

22nd May 2009

Giant Helicopter Goes On Display

Despite a week of high winds and rain, staff at the RAF Museum Cosford have successfully moved the Sikorsky MH-53 Pave Low helicopter into the National Cold War Exhibition (NCWE), the first aircraft of its type to go on display in the UK. This combat Search & Rescue Helicopter is the first new airframe to be added to the Exhibition since the Royal Opening in February 2007 and not even the poor weather was going to halt the move.

Following the acquisition of the aircraft in December, the Museum's technical team of the Michael Beetham Conservation Centre (MBCC) have completed a considerable amount of inspections, safety checks, remedial maintenance, restoration and anti-corrosion work, plus several deep-cleans to prepare this historically significant aircraft for display.

The move began on Monday 11th May when the 'soft' but reinforced doors of the NCWE started to be removed. The removal of these took some 3 days and involved high-level platform and crane work to remove five heavy metal stanchions. Specialised track was laid on to the grass leading up from the road to the NCWE to ensure that the 15,000Kg 'Super Jolly Green Giant' didn't sink into the grass.

The MBCC team 'towed and pushed' the MH-53 into the hangar using specialist vehicles, negotiating the tight spaces in the NCWE. Only three of the six 32ft blades were fitted beforehand and as the aircraft was moved into and through the NCWE, the blades were rotated to pass the obstructions.

Conservation Centre Manager, Mr Tim Wallis says:

"There was little room for error and at times the gaps between the tail of the MH-53 and the wing of the Belfast was just one centimetre. The work took time, but it had to be safe and everything was meticulously planned to ensure this. The MBCC team are 'old hands' in such tasks and managed all the moves, whilst our Curator Mr Al McLean managed the overall project and everything went just as it should"

Once into position the long and expensive process of reinstating the large door began, protecting the public, the Museum's artefacts and staff from the elements. Now all aircraft movement is complete and the door back into position, the visiting public can all enjoy what is a fantastic addition to the Museum Collection.

The Royal Air Force Museum Cosford is open daily from 10am – 6pm. Entry to the Museum and parking are FREE. For further information, please call the Royal Air Force Museum on 01902 376200 or visit the Museum website www.rafmuseum.org.

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Notes to Editors

- The helicopter is one of only 41 MH-53Js used by American Special Operations Forces in the first Gulf War. The main role of the helicopter was Combat Search and Rescue in Iraq and Bosnia-Herzegovina as part of the United Nations Task Force supplying not only military assistance but also humanitarian aid in both arenas.
- Royal Air Force Museum, Cosford, Shifnal, Shropshire, TF11 8UP
- Photos available on request
- Open daily between 1000 – 1800 (Last admission 1700)
- Free admission and parking
- For further information and all media enquiries please contact Karen Crick on 01902 376 208 or karen.crick@rafmuseum.org