

Faster, Stronger, Longer - The New MCH-65

Story by PA2 Bobby Nash, PADET Jacksonville, Fla.

The new MCH-65 may look like any other 65 out there, but this dolphin has teeth and it's ready to take a bite out of crime. All of the Coast Guard's Dolphin helicopters are being upgraded and re-designated as the Multi-Mission Cutter Helicopter.

The upgraded birds will have a large number of improvements and possible configurations, which include upgraded radio capabilities, a heads-up-display to enhance night operations, and an electro-optical sensor system to enhance detection capabilities. This MCH-65 helicopter will also have two new engines; each upgraded engine (the Turbomeca Arriel 2C2-CG turbo shaft engine) has 40 percent more power and allows the helicopter to continue flying even if one of the two engines fails.



Petty Officer 2nd Class (AMT2) Lee Fenton, a member of HITRON, takes aim with a decommissioned .50 caliber precision rifle during training in the St. Johns River, Fla., March 26, 2008. Lee is one of several gunners getting qualified on the new MH-65C dolphin helicopter. HITRON started receiving the new helicopter in September 2007. Some additional features on the new helicopter include a forward-looking infrared device and heads-up-display to enhance night operations, and an electro-optical sensor system to enhance detection capabilities. Photo by PA2 Bobby Nash.

These upgrades were installed by the Coast Guard Acquisition Directorate and the Aviation Repair and Supply Center at Elizabeth City, N.C. The upgrades were part of phase one of the three-phased MCH modernization project, which is being funded by the Acquisition Directorate. The MCH project's second phase will continue to modernize aging and obsolete systems essential to safe flight and install a flight deck recovery and traversing system (for use aboard new ships, such as the National Security Cutter). The third phase will modernize the helicopters' automatic flight control system and cockpit avionics.

When all three phases are complete, the helicopters will be designated as the MCH, denoting their multi-mission capabilities. These improvements will enhance the Coast Guard's ability to stop drug smugglers and better protect America's interests in the coming years.

One-hundred-two MCH-65's are planned for Coast Guard wide implementation, but what about the here and now? Look no further than the nation's premier airborne use of force unit, Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron in Jacksonville.

The Future is Now

Six MH-65Cs can be found at HITRON with more helicopters expected to arrive soon for a total of 10 MH-65C helicopters.

The new helicopter is replacing the MH-68A as the helicopter of choice in the Coast Guard's campaign against drugs. The Coast Guard previously used the MH-68A Stingray with great success; however, in an effort to better compliment the Coast Guard's Deepwater initiative, the Coast Guard allowed the contract to end on the Stingray and made the switch to the MH-65C.

The move allows the Coast Guard to further standardize its helicopter fleet, which helps with maintenance, spare parts and crew knowledge of the aircraft. Although the MH-65C isn't as nimble as its predecessor, it has plenty of upgrades that were lacking from the MH-68A.

"The new aircraft is turning out to be an exceptional aircraft for this [counter narcotics] mission," said Cmdr. Matt Rother, standardization officer and lead instructor pilot at HITRON.

The new platform provides more on scene time, a greater operating area, more available power, higher speeds and comes complete with a smoother ride over the Stingray.

"The great thing that we like is that we can go out on patrol longer, and it's a much smoother ride, which gives the gunner the ability to hit the target much easier than the other aircraft," said Rother.

The new helicopter is still equipped with a precision .50 caliber sniper rifle and M240B machine gun. The sniper rifle is used to disable non-compliant-vessel engines, while the machine gun can be used for warning shots and crew protection.

Passing the Test

The helicopters began arriving at HITRON in September 2007. Since then, HITRON crews have been busy training in the new aircraft and putting them through the paces. Recently, HITRON deployed with the Cutter Bear, from Portsmouth, Va., to the Caribbean Sea in support of Campaign Steel Web.

While on patrol, a Coast Guard C-130 Hercules fixed-wing aircrew from Air Station Clearwater, Fla., conducting law-enforcement patrols in the western Caribbean Sea, sighted a suspicious go-fast vessel March 18. When the smugglers knew they had been detected, the go-fast vessel immediately departed the scene at a high rate of speed.

The Bear launched its embarked MH-65C helicopter and aircrew to stop the vessel. The Bear also launched one of the cutter's small boats with a law-enforcement team aboard.

The smugglers aboard the go-fast vessel were observed dumping bales overboard and continued to flee. The HITRON aircrew used warning shots and disabling fire to try to stop the go-fast. While the smugglers and go-fast eventually evaded capture, the Bear's boarding team recovered 50 bales of cocaine with an estimated value of \$100 million.

