The P-39 Airacobra had several interesting features including a nose-mounted 30mm cannon firing through the hub of its propeller. The P-63 Kingcobra was a growth or evolution version of the P-39. Now, based on this lineage, you might think that the AH-1 Cobra's nom de plume came solely from the Airacobra and Kingcobra.

But there was more to it. Here's what happened:

During the conflict in Viet Nam, we at Bell became quite attached to and familiar with many of the units in action there, and with their traditions, exploits, and memorabilia. We followed the first UTT Company very closely and supported it with the armed Huey 1A gunships when they went "In country" in the early 1960s.

Many of the units had unique emblems painted on the nose or sides of the aircraft. Many kept score on the side of the fuselage of their conquests.

Thanks to the 114th!

A lot of us remember the Soc Trang Tigers and the Vinh Long Cobras; the Mavericks, Playboys, Buccaneers, etc. And it's from the Vinh Long Cobras, the guns of the 114th Air Mobile Company, that the AH-1 Cobra really got its name.

Veteran aviators may recall that, in April 1963, the 114th Airmobile Company was the first Huey company to be deployed from the States directly to Viet Nam where it joined the Delta Battalion. Some may argue that the UTT Company was the first one, but it came from Okinawa and was a provisional unit.

The 114th Airmobile Company had been reorganized at Fort Knox from Troop C, 17th Cavalry. The brand new OH-1Bs the unit received after it arrived in Vinh Long were products of the high-priority Hotshot program, a joint Army/Bell/Emerson venture to develop and...
How the Cobra Got Its Name

General "Ham" Howze, then working for Bell, walked into the author's office and suggested that we do not call it the UH-1 Cobra, but the HueyCobra. From that day on, it had HueyCobra as its official name.

In naming this new bird, we also felt that the characteristics of the helicopter and its real life counterpart were extraordinarily similar, i.e., the cobra snake resides in Far East climes, can detect his enemy visually or by sensing body heat, and can strike quickly spitting venom with deadly accuracy.

Why "HueyCobra"?
The first time the Army recognized this new bird in writing, it called it the UH-I H, believe it or not! Then, on 19 May 1966, the Army (in a mod to the contract) changed the designation officially from the UH-IH to AH-1G. On 13 July 1966, another mod to the contract was issued making the ship the AH-1G (Cobra).

Some of you may ask, "Why HueyCobra?" and "Where did Huey come from?". The first helicopter in the H-1 series was the HU-1A Iroquois; however, units in the field started calling it the Hu-Aye, spelled Huey. So that's how the Huey came to be.

The original Cobra schedule was a remarkable one, and we challenge aspiring program managers to lop it! See the box below.

Those of us talking to the Army about the Cobra those days kept an ample supply of realistic-looking rubber cobra snakes which we would coil on an unsuspecting briefee who, while recovering from his initial shock, would listen to our tabletop briefing.

There's a whole raft of stories about snakes we could tell here, but let's go on.

Cobra family increases
In 1968, the Marine Corps purchased a twin-engine version of the AH-1 and called it the AH-1J SeaCobra. Later in 1972, Bell proposed to the Army and Marine Corps a Cobra with uprated dynamic components called the KingCobra.

This name came from Bell Aircraft's P-63 KingCobra, and many of its ordnance and configuration details were remarkably similar to the original P-63. The USMC eventually procured a twin-engine version of the KingCobra, but opted to call it the AH-1T Improved SeaCobra.

So - in its short and fairly spectacular history the Cobra has had many names and many missions. Army pilots in Nam called it the Snake. Over 1,500 of these versatile attack helicopters have been built to date, are in the armed forces of five countries, and are headed for others.

Many of us at Bell have dreamed about the day when the H-1 series will develop its way through the entire alphabet. The AH-1T Improved SeaCobra is as far as it has proceeded to this writing.

However - who knows what the AH-1Z will look like?

THE ORIGINAL COBRA SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First flight</td>
<td>8 September 1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army evaluation</td>
<td>October-Nov. 1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development &amp; Production Contract</td>
<td>Apr. 1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Production Delivery of a Cobra to the U.S. Army</td>
<td>May 1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deployed to Combat</td>
<td>August 1967</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THANKS!

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- Cliff Kalista