



RARE ROTORS

AN AMAZING "BARN FIND" UNCOVERS A HORDE OF HISTORIC HELICOPTERS

BY NICHOLAS A. VERONICO

It turns out that the terms "around-to-it" and "barn find" are cosmically linked. Someone has the foresight to purchase an interesting or historic project with the intention of restoring it when they get "around-to-it." For various reasons, family obligations, health concerns, money, or time, the project owner never gets around-to-it and, in this case, an aircraft or helicopter gets pushed into a corner of the yard. The owner may pass and the project is then inherited by well-meaning friends or relatives and the "around-to-it" cycle starts again. Eventually, the decision to part with the item is made and it is at this

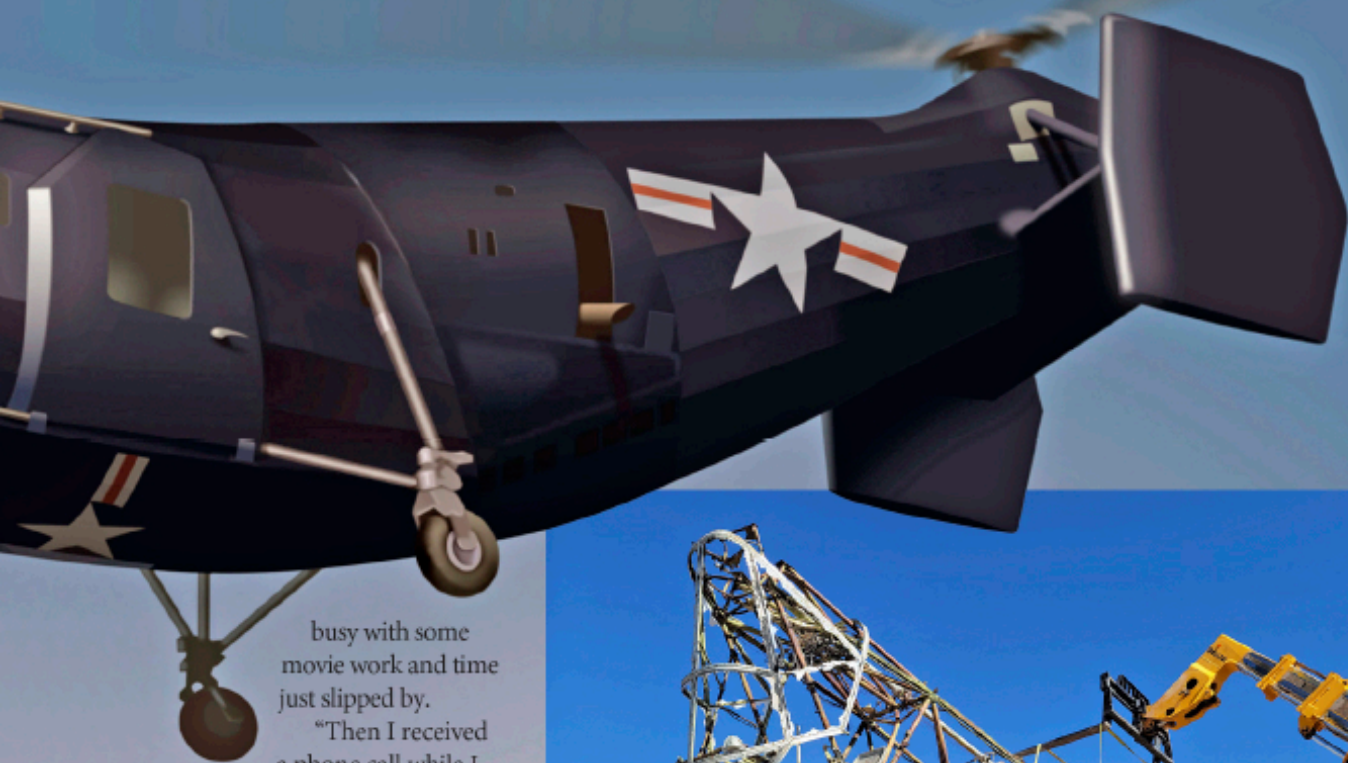
stage where the restoration project enters the realm of "barn find."

