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551st Special Operations Squadron deactivates while Pave Lows continue exodus

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5/10/2007 - KIRTLAND AIR FORCE BASE, New Mexico -- An era came to an end when Team Kirtland said farewell to the 551st Special Operations Squadron during the deactivation ceremony during the 58th Special Operations Wing here April 27. The squadron, which trained MH-53 Pave Low aircrews since 1989, stood down due to the Air Force's decision to retire the MH-53.

"For those of us who have flown the 53 it's a sad day," said Lt. Col. Todd Lancaster, the squadron's former commander. "But for special operations, this represents what we have always done, which is a continuum of the special ops warrior spirit. The guys who have flown the 53s will keep on the same tradition, which started during World War II and will carry far into the future."

Most squadron members will continue to serve at the 58th SOW, according to Colonel Lancaster.

"Many of our flight engineers are going to the CV-22 Osprey. Our aerial gunners are going to fly on the HH-60 Pave Hawk. Most of our pilots are retiring and some are moving on to higher leadership positions," he said.

During the ceremony, the colonel took the opportunity to thank his fellow squadron members.

"I'd like to thank the entire 58th SOW," Colonel Lancaster said. "We've always worked as a great team together, whether it's here training or off doing special operations around the world. We depend on each other. It's been a pleasure and honor serving with this great team."

The MH-53 Pave Low will still have a presence here at Kirtland. One is scheduled to be placed in the air park on the west side of the base in the near future.



Lt. Col. Todd Lancaster, former 551st Special Operations Squadron commander, salutes after relinquishing command to Col. Leonard Smales, 58th Operations Group commander. U. S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Markus M. Maier