

Last of the Sea Dragons to Qualify on the MH-53E



Lt. Jack Griffin, one of the last two naval aviators to qualify to operate the MH-53E Sea Dragon, stands next to an aircraft. Griffin and Lt. Keven Humphreys and Lt. Jack Griffin are completing the final phases of their training while assigned to training squadron Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron (HM) 12 in Norfolk. (U.S. Navy photo)



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[by Commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic Public Affairs](#)

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NORFOLK, Va. – The last two naval aviators to qualify to operate the MH-53E Sea Dragon are completing the final phases of their training while assigned to training squadron Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron (HM) 12 in Norfolk.

Lt. Jack Griffin and Lt. Keven Humphreys are set to close the chapter on the aircraft's 42-year history of qualifying pilots to operate the storied MH-53E Sea Dragon.

This specialized helicopter, renowned for its Airborne Mine Countermeasures (AMCM) capabilities, is drawing close to the end of its operational life with a sunset ceremony planned for March 2025. The MH-53E, introduced to the U.S. Navy in 1982, has long served as a critical asset in mine hunting, sweeping, and neutralization, as well as a heavy-lift aircraft transporting troops and equipment.

Since 1986, HM-12 has qualified over 580 naval aviators to operate the MH-53E spanning nearly five generations.

As the Navy phases out this iconic aircraft, Griffin and Humphreys will be the last pilots to master its unique skill set while the last two remaining squadrons – HM-12 and HM-15 – prepare for the sundown of this aircraft type model series. Both men originally set their sights on serving as naval officers but did not initially envision becoming naval aviators.

Humphreys credits his inspiration to join the aviation community from experiences a close friend of his brothers shared after joining the U.S. Marine Corps to serve as a fighter pilot.

“Growing up, I looked up to my best friend’s brother,” Humphreys recalled. “I knew I wanted to serve and become a leader in the military, but becoming a pilot wasn’t initially part of my plan. Seeing him as a leader and a pilot was pretty cool, though.”

Griffin emphasized what he likes best about serving in the MH-53E community.

“The MH-53E community is extremely tight-knit,” Griffin said. “There is a close relationship between pilots and aircrewmen. Everyone is down-to-earth and focused on the mission. I really appreciate how well the crews work together to get the job done.”

As the MH-53E nears its retirement, Griffin and Humphreys are still preparing for their final missions and upcoming overseas deployment and will continue to enhance their proficiency with the aircraft.

“We are excited to be here,” Griffin said. “We love what we do and where we are right now.”

A special ceremony will be held to honor Griffin and Humphreys as they mark the end of an era and their place in history as preparations are being made to sundown the MH-53E Sea Dragon. This event will celebrate their contributions and the legacy of an aircraft that has played a pivotal role in Naval Aviation history.