

NEW HELICOPTERS ENHANCE FORCE FIGHTING POWER

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This is the second installment in a series of updates on the impact of decisions made at last year's warfighters conference on shaping specific aviation communities. Last issue, I discussed our maritime patrol and reconnaissance (MPR) forces. This article focuses on the continued critical contributions of Naval Aviation's helicopter community.

The warfighters recognized the importance of a reliable and efficient helicopter force to the long-term success of naval expeditionary forces. In fact, future carrier battle groups will rely even more heavily on organic helicopters for maritime dominance, specifically antisubmarine warfare, antisurface warfare (ASUW) and airborne mine countermeasures (AMCM). Instead of regarding helicopters as merely extending the capabilities of the individual ships from which they operate, the warfighters envisioned a total battle force answer for organic helicopters in which a strengthened concept of operations (CONOPS) and streamlined command and staff relationships complement the enhanced warfighting capability of the new generation of helicopters under development. Beyond traditional missions, such as battle group core logistics, search and rescue (SAR) and an enhanced role in maritime dominance, helicopter forces will be key enablers for 21st century warfighting, providing critical surveillance, sensor netting and maritime strike capability within a network centric warfare environment.

The Helicopter Master Plan is the linchpin for developing a modern, total force solution to increase fleet capability and lethality in the littorals. The essence of the master plan is the transformation of the helicopter community from a multi-platform force of seven type/model/series aircraft into a tightly focused force comprising two extremely capable versions of the H-60, namely the SH-60R and the CH-60S. This transformation will accomplish two key objectives. First and foremost, it will greatly enhance the



An SH-60 *Seahawk* attached to Helicopter Antisubmarine Squadron Light 47 fires an AGM-114B Hellfire missile during training operations off San Clemente Island, Calif., in August 1999.

warfighting capabilities of the helicopter force: the SH-60R and CH-60S will be, without question, the most technologically advanced helicopters ever to enter the fleet. Secondly, by necking down to a force of two H-60 variants, we will be able to capitalize on the efficiencies of a single maintenance, logistics and training pipeline, resulting in significant cost reductions and better supportability.

The SH-60R will amplify the capabilities of surface combatants in all mission areas. A remanufacture of existing H-60 B, F and H versions will make each aircraft approximately 80 percent new—including the entire cockpit, cabin, associated wiring, avionics and aircraft systems. Optimized for littoral operations with a multi-mode inverse synthetic aperture radar, active dipping sonar, advanced electronic support measures, upgraded satellite communications, integrated self-defense, the Penguin missile and the forward-looking infrared sensor (FLIR)/Hellfire weapon system, this battle group asset is designed to shoulder a greater portion of the littoral strike mission in support of maritime dominance. The SH-60R conducted its first flight in December

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1999 and is on track for fleet introduction in 2002. The first operational deployment is targeted for 2005.

The CH-60S, an entirely new production aircraft, is equally essential as the multi-mission support centerpiece of tomorrow's naval expeditionary forces. Completing its first flight in January 2000, the schedule for operational testing and fleet introduction of the CH-60S supports a 28-month acceleration of the retirement of the venerable but overextended CH-46. To be sure, the CH-60S will capably fill multi-mission helicopter requirements—such as vertical replenishment, passenger/mail/cargo transport, day/night SAR, combat SAR and special warfare support—but it will also provide an organic, battle force-ready AMCM capability critical to maritime dominance in the littorals. Phases I and II of the AMCM proof-of-concept testing have already been completed, with the CH-60S demonstrating the ability to perform all necessary AMCM profiles. The CH-60S will also have the capability to employ the AAS-44 FLIR and Hellfire missile, expanding its missions to include ASUW.

The tremendous leap in capability represented in these aircraft has compelled Naval Aviation to reexamine fundamental concepts of operation, community organization and command and staff relationships for the naval helicopter force. Commander Second Fleet, VAdm. Fallon, has taken the lead on this initiative and has recently completed a study of helicopter CONOPS for the 21st century. A working group of action officers representing all helicopter communities on both coasts, the H-60 Fleet Introduction Team, the Center for Naval Analyses, Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 1, and the Naval Air Reserve Force was chartered to examine questions of organizational structure and tactical employment. Options considered ranged from preserving the status quo to creating composite squadrons or squadrons aligned by primary mission or airframe type. A flag-level panel chaired by Commander Second Fleet and comprising senior officers representing the fleet and OPNAV reviewed the results of the working group's analysis and has recommended a CONOPS supported by a helicopter force organization aligned first by platform and then by mission. Briefed by VAdm. Fallon at the most recent meeting of the Navy Helicopter Association, the Second Fleet study is an important step in defining the right processes and organization to complement the tremendous technological improvements in the SH-60R and CH-60S in order to optimize the warfighting capability of the Navy's helicopter force.

On a personal note, this will be my last "Flightline" article as Director, Air Warfare. It has been a privilege to serve Naval Aviation in the Pentagon, and I would like to thank all those on the team who work hard day in and day out to make Naval Aviation the nation's force of choice. Hot on my six is my replacement, RAdm. Mike "Wizard" McCabe, just back from the fleet as Commander Carrier Group 3. Prior to commanding the *Vinson* (CVN 70) battle group, Wizard worked right here as Head, Aviation Plans and Requirements Branch, so he brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to carry Naval Aviation into the 21st century.

To all of the wonderful professionals who help keep Naval Aviation on the cutting edge and who have made this tour a real pleasure for me personally, I thank you for your tremendous support.



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