Recently, Doug Scroggins of Scroggins Aviation Mockup and Effects of Las Vegas, Nevada, made an incredible barn find of ten 1940s/1950s vintage helicopters. Scroggins Aviation Mockups and Effects is a leading supplier of cockpit sections, full-scale commercial and military aircraft helicopters, and cabin interiors for the motion picture and TV industry. The company's work has most recently been seen in *Dunkirk*, *Flight*, *Jurassic World*, and *Sully*, along with *Captain America: Civil War*, *Deadpool 2*, and *Jumanji*:

Welcome to the Jungle. "I'm always in the market for interesting, historic aircraft. Having an inventory of classic helicopters helps us expand our offerings to entertainment production companies," said Doug Scroggins.

Before Covid, Scroggins had heard about some potential Vietnam War-era helicopters stored in a yard in the southwest. "A gentleman in the United Kingdom had mentioned that a pair of Piaseki CH-21s could be seen on Google Maps. I did some searching and could see the tails of the two H-21s poking over the fence on Google Maps Street View. I was

Vintage image of a Piasecki HRP-1. The steel tube structure was covered with fabric. Note the cartoon nose art and 19 "upward arrow" mission markings whose purpose is unknown.



busy with some movie work and time just slipped by.

"Then I received a phone call while I was in Hawaii on set," Scroggins said. "The person on the other end said, 'I hear you're the helicopter guy. I may have some helicopters available if you're interested.' I started asking questions and when he gave me the location, I got very excited. He sent pictures the same day. I could not believe it — this is the same yard I had seen a few years back. I had no idea what was in there.

"The caller said he represented the late owner's family and they were looking to sell all of the helicopters and associated parts as a lot. There were also some seven or eight fixed-wing aircraft, Convair L-13s and Fairchild PT-26 hulks, that were committed to another buyer. Wait! Helicopters, as in many, to be sold as a lot? He had my attention," Scroggins said.

After seeing photos and traveling to Deming, New Mexico, Scroggins made a deal to acquire a pair of rare 1947-vintage Piasecki HRP Rescuers, two Piasecki HUP Retrievers also with an addition cockpit section, three Piasecki H-21 Workhorses (known as the "Flying Banana"), a 1945 Sikorsky R-5D Dragonfly, and an even



The carcass of BuNo 111814 is carefully lifted out of the yard for transportation to Mojave Airport. The helo takes to the air for the first time in 70 years. (Doug Scroggins)



The HRP's look like skeletons from prehistoric beasts. (DS)



An HRP tests out flotation gear.



Doug Scroggins tests out the controls on an HRP. (DS)



US Coast Guard HRP in flight. We can't make out a serial but this could be Doug's aircraft.



An HRP-1 coming in to land. The name "Flying Banana" is particularly appropriate.



Sikorsky HO4S-1 of HU-1 taking off from the battleship USS New Jersey during the Korean War.



The Sikorsky R-5s became extremely useful during the Korea War and were used for transporting wounded and SAR.

rarer Sikorsky R-6 Hoverfly.

This collection of vintage helicopters was acquired by Cecil A. "Smoky" Harper. He was born in Ringgold, Louisiana, during March 1930, and joined the US Navy in 1948, at the age of 18. While posted in California, he met Joella Johnson, with whom he would marry and raise a family of three girls and a son. Harper started his helicopter collection while living in Oroville, California, in the mid-1960s. He purchased the HRPs and the Sikorsky R-6 in 1964. He made a test hop in the R-6, hovering it until the ignitor failed and, without a second on-line, he made a pretty hard landing. While collecting aircraft and helicopters, Harper was driving dirt track race cars and owned a company called Cobra Unlimited from the mid-1970s to mid-1980s. At one race, his car began to smoke badly before the engine finally blew, and he gained the nickname "Smoky."

