

Headquartered in England, this USAF squadron musters its HH-53Cs, HH-3Es, and HC-130 fixed-wings to respond to combat or peacetime rescue requests throughout Europe—and miles and miles beyond.

By Giovanni de Briganti
Reporting from RAF Woodbridge

THE MISSION is search and rescue; the area of responsibility is approximately 68 million square miles (1.76 million km²) ex-

Hercules turboprops and five Sikorsky HH-53C Super Jolly Green Giants, are based at Woodbridge, used exclusively by the USAF and from where the 67th has immediate access to NATO's Northern and Central European theaters. The squadron also maintains three overseas detachments which cover practically all of NATO's Allied Command Europe (ACE) area.

Strategically detached

Based at Keflavik, Iceland, Detachment 14 is the most active in the SAR role; its three HH-3Es are constantly made available for missions in support of civilian rescue efforts. Much of its activity consists of picking up injured or disabled crewmen from ships—including Soviet ones—in the North Atlantic. The Detachment, comprising 11 officers

The U.S. Air Force's 67th ARRS: Going the Distance for Rescues



tending from the North Pole to the South Pole and from the mid-Atlantic Ocean east to Burma's border.

This ambitious task is the duty of the 67th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron (ARRS), a unit of the U.S. Air Force based at the British Royal Air Force (RAF) base Woodbridge.

Transferred from Moron, Spain, in 1970, the 67th ARRS' deployment at Woodbridge, which is on the East Anglian coast near Ipswich, is significant not only for its primary mission—combat search and rescue (SAR) for NATO in Europe—but also for its peacetime SAR assignment throughout this immense area of responsibility.

The squadron's headquarters and its largest flying group, comprised of five HC-130

and 41 enlisted men, also maintains an HC-130 on permanent, 24-hour alert for SAR missions. Since 1971, it has chalked up the very impressive figure of 210 lives saved.

Detachment 2, deployed at Ramstein Air Base in Central Germany, principally flies VIP transport missions in support of various Air Force European commands, with combat SAR being a very secondary mission. Even in wartime, VIP transport and liaison would remain its main job. The detachment flies four VIP-configured Bell UH-1Ns, and comprises 12 officers and nine enlisted men.

A third subunit, Detachment 9, is based at Zaragoza, Spain, where its principal mission is air support of a USAF training range. In wartime, it would revert to its primary mission of combat rescue. Consisting of seven

officers and 27 enlisted men, Detachment 9 operates three Bell UH-1Ns.

Overall, the 67th ARRS comprises 320 people and flies five fixed-wing aircraft and 15 helicopters—a small force considering the size of the assigned mission area.

Long-range SAR

However, effective mission tasking tends to be restricted to the NATO area. In the past, the unit has flown missions to Saudi Arabia and to the Congo but, over the last five years, its longest deployments have been to Norway, Italy, Morocco, and Turkey.

The very long-range capabilities of the squadron's HC-130s, HH-3Es, and HH-53Cs—thanks to in-flight refueling—make it possible for extremely long-range missions to be flown in short times, the only real limitation to mission range being crew fatigue.

