

Special Delivery / Vietnam-era helicopter joins ranks at Hill Aerospace Museum



(MATTHEW HATFIELD/Standard-Examiner) Jim "Pappy" Walters, a civilian contractor test pilot, smiles Thursday after landing at Hill Air Force Base the last MH-53M still flying in the U.S. Air Force

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HILL AIR FORCE BASE -- The Hill Aerospace Museum added a new member to its family of historic aircraft Thursday afternoon.

A Vietnam-era MH-53M Pave Low helicopter, tail number 68-10367, was flown into Hill from Hurlburt Field in Florida and will be put on permanent display at the base museum.

"This is going to be a beautiful addition to our collection," said Hill Museum Director Scott Wirz as the helicopter became visible on the horizon over the Wasatch Mountains.

The 37-year-old aircraft was flown in by a crew of seven. It had actually been on the base before. The helicopter was first used by the 1550th Aircrew Training and Test Wing at Hill.

"That was the last flight for this bird in the Air Force," retired flight engineer Rick Simmon said of his travels to the base. "She served us well."

Simmon, who now works at the Hurlburt Field Air Force Installation, was stationed at Hill from 1974-75 and served on the aircraft during Vietnam.

"We did a lot of combat rescue missions with it in the southern part of Vietnam," Simmon said. "We were shot at and hit a bunch of times, but we never went down. It's just kind of a sad day to know I won't ever fly it again."

The chopper was also used at Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii to recover fill canisters ejected by Project Corona, a U.S. military reconnaissance satellite system run by the CIA and the U.S. Air Force. It was used for photographic surveillance of the Soviet Union, China and other areas from June 1959 to May 1972.

"It was dirty and greasy and ugly, but it got the job done," said Jim Walters, a retired Army and Air Force pilot who flew the plane in from Florida. "It's a piece of history."

All MH-53M Pave Low helicopters are being retired from the Air Force inventory and will be replaced by the CV-22 Osprey.

Many of the Air Force models will be delivered to various military bases around the world to showcase the aircraft's importance in Air Force history.

Wirz said the helicopter weighs about 46,000 pounds and is 88 feet long and 25 feet high.

After crews disassemble some of its parts, it will be transported from Hill's flightline to the museum by truck and will be placed on display within the next few weeks.

The Hill Aerospace Museum was founded in 1981 as a part of the United States Air Force Heritage Program.

The museum exhibits more than 80 military aircraft, missiles, and aerospace vehicles on the grounds and inside the Major General Rex A. Hadley Gallery and the Lindquist Stewart Fighter Gallery.



The last MH-53 from Hurlburt is on the ground at Hill AFB, A/C 369. The end of an era.
Got this off the PJ email server (Gary Pruitt)