



Good Morning, **VIETNAM!**

W The Army Aviation Heritage Foundation

Report and photography by Greg L. Davis

While helicopters have served in every armed conflict since the Korean War, the Vietnam War was the conflict that firmly established the role of rotary-wing aircraft on the battlefield. Just as the B-17 and the P-51 were aviation icons of World War II, the Huey and Cobra helicopters were perhaps the most familiar aviation symbols of the war in Southeast Asia. Preserving the legacy and history of these and other Vietnam era aircraft is the job of the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation (AAHF).

The AAHF is headquartered at Tara Field near Atlanta, Georgia, and is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving important Army aviation aircraft in flyable condition. Their mission is to ensure the American public can continue to see,

touch, smell, and hear these historic aircraft. The AAHF's main goals are to "educate, connect, inspire, and preserve." They do this through the use of an impressive fleet of fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft in which they perform around the country at airshows and special events. They also have robust educational outreach programs to help connect the public to the history of Army aviation.

The Foundation has two main programs that showcase their important aircraft at airshows – Rescue at Dawn and the AH-1F Cobra Flight Team. Both programs utilize the unique capabilities of the helicopter to keep the audience's attention by maintaining a constant presence at show center from start to finish. Over the last eight years, 127 AAHF presentations have entertained and educated over 24 million people.



Far left: An AH-1G Cobra (foreground) flies in formation with UH-1H Huey. Both aircraft wear Vietnam-era U.S. Army markings and 101st Airborne Division badges on the tails. Both aircraft actually served with the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam and have been fully restored by the AAHF. Near left: A group of Vietnam re-enactors pose with the pilots, crew members, and a UH-1H Huey of the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation's "Rescue at Dawn" simulated Vietnam-era downed pilot scenario. Below left: The "pilot" of a U.S. Army Cessna O-1 has exited the aircraft and is defending himself during "Rescue at Dawn."



an L-19 observation aircraft. A UH-1H Huey is used to insert rescue forces, and the presentation is backed by impressive pyrotechnics and re-enactors playing the roles of both U.S. and Vietcong forces. Authentic radio-calls audible through the airshow's public address system complete the package. Most shows include up to five different aircraft types that include the L-19 Observation aircraft, OH-6 Cayuse, UH-1H Huey, AH-1G Cobra, and OV-1B Mohawk. With non-stop action, Rescue at Dawn has become a captivating, authentic portrayal of a Vietnam-era rescue.

All aircraft are flown by military veterans with thousands of hours of flight time. For Rescue at Dawn, one of the most impressive aircraft to watch is the OH-6A Cayuse flown by either LtCol's (Ret.) John Woodward or John "Skip" Lam. Each pilot puts and keeps the nimble, lightweight observation helicopter right on the edge of its flight envelope while buzzing over and around the downed pilot at airshow center. The aircraft's attitude changes within seconds to go from showing the aircraft's underbelly to viewing the full top of the rotor disk as the aircraft dances while avoiding ground-fire. The Rescue at Dawn show culminates with the successful rescue of the downed pilot as he is transported out of harm's way via the Huey.

In 2009, at the Ft. Campbell, Kentucky airshow, home of the 101st Airborne Division, the *Screamin' Eagles*, three of the



Rescue at Dawn

Rescue at Dawn links the airshow spectator of today with Army aviation's past in an intense re-enactment of a Vietnam-era downed-pilot rescue operation. This program has evolved from an earlier Vietnam Program that included more aircraft. However, tough times have dictated a somewhat pared-down version which can be affordable to both large and small events.

The Rescue at Dawn program includes authentic fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft performing their missions just as they would have over 35 years ago and begins with a simulated shoot-down of



Left: A re-enactor shoots at an AH-1G Cobra that is making an attack run on his position while an UH-1H Huey lifts-off in the background after securing the downed pilot. Below: Re-enactors playing the role of Vietcong soldiers track and unseen aircraft as they prepare to simulate the shoot-down of the aircraft during "Rescue at Dawn."

Cobra Team

AH-1F Cobra attack helicopters of the Sky Soldiers AH-1F Cobra Precision Flight Demonstration Team in echelon formation.



participating aircraft (the UH-1H, OH-6A Cayuse and AH-1G Cobra) wore 101st Airborne markings. But significantly, these weren't markings applied just for the show. They were authentic combat action markings from when each aircraft was assigned to the 101st Airborne in Vietnam. Additionally noteworthy is the fact the foundation's AH-1G Cobra is the only flyable G-model in the world today.

