

HU-1 Det. ONE.

"Where it all began"

by
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Much has been written and said about the Navy HO3S-1 Helicopter and its role in the Korean conflict. ("ROTOR REVIEW", No. 28, Winter 1990, "The HO3S-1 and Korea"). In the early phase of the action the helicopter sort of 'hit the ground running' and the more it did, the more tasks were laid upon it. Fortunately, it turned out to be a very rugged helicopter for its day, and flight hours were accumulated beyond what was anticipated during early planning stages.

As August and September of 1950 turned into November and December, optimistic predictions that, "it would be over by Thanksgiving or Christmas", were not about to be realized, it appeared prudent to assess what would be needed in the way of intermediate level maintenance support to reinforce the maintenance capabilities of the ship based helicopter operating detachments.

It should be noted that at the time the HO3S-1 helicopter went into action in the Korean conflict, it had a conservative maintenance schedule, pending a build-up of maintenance and overhaul experience. Thus, the main components of the rotor and transmission systems required removal for overhaul at 240 hours flight time. While this removal and installation could be accomplished while embarked, it was much more efficiently done ashore. In addition to tying up hanger space on a crowded hanger deck and working under blackout conditions at night, there were several procedures such as flight control rigging, rotor blade tracking, and post maintenance test flights that were more easily and safely performed ashore. The operating detachment was better served if it could be provided another aircraft while the aircraft requiring heavy maintenance was transferred to a shore based maintenance facility.

At this point let it be noted that the writer had deployed to South Korea with the 1st Marine Provisional Brigade in August, 1950, and was assigned with VMO-6 as a U. S. Naval Technician in support of this squadron's HO3S-1 aircraft. On November 25, 1950, while at Hungnam, North Korea, I was requested to return to Commander, Fleet Air Japan, Tokyo, "to assist in establishing a shore based maintenance facility to support embarked helicopter detachments". At my initial meeting with maintenance personnel at COMFAIRJAPAN, I was advised that I would be based in Tokyo and made available to Marine and Navy operating units, as needed. The immediate need was to assist a detachment that had been off-loaded at Kisarazu Naval Base across Tokyo Bay from Yokosuka. Their helicopter

required replacement of all high time (240 hr.) components. The O-in C of the detachment was advising COMFAIRJAPAN that Kisarazu was not a satisfactory location for this work. I was requested to immediately visit Kisarazu and report back on the situation.

Conditions noted during my visit confirmed that it was not a satisfactory site to undertake the scheduled maintenance task. The FASRON manning this base had a high priority task of making ready for flight replacement aircraft arriving from CONUS, and making ready for shipment to CONUS damaged aircraft requiring repair or overhaul. They had insufficient working space, support equipment and personnel and thus, were unable to offer the helicopter detachment the space and equipment needed. Upon returning to Tokyo, I was unable to convince the staff to send the aircraft elsewhere. (There really wasn't any elsewhere).

I was asked to return to Kisarazu and assist the HU-1 crew with its task. My participation in this matter went on "hold" after the first day as I was ordered back to Hungnam, Korea immediately. I never returned to Kisarazu, but the need for a dedicated helicopter support base was demonstrated when it took two months for the helicopter at Kisarazu to be returned to service.

When the 1st Marine Division departed North Korea, I returned to COMFAIRJAPAN. A chief on the COMFAIRJAPAN staff contacted me and told me about the seaplane facility at Oppama and we drove there for a first hand look. It was an ideal location. It had several serviceable hangers, a ramp out of the water where LST's could be beached, and facilities for unloading non-flying helicopters that could be barged over from the aircraft carrier pier at Yokosuka. Before I could discuss this matter with COMFAIRJAPAN maintenance staff personnel, I was advised that Sasebo had been selected as the site for HU-1 Detachment ONE to become operational. Sasebo had been selected because it was close to the operating area and 7th Fleet ships were arriving at Sasebo for R&R. Personnel were enroute from HU-1 in San Diego, to man this detachment.

Air Repair Division ONE, comprised of two modified LST's would support Det. ONE and was already in Sasebo. USS FABIUS was outfitted for airframe and airframe component repair; USS AVENTINUS was outfitted for aircraft engine and engine component repair.

On December 28, 1950, I was requested to proceed to Sasebo and provide assistance as necessary. Upon arrival at Sasebo I visited both ships. They had no experienced helicopter personnel on board and were concerned about being able to provide assistance. I was able to advise that HU-1 Det. ONE personnel would fill this requirement.

Before departing Tokyo for Sasebo, discussions with the assistant aircraft maintenance officer at COMFAIRJAPAN touched on the matter of positioning spare parts where HU-1 Det. ONE had access to them. He suggested that I talk to the several operating detachments in Sasebo on Christmas leave, about offloading the large components that were going to be replaced ashore, when necessary. While the ships supply officers were understanding, they were not about to release these components without official instructions. After getting the same reaction at the several ships we visited, we requested COMFAIRJAPAN to release a message on this matter.

