

Sikorsky MH-53M Pave Low IV 68-8284

Museum Accession Number X004-4396

15 Nov 68 Built by Sikorsky Aircraft to contract No. N00019-67-C-0401 as a Sikorsky S-65/HH-53C-SI, serials batch 68-8283/8286, one of 44 built (and since 2002, the only survivor of its batch of four), entering service from August 1968. Constructor's Number 6800284. Medium-lift Combat Search and Rescue helicopter; USAF version of US Navy Marine Corp's CH-53A/D Sea Stallion helicopter.

The HH-53C 'Super Jolly Green Giant' (officially known as the Stallion) was long-range Combat Search and Rescue helicopter that was also used for covert operations during the Vietnam War.

May 71-Jan 72 Active in South East Asia; Call Sign JG 55. Made two known aircrew recoveries, on 5 September 1971 and 19 December 1971.

28 Jun 79 Photographed at RAF Woodbridge when serving with 67 Air Rescue and Recovery Squadron (ARRS), USAF.

Oct 80 As an HH-53C, three week detachment (along with HH-53C 69-5785) operating from Royal Aircraft Establishment airfield at West Freugh, SW Scotland. Tasked with sling loading Alconbury-based USAF RF-4C Phantom and Upper Heyford-based USAF F-111E wreckage from Cairnsmore of Fleet and Craignaw in Southern Scotland. Pilot was Captain Frank A Gray USAF. The 1TRS/10 TRW RF-4C, 68-0566, had crashed on Cairnsmore on 28 March 1979, and the F-111E, 68-0803 from the 20 TFW had crashed on Craignaw on 19 December 1979.

One of nine MH-53Hs and 32 HH-53s later converted to 'MH-53J Pave Low III Enhanced' low-level, long-range Special Operations standard with uprated engines, more armour, forward-looking infrared, global positioning system, Doppler navigation systems, terrain-following and terrain-avoidance radar, on-board computer and integrated avionics for 'low-level, long-range, undetected penetration into denied areas, day or night, in adverse weather, for infiltration, exfiltration and resupply of special operations forces' to quote the USAF official website.

There were 41 MH-53Js in all, all modified from existing airframes between 1986 and 1990; they all retained Combat Search And Rescue (CSAR) capability in addition to Special Operations duties, and were the largest helicopter in the USAF inventory. Pave refers to the all-weather sensor system, Precision Avionics Vectoring Equipment.

Later modified from J model to MH-53M Pave Low IV standard with Interactive Defensive Avionics System/Multi-Mission Advanced Tactical Terminal, enhancing its defensive capabilities.

20 Jun 89 Photographed at Aalborg airfield, Denmark in Pave Low IV configuration.

Latterly assigned to 20th Expeditionary Special Operations Squadron (20 SOS – the ‘Green Hornets’), part of 1st Special Operations Group, Air Force Special Operations Command at Hurlburt Field, Florida, USA.

This unit converted to the HH-53 at Hurlburt Field in 1980, equipping with the MH-53H Pave Low in 1986 and the MH-53J from 1988 and MH-53M in 1999.

The unit was involved in Operation Desert Shield from August 1990 and later operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina 1992/94 and Operation Desert Thunder in 1998.

Flight records of former MH53 rear gunner Dean ‘Diz’ Chambless (see e-mail on MH-53 history file) record a number of flights in 68-8284 in Kuwait in 2003, prior to and after the opening of Gulf War 2 against Iraq by American and British Forces who attacked on 19 March, the campaign effectively ending with the fall of Tikrit on 15 April;

7 Mar 03 3.1 hr flight, Night rehearsal to secure oil refineries on Al Faw peninsula.

11 Mar 03 1.4 hour flight, Night CSAR (Combat Search and Rescue) exercise in simulated chemical environment.

11 Apr 03 Eight hours (Combat Time) flight –Night infiltration of 2.5 tons of ammunition and weapons; Mosul fell to Allied forces on this day.

25 Apr 03 2.3 hours (combat time) Night Exfiltration of team and their NSCV (Non-Standard combat vehicle)

7 May 03 4.5 hours ‘Day Time taxi for VIPS’

8 May 03 1.4 hours Day time FCF (functional check flight), surprised by severe sand storm, just making it to the end of the runway as the edge of the storm caught them, and the PAVE systems had to be used to taxi back to the dispersal in zero visibility.

26 Feb 04 1.5 hour daytime flight – en route to New Orleans from Hurlburt Field, Florida, USA, but recalled for deployment elsewhere.

24 Sep 08 Final flight, flying time 4hrs.

Total airframe hours 12066.6.

- 30 Sep 08 Type finally retired from USAF Inventory following a final operational combat mission by 20 SOS in Iraq on 26 September 2008.
- 28 Oct 08 Following gifting by the United States Air Force via the National Museum of the United States Air Force, delivered by USAF C.17 s/n 44133 to RAF Brize Norton, Oxfordshire, arriving from Joint Base Balad, Baghdad, Iraq at 12.45pm. Photos on arrival – Royal Air Force Museum News Winter 2008 pp.4-5; Flypast February 2009 p.7; Aircraft illustrated January 2009 p.20.
- 17 Dec08 Flown by No. 99 Squadron RAF C.17A Globemaster III ZZ176 from RAF Brize Norton to Cosford (this being the largest ever aircraft type to have flown into, and out of, Cosford) for reassembly. Photos being unloaded from the C-17; Aircraft illustrated February 2009 p.23; Wrecks and Relics 22nd edition.
- 13 May 09 Moved into the National Cold War Exhibition building (NCWE) building for display.
- Special opening ceremony for the aircraft and supporting display 12 November 2009.

TEXT; ANDREW SIMPSON

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