Cobra Precision Flight Demonstration Team

The AH-1F Cobra Precision Flight Demonstration Team has been performing on the airshow circuit since late 2006. Using demilitarized, but otherwise fully-functional aircraft that once saw duty on the front lines, the four-ship team is the only attack helicopter demo team in the world.

During the 2007 season, the team was sponsored by the U.S. Army's Recruiting Command to inspire more people to "go aviation" when considering Army service. Despite success in recruiting during that first season, the Army opted to focus their recruiting budget in other areas, so the team is no longer fully sponsored.

The four black and gold helicopters fly in formation as close as ½ rotor disk apart and trail smoke while never straying far from show center. Unlike other formation teams, spectators are never looking for the aircraft far on the horizon. The team also prides itself on allowing airshow spectators – especially families with kids – to interact with them by allowing fans to physically put their hands on the aircraft before and after each show.



Members of the Sky Soldiers AH-1F Cobra Precision Flight Demonstration Team along with key AAHF personnel. From left to right on the back row are: LTC. (Ret.) John Woodward, CW-3 (Ret.) Patty Meek, LTC (Ret.) John "Skip" Lam, CW-4 (Ret) Richard Thetford, USMC LTC (Ret.) Peyton DeHart, CW-4 (Ret.) Jerry Sanders, former Army CPT's. Jeff Moss and Mark Sorenson. Front row (L to R), Mr. Lee Maynard, VP of Marketing, Mr. Mike Brady, AAHF President and USMC Command SgtMaj. (Ret.) Shanda Elkins, VP of Operations.

Painted black and gold, the four two-person aircraft are stunning in their presentation up close and in the air. The show itself features a series of four ship passes in echelon and diamond formation as well as opposing passes by two pair of Cobras, and burst maneuvers. In the team's "Cobra Dance," two aircraft face each other while in a low-altitude hover just feet off the ground, pivoting around an



Above: The Cobra diamond formation during a performance at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky in 2009. Below left: A unique self-portrait by the author! Right: Two AH-1F Cobra attack helicopters face-off with each other in the world famous "Cobra Dance" maneuver.



imaginary point three full times less than one rotor disk apart from each other.

For 2010, the Cobra Team plans to add a new maneuver tentatively titled "Vertical Merge." In this new maneuver the aircraft will converge from four opposite points at the same time in dramatic fashion.

Adding Flexibility

The AAHF believes that the unique characteristics of their offerings offer needed flexibility to airshow organizers. "The beauty of our program is how flexible it is," says Shanda Elkins, Executive Vice president of AAHF. "We can make this program work in almost any weather. Low ceiling are no problem." This flexibility was illustrated in October 2009 at the "Go Guard" airshow at McEntire Air National Guard Base near Columbia, South Carolina. Low ceilings prevailed during the early hours of the event, keeping the jets and aerobatic aircraft grounded. Airboss David Schultz simply rearranged the schedule, moving a helicopter-only Rescue at Dawn presentation and the Cobra Demonstration Team into the early part of the schedule. "Other shows would have suffered with a major delay in the flying portion of the event," said Schultz. "But we were able to proceed with a modified schedule so that the public and servicemen in attendance would enjoy the afternoon."

Lee Maynard, Vice President of Marketing for the AAHF also notes that their helicopters can also add a new dimension to the

promotions available to airshow sponsors. "In 2009 we flew one of our AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters to the Cox Cable headquarters outside of Macon, Georgia in support of the Warner-Robins Air Show," explains Maynard. "We coordinated with the organizer and the leadership of Cox Cable to land one of our aircraft in their parking lot and entertain the employees with an up-close and personal look at the aircraft and the pilots who fly them. Our mission of community outreach and sponsor reward was accomplished with flying colors. Try that in a fixed wing aircraft!"

In addition to the two performance programs, the AAHF also offers the Huey ride program. The AAHF is the only organization that is authorized by the FAA to provide public education flights in authentic military UH-1H Hueys. The organization makes the ride program available to shows that book one of the two performance programs and as a stand-alone offering.

But while the team's unique flexibility can be a benefit to show organizers, their message is really what the team is all about. "We love telling the story of Army Aviation," says Shanda Elkins. "Our veteran pilots and staff continue to serve our great nation by ensuring we never forget our history from Korea and Vietnam to Desert Storm and Desert Shield."

Greg L. Davis is an aviation photojournalist specializing in aerial photography. He is also the official team photographer for the AH-1F Cobra Team. See more of his work at: www.focalplaneimagery.com