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Pave Low Takes Flight After Milestone Depot Repair Effort

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CHERRY POINT, N.C. (NNS) -- An Air Force helicopter took to the skies over eastern Carolina for a test flight April 14, marking another maintenance milestone for the Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) Depot Cherry Point.

"It was a notable occasion, because this is the first time we ever sectioned an H-53 Air Force aircraft and put it together to this extent," Planner and Estimator Dan Anthony said. "The helicopter had two cracked frames, and in order to repair it, a section of fuselage was removed from another Air Force H-53 and installed in place of the damaged section. This was our first major repair for the Air Force, and the work was done in record time."

The MH-53M Pave Low was damaged during a hard landing in Afghanistan and was delivered to the depot in three sections on three flatbed trucks. Other parts and components were delivered later. The helicopter was inducted April 10, 2002, and depot engineers took charge of evaluating the extent of the damage and determining the level of repair that would be needed.

"It was a unique circumstance," Anthony said. "This was the first time that our engineers took responsibility for the repair of an Air Force aircraft."

Anthony explained that due to the high priority of the special operations missions they fly in support of the war on terror, the Air Force placed a high priority on the repair of the Pave Low and provided funding for the work. In response, depot maintenance and support personnel worked 24/7 to get the job done.

It was a real team effort. Sheet Metal mechanics performed structural removals, manufactured parts, and installed parts and components; airframes and electrical artisans did all components and systems rigging and performed ground checks; and a variety of support personnel interfaced with the Air Force, wrote contracts, and coordinated with the production people to accomplish required tasks. A total of 203 components were replaced, and it took about 20,000 man-hours of labor to complete the job.

"We knew this was something special," Anthony said. "Everyone felt a sense of pride being involved with this helicopter. Seeing it fly and comparing how it was when it came in here to how it is now was really awesome. It's a great before and after story, and we're all very proud."

"This was a great effort by everyone involved," Industrial Specialist Lee Bagwell said. "It shows the true capabilities of the artisans on the floor. Given the chance, they can do just about anything, and it is certainly a plus for the warfighter to have support like we provide here at the depot."

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