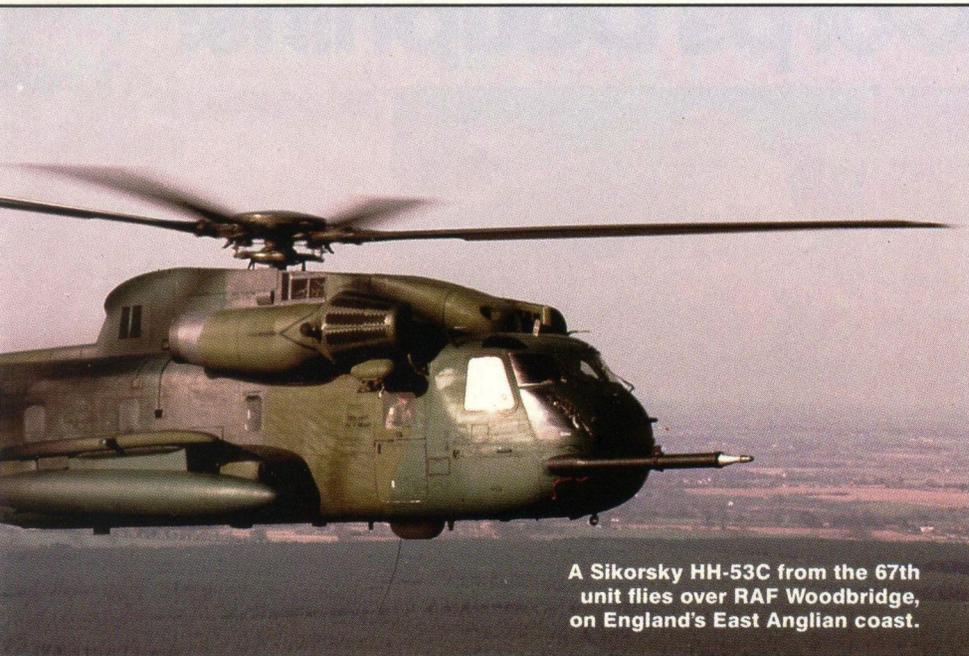
Probably the longest helicopter mission flown by the unit in recent years took place in 1983, when its HH-53s flew nonstop from Brindisi, in Southern Italy, to Woodbridge in nine hours and 45 minutes, with four in-flight refuelings. Another long-range, but more routine, mission is flown by HH-3Es from Keflavik to Woodbridge. The most recent one, flown last August, took 11.8 flying hours with one intermediate stop.

Although some detachments, such as the one in Keflavik, are on permanent standby for SAR missions, this is not true of the HH-53s stationed in Woodbridge. This is because, as notes the 67th's commander, Col. Robert E. Thomas, "The British have an excellent SAR system, and because of this we are not used more often."

Elaborating, Operation Director Lt. Col. Louis E. Glass adds, "The British only come to us when they have a need for long-range or long-on-station times," where the HH-53s, used in combination with the HC-130s, pro-

A pararescueman from the 67th ARRS supports a downed aircrewman while being winched aboard one of the unit's HH-53Cs during a practice exercise.





A Sikorsky HH-53C from the 67th unit flies over RAF Woodbridge, on England's East Anglian coast.

vide a capability that is unique in Europe. A recent example of this was in the wake of the Air India Boeing 747 crash last summer (see sidebar).

When the 67th is called upon to assist in SAR operations in the UK, the British Plymouth Rescue Coordination Center (RCC) requests assistance from the Joint RCC at Ramstein, which controls U.S. mili-

tary SAR assets throughout Europe. "In a life-threatening situation," says Glass, "we will always find volunteers to come back at any hour." In a recent case, the crew and ground crew for an HH-53 was called in at 11:30 p.m. and the aircraft was ready to launch 30 minutes later.

In addition to on-call missions, the 67th has on occasion put one of its HH-53s on a 24-

hour alert to replace a British SAR helicopter which, for various reasons, was unavailable. This, however, tends to be the exception.

Wartime combat rescues

Although, by necessity, the 67th is active in peacetime SAR, its primary mission remains combat rescue, principally, although not exclusively, of downed aircrewmembers.

In wartime, the unit would deploy to Forward Operating Locations (FOLs) in Continental Europe but their number and location, unlike those for other aircraft such as the A-10s and the E-3As, are kept a closely guarded secret. So is another of the unit's missions, which is low-level transport of Special Operations Forces. Even that this mission exists is not officially recognized by the unit, although it is self-evident and well-known fact.

For combat rescue operations, the squadron has a wide variety of specialized equipment. The most spectacular pieces are those carried by the pararescue specialists (PJs), of which the squadron has 35. These specialists have all received extensive emergency medical training (an eight-week course at Kirkland AFB, N.M., on traumatic injuries, minor surgery, and childbirth, followed by a

(Continued on Page 72)

