pave Lows marks end of an era





Above, Airmen stand in formation and guests keep an eye on the stage at the beginning of the 20th SOS deactivation ceremony Oct. 17. **Below**, ceremony attendees gather near the MH-53 Pave Low helicopter on display at Hurlburt Field Memorial Air Park.

By KELLI HERNANDEZ
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Three weeks ago, the 20th Special Operations Squadron flew its final mission in the MH-53 Pave Low helicopter over Iraq. On Oct. 17, the squadron was deactivated, leaving a legacy of victory and bravery through the crews who served under the 20th SOS flag.

Current and former members of the squadron met at the Hurlburt Field Memorial Air Park for the ceremony with the menacing Pave Low serving as the 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, it also was sad to see the end of an era for many.

"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 20th SOS as brave and sacrificial. A plaque was dedicated to honor the 12 crew members who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country as members of the 20th SOS. Webb said those Airmen were the giants on whose shoulders the rest of the squadron could stand.



Col. Brad Webb, 1st Special Operations Wing commander and former MH-53 Pave Low pilot, speaks during the deactivation ceremony. "It's sad, but it's not about the plane. It's about the people," he said.

Col. Dennis B. Pannell, commander of the 1st Special Operations Group, said that although the day may be lined with sadness, it should be recognized as a day to celebrate victory and reflect 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 that the final mission, which used all six available Pave Low helicopters and their crews, represented the epitome of the capabilities of the MH-53, although he added that those capabilities paled in comparison to those of the men of the 20th SOS. Becker added that the pride of the 20th SOS has never been about the places where missions were carried out or the machines that made them possible, but about the men who were willing to face those 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 penetration into hostile or enemy territory to accomplish clandestine infiltration and exfiltration, aerial gunnery support, and resupply of special operations forces throughout the world.

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."

Known as the "Green Hornets," 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 both Afghanistan and Iraq in addition to conduction humanitarian aid missions both stateside and overseas, Pannell said.

The squadron rolled into Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 on the heels of Operation Enduring Freedom. Green Hornets initiated combat and enabled the push for Baghdad.

The last Pave Low helicopter left Hurlburt Sept. 16 en route to Hill Air Force Base, Utah, after being retired the same month.



Airmen salute during the 20th SOS deactivation ceremony Oct. 17 at Hurlburt Field Memorial Air Park.



Photos by MARK KULAW| Florida Freedom Newspapers

Col. Dennis Pannell (in profile left), commander of the 1st Special Operations Group, and Lt. Col. Eugene Becker, commander of the 20th Special Operations Squadron, look at the squadron's war ribbons one last time before they are wrapped up and put away during the unit's deactivation ceremony Oct. 17 at Hurlburt Field.



Master Sgt. Patrick LaDue and his youngest son, Senior Airman Gabriel LaDue, had the opportunity to spend a couple of days together in Iraq as Airman LaDue was heading home from deployment with the 557th Expeditionary Red Horse Squadron at Forward Operating Base Hammer.

Airman traces his heritage back to the Civil War

Story and photo by MASTER SGT. BRIAN DAVIDSON
447th Air Expeditionary Group

SATHER AIR BASE, Iraq — A father and son, both serving in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, recently had a brief family reunion at Sather Air Base, Baghdad. Master Sgt. Patrick LaDue and his youngest son, Senior Airman Gabriel LaDue, a heavy equipment operator stationed at Hurlburt Field, had the opportunity to spend time together as Airman LaDue headed home from deployment with the 557th Expeditionary Red Horse Squadron.

While stories about siblings, husbands and wives, parents and children, and even grandparents and grandchildren serving together have become fairly common, the LaDue family story of service reaches all the way back to the Civil War.

Drawings and paintings by artist and war correspondent Theodore Davis depicting the Civil War are on display in museums throughout the United States. He was employed by Harpers Weekly newspaper, and in 1889, he wrote: "I have found that a sure guide... was to go toward the place where the heaviest musketry fire was heard."

Since that time, his relatives, the LaDues, have also stepped forward to serve wherever combat operations have occurred.

Davis was awarded the Grand Order of The Republic Medal for his heroic actions and bravery in documenting the battles that led to the surrender of the Confederacy. One hundred and forty-three years later, Davis' Grand Order of the Republic Medal hangs in the "Patriot Room" of the LaDue family home in Oliver Springs, Tenn.

The medal serves as the centerpiece for a collection of military awards, artwork and photos depicting the lineage of family members' service since the Civil War.

Airman Gabriel LaDue's parents, Master Sgts. Patrick and Carolyn LaDue, both serve in the Air National Guard's 134th Air Refueling Wing, Tenn. Patrick is serving on his fifth deployment as part of the 447th Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron, where he is the vehicle management flight chief. Carolyn serves full-time as the base knowledge

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