In 1965, Harper moved the family to Gila Bend, Arizona, where he continued to grow his collection with the addition of CH-21s, an R-5, and more. Between 1987 and 1989, Harper moved the family



R-5D 43-46640 at Buchanan Field in Concord, California, just after WWII is a sister-ship to R-5D 43-46656, saved by Smoky Harper. The R-5D had room for a litter patient inside the cabin. Note that helicopter's rescue hoist is on the port side, unlike today's helicopters. (William T. Larkins)

and his collection to Deming, New Mexico, where he intended to retire and form a non-profit museum focused on returning the helicopters to the air while he operated an aircraft parts business. To earn a daily living, Harper was a construction foreman on jobs such as the Central Arizona Project that today delivers water to nearly six million people. He retired from the union in March 1995, and sadly passed away seven months later on 24 October 1995.

Harper had an adventurous life and had acquired more than a dozen historic aircraft and helicopter projects. Unfortunately, health issues robbed him of the opportunity to get around-to-it and restore the vehicles that intrigued him. For 28 years, Harper's collection of airframes and parts sat in his compound at the Deming Airport. When control of the collection passed down to his daughter and granddaughter, they sought the opportunity to pass on these rare relics to someone who could help Harper's vision become a reality, even if on a different level. With that, Harper's "around-to-it" became Scroggins' "barn find."



Cleaned up for the cross-state drive, the R-5D is strapped to the trailer for the move to Mojave. (DS)



Scene inside the Deming yard showing the R-5D in the foreground with the R-6 in the background. Check out the number of spare parts and rotor blades stacked everywhere. (DS)



Lifting the R-5 into the air prior to loading on the trailer for the trip to Mojave. Peeking into the open compartments shows the complexity of the systems of the radial engine-equipped helicopter. (DS)



Although stripped out, the cockpit of the R-5D has all of the panels and holes for installation of the original components. (DS)



The super rare R-6A 43-45526 was accepted by the Army and quickly turned over to the Coast Guard where it was redesignated an HOS-1. She received Coast Guard serial 75621, and was first assigned to CGAS Brooklyn. (DS)



An R-6A being turned over to the Coast Guard at CGAS Brooklyn. (Rudy Arnold)



The R-6A enjoyed overseas sales as can be seen by these three Royal Navy examples. In one of the strange displays at the 1950 Farnborough airshow, the helos were given pink trunks and waggling ears. Each day, they performed under the direction of "circus ringmaster" Sgt. J.D. Hayhow. The Royal Air Force and Fleet Air Arm received 27 examples that were given the designation Hoverfly Mk. 2.



Once the debris around the R-6 was cleared away, the helicopter's tail landing gear can be seen. The gear was not very robust and its failure in rough landings contributed to numerous accidents. (DS)

WHAT WAS IN THE BARN?

The rarest helicopters in Harper's collection were the Piasecki HRP-1s and the Sikorsky R-5D and R-6. All three types were pioneering helicopters that emerged from World War II.

The Piasecki Helicopter Corporation was based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and its HRP Rescuer was the first American-built helicopter that could carry a substantial payload. The company built

20 HRP-1s (BuNos 111809-111828 with the order for 111834-111848 cancelled) with fabric-covered fuselages. Rotor diameter is 41 feet each and length of the HRP is 83 feet, 4 inches (49 feet, 6 inches with rotors folded). Nicknamed the "Flying Banana," the HRP was powered by two 550-hp (at 2000-rpm) Pratt & Whitney R-1340-AN-1 radial engines and could carry ten passengers plus a crew of two. HRP-1s had a maximum load of 6900 pounds with a useful load of 1843 pounds, which was quite a bit in 1947 helicopter terms.

Scroggins recovered two HRP-1s, one is BuNo 111814, and the second, possibly an ex-Coast Guard example, is yet to be identified. Bureau Number 111814's first assignment was with VX-3 in late 1947, then HMX-1 in mid-1948 to mid-1949, when she went in for overhaul. In spring 1950, HRP '814 was assigned to VX-1, and returned to overhaul at NAS Lakehurst, New Jersey, on 1 April 1952. This was followed in October 1952 with an assignment to HU-2, also at Lakehurst, then with Det 32 on board USS *Tarawa* from 20 October to 26 November 1952. The end of November saw '814 transfer south to NAAS Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The last entry in 111814's log book is on 15 July 1954 when she arrived at NAF Litchfield Park, Arizona, for storage and final disposition.

