



U.S. Coast Guard Aviation History

US Coast Guard's HITRON Squadron formally commissioned

Source: US Coast Guard
20 May 2003
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JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – Vice Admiral James Hull, Commander of Coast Guard Atlantic Area in Portsmouth, Va., will formally commission HITRON Jacksonville in a ceremony at 10:00 a.m. Monday, May 19 at the Cecil Commerce Center (the former Cecil Field) in Jacksonville, Fla.

The Coast Guard's Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron is America's first, and only, airborne law enforcement unit trained and authorized to employ Airborne Use of Force. Recently, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge approved the use of armed HITRON Jacksonville helicopters for specialized security missions in the nation's ports and waterways.

HITRON was initially given the mission of interdicting and stopping drug-laden, high-speed vessels known as "go-fasts" in the Caribbean, and more recently the Eastern Pacific Ocean. The MH-68A helicopters employed by HITRON are the newest helicopters in the U.S. Coast Guard inventory and are capable of cruise speeds of up to 140 knots. The actions of the men and women of HITRON have been instrumental in stopping over 25 tons of illegal drugs, worth over \$1.5 billion dollars, from reaching America's neighborhoods.

Due to HITRON's unique capabilities and training, the unit was additionally tasked to develop Airborne Use of Force tactics to counter possible terrorist threats to the United States. HITRON stands ready to respond in defense of our shores, ports and waterways. "HITRON will be a highly effective tool available to the leadership of the Homeland Security Department and the U.S. Coast Guard in the continuing national effort to prevent illegal drugs from entering the United States and to prevent terrorism in our homeland," said Capt. Walter Reger, Commanding Officer.

"The use of Coast Guard HITRON for armed patrols will increase the level of security in our ports, provide an additional layer of defense, ensure continued safe flow of commerce and deter possible acts of terrorism in our nation's key ports," said Secretary Ridge.

