‘Bearcat to Dark Horse’
U.S. Army Approves Additional MH-47E Special Operations Chinook

The Boeing Company and the U.S. Army are teaming up to make a “Dark Horse” out of a “Bearcat.” This odd alchemy is not as strange as it seems, however. The U.S. Army Aviation Center’s CH-47 Chinook, nicknamed “Bearcat III,” utilized to test and evaluate new aircraft systems and configurations, will take on a new name and new mission, thanks to a modification program formalized in late September. After its arrival at Boeing Philadelphia’s manufacturing facility in early October, “Bearcat III” began to be stripped, inspected and repaired in preparation for remanufacturing as an MH-47E Special Operations Chinook, nicknamed the “Dark Horse.”

The Army’s 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), based at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky, and Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah, Georgia, currently operates 25 MH-47Es and eleven MH-47D Chinooks in special missions around the world. Special Operations Chinooks are configured to fly nap-of-the-earth at night and in adverse weather. The aircraft are equipped with fully integrated cockpit management systems, aerial refueling probes and a variety of unique systems to carry out the Special Operations mission.

“Bearcat III’s” modernization, to be completed in 2003, will restore the full complement of MH-47Es authorized for the Special Operations Forces.

Comin’ at Ya. The MH-47E Special Operations Chinook doing what it does best, flying nap-of-the-earth at high speed. With deliveries completed in 1994, the U.S. Army’s MH-47Es remain among the most advanced helicopters flying today. Among the distinguishing features in this photo are the in-flight refueling boom, rescue hoist, chin-mounted forward-looking infrared turret and terrain-following, terrain-avoidance radar.

Dear Chinook and Sea Knight User:

As I write this, we are still waiting for the outcome of the U.S. Presidential election. There is no such uncertainty, however, about the value and capabilities of tandem rotor helicopters. England, of all places, was in the last few weeks the target of monstrous wind and rain storms that devastated the otherwise tranquil countryside southwest of London.

It was no surprise, however, that HC Mk2 Chinooks from the British Royal Air Force were on the scene after the disaster, carrying vital supplies and providing assistance quickly and safely.

This incident adds another chapter to the astonishing history of Chinooks and Sea Knights in their humanitarian service roles.

Still, natural disasters often exact costs that cannot be measured. One victim of the storms was Cavin Parker, an official of the U.K. Ministry of Defence procurement directorate who was instrumental in HC Mk2A and Mk3 contract negotiations. We extend our sincerest sympathies to his family, friends and colleagues.

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Good luck and good flying!

John Gilbride
Director - Aerospace Support – Philadelphia
Rough Mission, Nice Rotorcraft

‘Delta Schooner’ Chinooks Are ‘Pretty in Pink’

The dry summer of 2000 brought a record number of forest fires to the western U.S. Millions of acres went up in smoke, and several firefighters gave their lives while struggling to contain nature’s onslaught. Among those in the forefront of the fight were the ‘Delta Schooners’ of Co. G, 140th Avn. Regt., California Army National Guard. The Forest Service asked the ‘Schooners’ to add high-visibility markings to their Chinooks. Here, a Chinook prepares to use a 1,350-gal. water bucket (left), and three of four Chinooks deployed to fight the Storrie Fire in Plumas County, Calif., rest at Fire Base Chester, Lake Almanor, Calif. The fire destroyed 60,000 acres. The ‘Schooners’ flew more than 300 hours and dropped more than five million gallons of water on Western fires this year.

(Photos and comments from SFC Steve Robertson, CANG)

As of September, Columbia Helicopters, Inc., had equalled its previous record for fire-fighting deployments established in 1994. Columbia assigned ten of its 13 U.S.-based aircraft, including one recalled from Alaska logging operations, to stem the wild fires raging throughout several western states. CHI’s rotorcraft, including Boeing 234 Commercial Chinooks and Boeing Vertol 107-IIs, fought fires in Montana, Utah, California, Colorado, Idaho and Nevada.

Three RAF Chinook HC Mk2s deployed to Canada for the first time to support Exercise IRON HAWK, a 38-day live-fire and maneuver warfare-training exercise, at the British Army Training Unit Suffield (BATUS) located on 1,000 square miles of rolling prairie, 250 kilometers east of Calgary, Alberta.

The principle task at BATUS is to plan and conduct up to six ‘Ex MEDIT-CINE MAN’ live-fire and training exercises for UK armored battle groups each year.

Exercise IRON HAWK, which took place from 1 Sept. to 3 Oct., was a new initiative moving away from armored battle group training to Lead Aviation Brigade and Lead Recce Task Forces, forming elements of the UK’s new 16 Air Assault Brigade, who are able to use the live-fire training area to practice deep operations at Divisional level and below, within the context of a Joint Rapid Reaction Force (JRRF) deployment.

(see RAF, p. 3)

An RAF Chinook flies by Crow’s Nest Mountain (left) near Calgary, Alberta, Canada during recent exercises in the area. Three RAF HC Mk2s supported an air assault brigade, lifting weapons and equipment (right) during 38 days of training.

Record Fire Year for CHI
RAF in Canada  
(cont’d. from p. 2)

Ex IRON HAWK incorporated all the operations of war within a realistic environment consisting of 15 days of live-fire training, followed by Tactical Engagement Simulation (TES) training against an Opposing Force (OPFOR) and culminating in a division-level tactical exercise involving combined arms and maneuver warfare which included RAF Chinooks and Lynx and Gazelles from Three Regiment Army Air Corps.

The exercise also provided an opportunity to look at future possible uses of a wider expanse of training area, other than the Suffield Block (BATUS), also encompassing the British Army Training Unit (Wainwright) a training area 250km north of Suffield, together with the Electronic Warfare (EW) range at CFH Cold Lake and the airspace between for future air assault maneuver warfare involving the UK’s new WAH-64D Apaches.

The joint effort, including virtual design reviews using shared computer systems, enabled Boeing to design the new shelves in just eight weeks, and a new supplier fabricated the first shipset in just four more weeks. The assembly team completed installation ahead of schedule.

The first CH-47F, now in assembly, is scheduled for first flight in mid-2001. Under the current modernization plan, Chinooks will remain in U.S. Army service until at least 2033, a remarkable 71 years after CH-47s joined the Army fleet.
Phrogs Assist In ‘Cole’ Bombing Salvage Operation

After a terrorist bomb crippled the Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Cole, the U.S. Navy launched a sophisticated salvage operation to bring the damaged ship home for repair. Throughout the salvage effort, Navy CH-46Ds performed a variety of utility missions to assist the rescue flotilla prepare for the long voyage.

Seventeen American sailors on board the Cole died in the explosion, which ripped a 1500-square foot hole in the ship’s hull, wrecking engineering spaces and buckling a mess deck.

A ‘Capital’ Phrog

Boeing Tech Rep John Sanner recently sent these photos of a U.S. Marine CH-46E in VIP livery from MCAS Quantico’s HMX-1. Given this Phrog’s well-known Pennsylvania Avenue locale, formal attire, in the form of a glossy paint scheme, seems completely appropriate!