Of the first 20 HRP-1s delivered to the Navy, three were assigned to the US Coast Guard, BuNos 111821, 111823, and 111826. HRP '826 crashed in the spring of 1951, while the other two flew on into the mid-1950s. Bureau Number 111821 was stored in early 1955, thus the second HRP

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BARN FIND HELICOPTERS

Piasecki HRP Rescuer

HRP-1	111814	
HRP-1	unknown, possibly ex-USCG	

Piasecki HUP Retriever

HUP-2	128550	
HUP-2	128574	Cockpit section
UH-25B	130064	To be restored for film work

Piasecki H-21

CH-21	52-8645	
CH-21	55-4172	To be restored for film work
H-21C	56-2134	

Sikorsky Dragonfly

R-5D	43-46656	To be restored for film work
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Sikorsky R-6 Hoverfly (Nash-Kelvinator, Detroit, Michigan)

R-6A	43-45526	
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The Piasecki HUP was the primary short-range rescue helicopter in the early 1950s. Here, a Moffett Field-based HUP is seen hoisting an airman into the helicopter's cabin. It is interesting to note that the hoisting gear was all internal and the cockpit floor opened for lifting operations. The airfield fire department's downed aircraft simulator can be seen at lower left. It appears to have recently been lit on fire and extinguished. (William T. Larkins, slide restoration by Jim Leslie)



Under the pilot's window are five harness marks, much like bomber mission marks. It is assumed that these symbols represent five lives saved by this HUP. (DS)



This is the view a downed naval aviator would have seen when being rescued by the plane guard HUP. "Abandon Chute" was excellent advice as the HUP's rotor wash could catch an aviator's parachute, pushing them away from the helicopter. The hatch in the floor opened and enabled the rescue hoist to deploy a harness that reeled up a downed aviator.



HUP-2 BuNo 130064 was a world-traveler having served in the US Midwest, West Coast, Hawaii, and Japan. (DS)



HUP-2 BuNo 128550 kept company with a Convair L-13 and Fairchild PT-26 Cornell. Aside from foliage, workers had to navigate the helicopters around other aircraft, cars, and trucks stored in the yard. (DS)

recovered by Scroggins is possibly '823 as it flew into mid-1956 before being stored.

Of note, in summer 2011, the Classic Rotors Museum at the Ramona Airport in southern California, acquired an HRP from Smoky Harper's yard in Deming. After completely restoring it, this HRP is now on display at the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum in McMinnville, Oregon. Unfortunately, its identity is unknown. Two additional HRP airframes are held by the American Helicopter Museum and Education Center in West Chester, Pennsylvania, which brings the surviving total of HRPs to five airframes.

SIKORSKY R-6

The Sikorsky R-6 Hoverfly is a redesigned version of the company's mid-WWII R-4B helicopter. Seating a pilot and observer with the capability of carrying a litter patient on externally mounted

stretchers, the R-6 featured a 235-hp Franklin O-405-9 radial engine, somewhat of an improvement over the R-4's 200-hp Warner R-550-3 radial engine. The cockpit was given greater visibility over the R-4 with the addition of a glass bubble canopy and forward area.

The R-6 recovered by Scroggins Aviation is USAAF 43-45526, which was license-built to Nash-Kelvinator. During WWII, Nash-Kelvinator switched from building Nash automobiles and Kelvinator refrigerators to producing Hamilton-Standard propellers (158,000 propeller assemblies and 85,000 spare blades), 17,000 Pratt & Whitney R-2800 radial engines, and 193 Sikorsky R-6/HOS-1 helicopters. R-6s could fly at a maximum speed of 80-mph (69-kts) and had a useful load of 232-pounds, and although that's not much of a load in today's helicopter world, the type did make an outstanding



The H-21Cs were extremely active during the Vietnam war and this flight was airborne during 1962. Over 10,000 helicopters were lost or damaged during that war.

scout and observation platform.