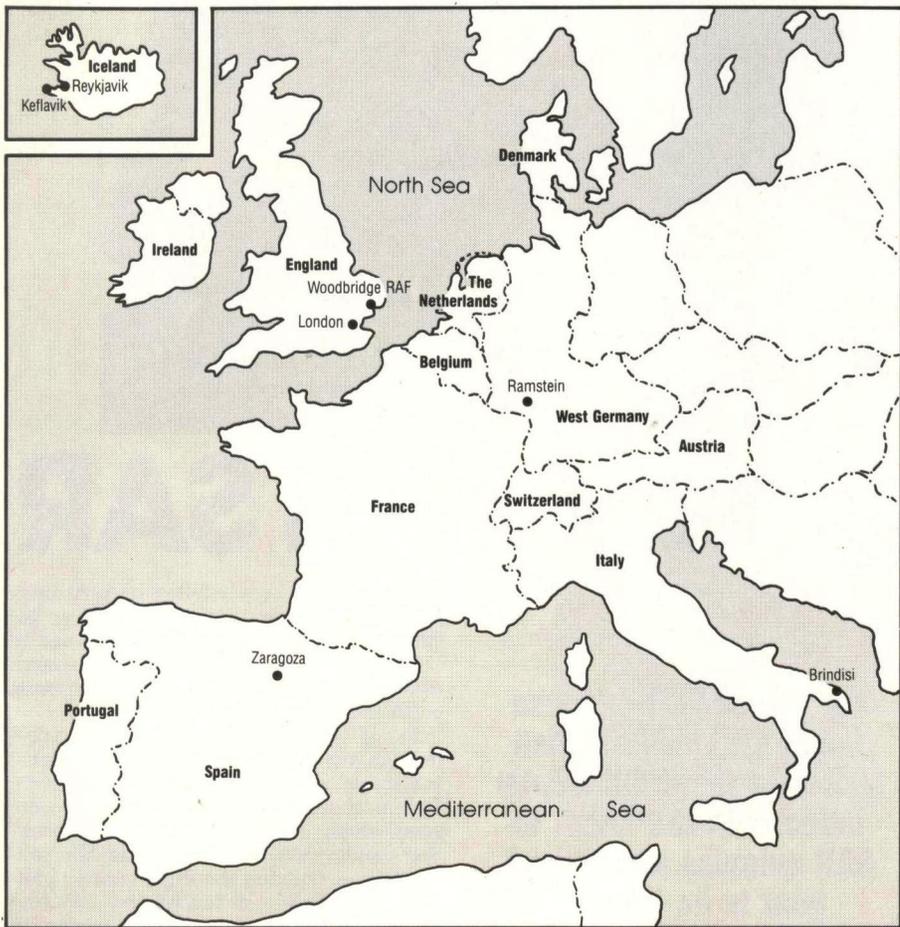
Searching for Air India 747

"The worst thing we have ever done." This is the way a 67th ARRS pararescueman described, at the time, the unit's deployment to Cork, Ireland, to search for survivors of the Air India 747 which crashed into the Atlantic last June, killing 325 people. The sentence describes the unit's disappointment at not recovering any survivors, and at the ghastly state of the bodies they recovered.

When it became apparent the 747 had gone down, Plymouth Rescue Coordination Center (RCC) altered all available SAR assets. The Ramstein-based Joint RCC immediately diverted to the scene of the accident an HC-130 which was en route from Keflavik back to Woodbridge. Shortly afterward, two HH-53s and an additional HC-130 were launched from Woodbridge. These aircraft constantly patrolled the area searching for survivors, recovering both bodies and wreckage.

From the third day, one HC-130 assumed local command of all SAR assets involved, orbiting above, and coordinating the British, Irish, and USAF helicopters involved. The unit's pararescuemen dived on several occasions to recover bodies and wreckage, despite the widespread presence of sharks. Most helicopter search patterns were flown "low and slow," in which the machines flew at 10 knots and 10 feet above the sea.

By the time the helicopter search was called off because of the obvious impossibility of finding survivors, the aircraft of the 67th ARRS had flown 46.1 hours, in eight sorties, over a two-day period June 23 to 25. The aircraft returned to Woodbridge on June 25.



67th ARRS

(Continued from Page 51)

refresher course every three years) as well as specialist training which allows them to parachute, scuba dive, and mountain climb their way to a survivor and give medical treatment as necessary before evacuation.

Keeping the HH-53s flying

The HH-53 aircrews come from a variety of backgrounds. They include helicopter pilots fresh out of flying school—with sometimes as little as 50 helicopter hours—as well as Vietnam veterans with several thousand helicopter hours. The average flying experience of the unit's 22 helicopter pilots is 2,076 flying hours, of which between 600 and 700 have been flown on the HH-53.

