

STARS AND STRIPES

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31st Special Operations Squadron is inactivated at Osan Air Base

By [Jim Lea](#), Osan bureau chief

OSAN AIR BASE, South Korea — The 31st Special Operations Squadron Black Knights are no more — almost.

The 50-year-old unit held an inactivation ceremony last week, but Lt. Col. Brendan G. Clare, squadron commander since last June, said the Black Knights will still fly their MH-53 Pave Low helicopters from Osan through June.

Squadron members will gradually rotate to units outside Korea. As they do, the unit will be augmented by airmen from helicopter units at Hurlburt Field, Fla., he said.

"We wanted to hold the inactivation ceremony while most of the unit members are still here," Clare said.

"This is the first step in preparation for the arrival of the CV-22 tilt-rotor aircraft," said Master Sgt. Michael Farris, spokesman for the 353rd Special Operations Group, the squadron's parent unit at Kadena Air Base, Japan. "The new aircraft will increase the command's long-range mission, (even) sending teams into politically denied or hostile territory."

But last week's ceremony doesn't mean the Black Knights will fade into Air Force history. When a squadron of the CV-22s joins the Air Force inventory in the Pacific, it will carry the 31st's banner, Farris said.

During its nine years at Osan, the squadron has used its MH-53J Pave Low III helicopters for humanitarian flights and classified night missions. The Pave Low is a long-range, all-weather helicopter capable of flying at very low altitudes through zero-visibility weather.

When the squadron leaves Korea in June, its helicopters will be reassigned to Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M., Farris said.

Army units will take up special operations and rescue missions in South Korea once the Air Force squadron is deactivated, said Brig. Gen. Richard L. Comer, vice commander of the Air Force Special Operations Command at Hurlburt Field, who flew to Osan to take part in the inactivation ceremony.