R-6 43-45526 was accepted by the USAAF on 19 September 1945. On 25 January 1946, this R-6 was transferred to the US Coast Guard Air Station Brooklyn, New York. Here, the R-6 was redesignated an HOS-1 and gained the Coast Guard serial 75621. While at CGAS Brooklyn, at the end of March and beginning of April 1946, a rescue hoist and related equipment was installed adding to the versatility of the little helicopter.

Her career at CGAS Brooklyn lasted only until 15 April 1946. On this day, 75621 was transferred to the Navy at NAS Norfolk, Virginia. Serving with the Navy, 75621 was assigned to participate in Operation Crossroads, the test of two nuclear weapons that took place during July 1946, at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. During the month of July, 75621 made twelve flights, often more than one per day, with a Commander Wood at the controls.



Removing H-21C 52-8645 from the Deming yard for the 750-mile trip to the Mojave Air and Space Port. (DS)

When the atomic bomb tests were over, 75621 was delivered stateside to resume service with the Coast Guard, arriving at Coast Guard Air Station Seattle, Washington, on 18 August 1946. On 1 September 1947, HOS-1 75621 had its main rotors removed and the aircraft stored in a hangar until 28 February 1948, when she was transferred to CGAS San Francisco, California. While at San Francisco, this helicopter was robbed of its tail cone, tail rotor shaft, generator drive, voltage regulator, and other parts, which were installed on HOS-1 75614. The parts donated to 75614 were then removed from 75616 and installed into 75621 returning her to flight status on 28 May 1948. At this point, 75621 had flown 47.1 hours total time.

Flying in the San Francisco Bay area saw 75621's utilization go up

dramatically, as on 2 June 1949, this HOS-1 had flown a total of 83.5 hours. Also on this day, 75621 was stricken from the Coast Guard inventory. Sold surplus in early 1950, 43-45526 was given the civil registration of N69089, with the restriction that the registration was "valid only when owned and operated by Roy Patton." From there the helicopter's civil service trail goes cold until it turned up in Smoky Harper's collection. Rescuing this helicopter brings the number of survivors of this type to six.



Tail art from H-21C 56-2134 representing the 121st Assault Helicopter Company as flown in Vietnam. The 121st AHC was known as the "Goc Trang Tigers." (DS)



H-21C 52-8645 was fitted with a VIP interior and it is believed this Shawnee served Department of Defense and White House staff in the Washington, DC, area. (DS)





H-21C 55-4172 is in an all-cargo configuration and retains much of its original interior fittings. (DS)



SIKORSKY R-5D

Although numerically earlier than the R-6, the Sikorsky R-5D (later designed the H-5D) Dragonfly, USAAF 43-46656, found in Smoky Harper's yard was delivered the following year. R-5D 43-46656 was accepted by the USAAF on 23 October 1946. This Dragonfly spent its entire career in the Texas area training new helicopter pilots with assignments to Kelly, Randolph, San Marcos, and Waco among others. Its last posting was at Laughlin AFB, Texas. During its

career, 43-46656 was landing near the scene of an F-84 crash 15 miles southwest of Wickenburg, Arizona. Touching down, the R-5D rocked forward, then back on the tail wheel, which collapsed. The tail rotor made contact with the ground, breaking the blades and twisting the tail cone. While in military service, 43-46656 had two other incidents that caused damage to the tail as well. Eighteen other examples of the R-5D exist and this, the 19th, will be restored by Scroggins Aviation and offered to a museum after being used in a film.