In the average month, a typical pilot will fly 11.6 hours, a copilot 11.9 hours, and a flight engineer 15.8 hours; this total can reach about 40 hours for an instructor pilot. These figures are rather low but, since the squadron maintains 1.5 crews per helicopter,

The 67th's Detachment 14, located in Keflavik, Iceland, operates this HH-3E.



the limited flying time must be shared between all crewmembers.

In the three-month period between April and June 1985, the five HH-53s flew some 580 hours: 65% for training missions, 30% for operational missions, and fully 5% for checkout flights. The average sortie lasts 3.5 hours, which means that each HH-53 flew about 11 sorties per month.

This is due to the limited availability of the HH-53, which is well-known for being what is euphemistically described as a "labor-intensive machine to maintain." Says Col. Thomas, "When it flies, it's truly a Cadillac. It's a very complicated piece of machinery but it's also a tough old bird."

Notwithstanding, since each flight hour needs 48 maintenance man-hours, availability is necessarily limited, and the unit has "to maximize the work in each training sortie" because of low flight time; "sorties are packed with events."

The machine's inherent maintenance difficulties, such as the automatic flight controls (very difficult to fine-tune) or its main-rotor blades (very labor-intensive to maintain) are felt more acutely than would otherwise be the case because the USAF's small (about 50) fleet of HH-53s are spread throughout the world, worsening spare parts supply. In addition, the airframes are all quite old (the 67th's five machines were all built in 1969) and all were used in combat, resulting in higher fatigue levels.

Availability figures are classified but the maintenance cancellation rate of scheduled missions was 12.25% during the first five months of 1985. The real situation is, however, much worse since missions are simply not scheduled when maintenance problems arise.

The biggest maintenance problem, according to Lt. Col. L. Thomas, the maintenance director, is that the HH-53 fleet's small size and its dispersion means that there is a constant dearth of experienced maintenance technicians qualified on the type. "Training in systems knowledge is our biggest problem," he says, "as there is no maintenance continuity."

Mission requirements

For its combat rescue and recovery mission, the HH-53 is equipped with armor plating, self-sealing fuel tanks, an external rescue hoist with 250 feet (76 m) of control cable, and three 7.62mm miniguns. It has an automatic flight control system, instruments for all-weather operations (TACAN, VOR, DME, full IFR capability); its Doppler navigation

system is old, however, and not really reliable, while the "anti-ice or deice capability is short," according to one pilot. Two of the unit's helicopters are also fitted with an electronic location finder.

The HH-53 is equipped with a retractable in-flight refueling probe; two 315-gallon (1,190-l), self-sealing bladder fuel tanks; and two 450-gallon (1,700-l) auxiliary fuel tanks on lateral mounts. It also has a gas turbine auxiliary power unit.

For 67th ARRS missions, the crew of five includes pilot, copilot, flight mechanic, and two pararescuemen; the latter three also serve as gunners for the miniguns as needed. The HH-53 can carry 24 stretcher patients and four medical attendants, or 18,500 pounds (8,400 kg) of freight. Its external cargo hook has a 20,000-pound (9,100-kg) capacity.

Although the Air Force will introduce the HH-60 rescue helicopter, no plans have been announced to have it replace the HH-53s of the 67th ARRS. And, from what the pilots seem to feel, such a change would not be welcome. Despite its maintenance problems and limited availability, the HH-53 is much appreciated as a fast, comfortable, and very versatile helicopter, with a maneuverability that is truly exceptional for its size. A full systems modernization package, it is felt, would be a much more efficient way to update the unit's already considerable capabilities. ■

**Yes,
We Admit
It...
We're Only
Interested
In Your
Body.**

**Military and Commercial
Repairs**

- Specializing In
- Honeycomb Bonded Structure Repairs
- Honeycomb Component Replacements
- Consolidation And Consignment Of Inventory
- Immediate Delivery Worldwide
- FAA Repair Station 265-8
- New Manufacturer of Bonded Structures

HELICOMB INTERNATIONAL

Helicopter Honeycomb Panels are our only business

Contact: Bob Austin or Susan Schlecht

6956 East Thirteenth Street
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74112
(918) 835-3999
Telex 796168 HELICOMB TUL

(Circle No. 66 on Reader Inquiry Card)
ROTOR & WING INTERNATIONAL/APRIL 1986