After "freelancing" at Sasebo on my own, I finally met the HU-1 personnel, who had just arrived to set up shop. They anticipated considerable delay getting the selected building in condition to use. It was a roofless hanger filled with harbor defense gear, and in an out-of-the-way location on the Sasebo Naval Base. The O-in-C of Det. ONE suggested that I return to Tokyo, pending getting the detachment operational.

Upon returning to COMFAIRJAPAN I was "loaned" to the 3rd Air Rescue Squadron, to visit operational detachments in Korea and Japan. When I reported back to COMFAIRJAPAN at the conclusion of my Air Force visits, I was requested to depart immediately for Sasebo to assist in the investigation of an HO3S-1 accident that occurred at the Naval Station. The accident, the result of a mechanical failure in the flight control linkage, took the lives of the pilot, the O-in-C of Det. ONE and the captain of AVENTINUS. It was a sad setback to plans for getting the detachment operational.

Following this visit to Sasebo, I visited VMO-6, which was now in central South Korea. Upon return from Korea I departed Yokosuka aboard USS PHILLIPPINE SEA with an itinerary and orders that would permit a visit to each of the helicopter detachments operating with the 7th Fleet. I hopscotched through the fleet, visiting USS ST. PAUL, MANCHESTER, LST Q007 and returned to Yokosuka aboard USS BOXER.

Upon returning to COMFAIRJAPAN on 21 April 1951, I was advised that HU-1 Det. ONE had been moved from Sasebo to Oppama and I was requested to report to Commander Aircraft Repair Division ONE, to work with HU-1 Det. ONE. The move from Sasebo to Oppama was made as a result of a decision to use the Yokohama/Yokosuka and surrounding area as R&R sites. There was dissatisfaction with the Sasebo area, as it was too small to handle the influx of Navy personnel during leave periods.

Whatever the reason for the move to Oppama, the result was outstanding as far as HU-1 Det. ONE's ability to perform its mission was concerned. The location

and layout of the facility was ideal. The hanger provided was clean and weather proof and immediately adjacent to beaching ramps for the LST's. It was a short flight from the carrier pier at Yokosuka to the helicopter landing area adjacent to the hanger. Facilities were available to barge and off-load dud aircraft that might be arriving for repair. A U. S. Navy aviation supply base was located just a short drive from Oppama. As previously noted, R&R opportunities were readily available for ship based personnel.

Typically, when the carrier tied-up at Piedmont Pier at Yokosuka Naval Station, the embarked helicopter was flown to Oppama, accompanied by the helicopter maintenance crew. In some cases, the parent crew would turn their aircraft over to the Det. ONE crew and go on leave. Det. ONE would perform all of the required maintenance and have the aircraft ready to return to the ship by the end of the leave period. If necessary, all liberty was cancelled until the aircraft was "up". Other ship's maintenance crews preferred to perform the maintenance themselves and deferred their R&R until their aircraft was ready to return to sea. At the end of the in-port period, the helicopter returned to their ships looking like they came out of overhaul. Some aircraft received a complete paint job during the maintenance period.

With a steady maintenance effort ongoing at Oppama, COMFAIRJAPAN directed that I make my base in Japan at Oppama rather than Tokyo. This resulted in my getting to know all of the Det. ONE personnel. A major benefit of this was that they were not reluctant to come to me with questions and requests for assistance and everyone who needed it had access to on-the-job training.

A case-in-point concerned four (4) HO3S-1 aircraft inoperative due to damaged tail cones. The tail cone was subject to main rotor blade strikes while engaging or shutting down the main rotor blades in heavy weather, with winds gusting and the deck pitching. A sequence of messages ordering spare tail cones advised that there was none any closer than San Diego and these were being shipped via LST. Just as we were settling down for a long wait, I was told by one of the officers from USS FABIUS that he was walking through a storage area at the supply base when he saw several crates marked "tail cones". From his description of their dimensions, they could have contained a tail cone. A quick check by HU-1 Det. ONE's supply personnel confirmed that they were the needed tail cones.

Since detachment personnel had not previously performed the task of installing a tail cone and installing and aligning a new tail rotor drive shaft, on-the-job training was initiated. It also included fabrication of simple tooling required for the task. All four aircraft were quickly returned to service and made

available to COMFAIRJAPAN as "pool" aircraft.

Just as the helicopter demonstrated that it could fill a vital need in naval warfare, the helicopter maintenance detachment filled a vital need in supporting the helicopter squadrons and detachments. And they continued to demonstrate their worth as Navy rotary wing operations expanded around the world in the last 46 years.

In closing this article, which hopefully will find its way into the Naval Helicopter Historical Society records, I would have liked to list the names of the officers and men I worked with on my assignment as a U. S. Navy Technician. I have always appreciated the fact I was treated with courtesy and respect. Though recommendations and suggestions put forward by me were of necessity "advisory", they were reviewed and implemented when they solved a problem. To widen the base of historical information on Navy helicopter operations, those who were involved are urged to send their name, organization, and periods of involvement to the Naval Helicopter Historical Society.

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