PIASECKI HUPs

Two complete and the cockpit section of another Piasecki HUP Retriever were recovered from the yard. HUP-2 BuNo 128550 was accepted by the Navy on 17 September 1952, and spent its first three years flying with HS-2 from Ream Field in the San Diego, California, area. In September 1955, the HUP was transferred to NAS Alameda, California, and then shipped to NAS Atsugi, Japan. She returned stateside aboard USS *Coral Sea* (CV-43) in April 1961, and was assigned to HU-1 at Ream Field. In September 1962, BuNo 128550's service career ended and she was flown to NAS Litchfield Park for storage and final disposition. On 28 March 1963, she was stricken from the Navy's inventory with 1796 hours total flight time. Scroggins plans to offer this HUP-2/UH-25B to a museum for static restoration.

The second complete HUP/UH-25B, BuNo 130064, and the cockpit section of BuNo 128574 will both join Scroggins Aviation's inventory for future use in film and TV productions. Bureau Number 130064 was accepted by the Navy on 26 October 1953, and was assigned to



Republic of Vietnam troops await an arriving H-21C.



H-21C 56-2134 was in the thick of combat early in the Vietnam War. PFC Loye T. Christmas was serving as a gunner on board 56-2134, and was killed by ground fire on 17 January 1964. (DS)



The H-21C crews soon realized they were large targets for enemy Viet Cong on the ground. These H-21s have received field camouflage along with modifications to mount a .50-caliber gun in the door.

the Naval Reserve at NAS Glenview, Illinois. In June 1957, she flew west to for overhaul at San Diego, before going to NAS Alameda from where she was shipped to the 14th Naval District at NAS Barbers Point, Territory of Hawaii. On paper, 130064 was assigned to HU-1 at Ream Field, but she was flying with HU-1's Det. 1 at NAS Oppama, south of Yokohama on Tokyo Bay, Japan. On 30 April 1961, she was operating aboard the cruiser USS *Saint Paul* (CA-73), and then joined the carrier USS *Midway* (CV-41) in July 1961. The *Midway* brought her back to the US West Coast in October 1962, and she was flown to NAF Litchfield Park for storage. With 2018 hours total time, BuNo 130064 was stricken on 28 March 1963. What's the most intriguing aspect of this HUP are the five harness markings under the port side cockpit window. One has to wonder about the stories of the five people rescued by this Piasecki Retriever.

PIASECKI H-21

The final trio of helicopters acquired from the Harper cache were versions of the US Army H-21C Shawnee. The earliest of the trio, H-21C, USAF 52-8645, was delivered on 1 September 1955. This Shawnee has an executive interior and is thought to have flown Army General Staff officers and may have provided support to the White House staff as well. This helo is up for adoption by qualified museums. H-21C 55-4172, delivered on 17 December 1956, and like 52-8645, Scroggins is looking for the right museum that would be interested



Keeping company with the helicopters were three Convair L-13 scout planes. The short takeoff and landing capabilities of the L-13 were amazing. The wings are shown folded back along the fuselage sides to facilitate transportation of the type. (DS)



The sun sets over the R-5, right, and R-6, in preparation for their journey to the Scroggins Aviation storage yard. (DS)

in preserving this airframe.

The third H-21C is 56-2134, delivered on 12 December 1957, saw service in Vietnam with the 121st Assault Helicopter Company, known as the "Soc Trang Tigers." On 17 January 1964, PFC Loye T. Christmas of Jacksonville, Florida, was serving as a gunner aboard 56-2134. The helicopter was ferrying troops near Can Tho in the Mekong Delta, when PFC Christmas was struck by ground fire and killed. One of the vertical stabilizers still has its Soc Trang

Tiger head artwork that has survived to this day.

Scroggins feels that HRP 111814 certainly deserves to be restored and displayed at the National Museum of Naval Aviation in Pensacola as the Flying Banana is the progenitor of today's Navy rotary wing fleet. As for the other airframes, what were once Smoky Harper's "around-to-it" projects have received a new lease on life, either as eventual museum displays or to be seen in future movies and TV productions. **AC**



Safely tucked away at the Mojave Airport, the recently acquired H-21Cs are tied down as they await their new lives. At least one will be retained for use in film and TV productions while homes at museums capable of restoring the other two H-21s to static display condition will be sought. (DS)