



# FACT SHEET

## U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet MH-53 PAVE LOW

The MH-53 Pave Low is a variant of the US Air Force's Sikorsky HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant and the US Navy's CH-53 Sea Stallion. The MH-53 is used for long-range combat search and rescue (CSAR) and was developed to replace the HH-3 Jolly Green Giant. The HH-53s were later upgraded as MH-53 Pave Low series.



In May of 1980, the Air Force's newly operational fleet of nine HH-53H Pave Low CSAR helicopters was abruptly transferred to the special operations forces in response to the failed Iranian hostage rescue attempt and the lack of dedicated long-range vertical lift platforms. Throughout the 1980s, the Pave Low fleet grew to 41 helicopters and expanded from the 20th Special Operations Squadron at Hurlburt Field to include the 21st and 31st Special Operations Squadrons in Europe and East Asia, respectively, in addition to a dedicated training squadron, the 551st Special Operations Squadron at Kirtland Air Force Base, Albuquerque, NM.

The MH-53H evolved into the MH-53J with the fleet expansion and Pave Low development culminated with the fielding of the MH-53M in the late 1990s. During its operational life, the men who flew the Pave Low conducted innumerable missions of national importance. Among a host of other missions, they played an important role in the invasion of Panama in 1989; led the first missions of the [1991](#) and 2003 wars in Iraq; [rescued a US pilot in Iraq in 1990](#); evacuated the American Embassy in Liberia in 1996; led the successful rescue missions for both US pilots shot down in Serbia in 1999; conducted the longest-ever helicopter rescues at sea in the North Atlantic in 1989 and 2002; flew daring raids in Afghanistan in 2001-2002; seized strategic oil pumping facilities in Iraq in 2003; and led scores of dangerous missions in Iraq from 2003 until the end of Pave Low operations.

Fitting of the rich history of the beloved "steel horse," during the sunset of her service life, the MH-53 and her crews flew in combat for the final seven years of their valorous service. This aircraft, 68-10928, flew its last mission in combat in Iraq in the summer of 2007. It was maintained, launched, and recovered by the men and women of the [1st Special Operations Helicopter Maintenance Squadron](#), and was flown by the men of the [20th Special Operations Squadron](#).

### MH-53M TAIL #68-10928 HISTORY

The MH-53M on display at the Air Park was manufactured by Sikorsky Aircraft, Bridgeport, Conn., and delivered to the Air Force on July 2, 1970. It was a much traveled aircraft with assignments at various locations in Thailand, Germany, United Kingdom, Philippines, and South Korea. This helicopter took part in the May 1975 [Mayaguez Rescue](#) operation and sustained major battle damage to the engine, rotor blades, and instrument panel ([refer to page 45 of PACAF's report](#)). The legacy of tail

number 68-10928 came to a close in the hands of Maj. Frank Cooper, 20th Special Operations Squadron, who piloted the MH-53 on its final flight July 29, 2007 in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. The aircraft was retired and put on display in the Air Park on December 3, 2007.

**Point Of Contact**

1st Special Operations Wing, History Office, 131 Bartley St., Suite 246; Hurlburt Field, FL 32544-5271; DSN 579-6507 or (850) 884-6507; e-mail: [1sow.ho.dl@hurlburt.af.mil](mailto:1sow.ho.dl@hurlburt.af.mil)