

# Navy Proposes Divestment of Special Ops Helicopter Squadron



Sailors assigned to the “Firehawks” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 85 (HSC-85) prepare an MH-60S Seahawk helicopter for flight operations aboard Naval Air Station North Island in August 2020. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Chelsea Milburn*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy is proposing to retire its only expeditionary helicopter squadron dedicated to support of special operations forces with the service’s 2023 budget request.

Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 85 (HSC-85), a reserve squadron based at Naval Air Station North Island, California, is 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 drawdown of HSC-85 would begin in 2023 with reduction in manpower and flying hour reductions would begin in 2024. Unless the MH-60S aircraft are needed elsewhere in the fleet, the aircraft would be placed in storage. 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.