“We are proud to have served on the front line of the U.S. Counter Narco-Terrorism efforts over the past two months, and are pleased to have kept more than 3,200 pounds of pure cocaine off the streets of America,” said Cmdr. Raymond W. Pulver, commanding officer of the Bear. “The opportunity to deploy with the Coast Guard’s new aerial Use-of-Force Helicopter, including its first two interdictions, was also very rewarding.”

With all of the benefits of the new aircraft, HITRON is poised for continued success against the war on drugs, and so is the rest of the fleet once all 102 MCH 65’s arrive. Next time you see a Dolphin overhead be sure to look closely. It just might be packing heat.

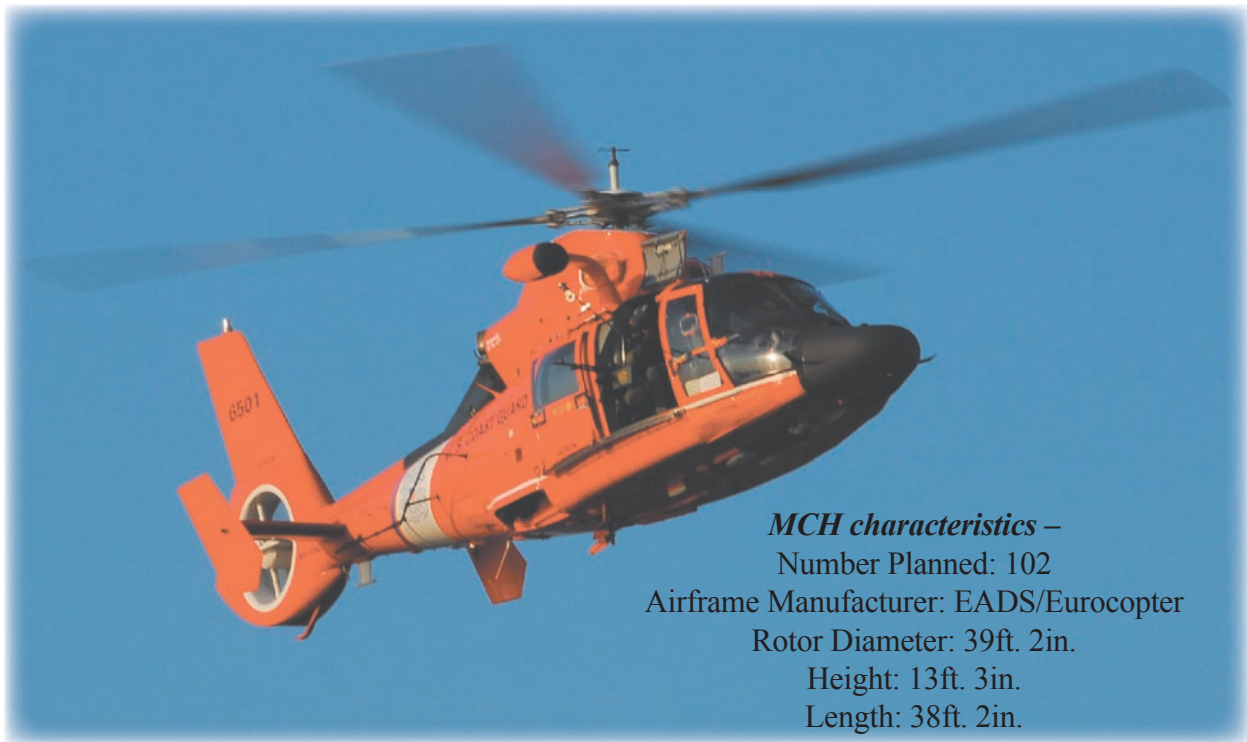


Photo by PAC Donnie Brzuska

MCH characteristics –

Number Planned: 102

Airframe Manufacturer: EADS/Eurocopter

Rotor Diameter: 39ft. 2in.

Height: 13ft. 3in.

Length: 38ft. 2in.

Max Gross Weight: 9,480lbs.

Empty Weight: 5,267lbs

Propulsion Type: Two Turbomeca Arriel 2C2-CG Turboshfts

Fuel Capacity: 1,977lbs

Speed: 165kts

Radius of Action: 150nm

Endurance: 4h

Crew: Three

Armament: M107-derived .50 cal. precision fire weapon;

M240B 7.62mm general purpose machine gun

USCG