

Merlin Mk3 Helicopter Completes First Transcontinental Self-Deployment

Cross-Country Flight Demonstrates Capability, Reliability for US101 Marine One Mission

Britain's Royal Air Force has successfully self-deployed an EH101 Merlin Mk3 helicopter across the southern tier of the United States -- from San Diego, CA, to Jacksonville, FL, demonstrating the helicopter's superior capabilities and reliability. This event marks the first time an EH101 helicopter has visited the West coast, and the first time an EH101 helicopter has flown across America.

Home-based at RAF Benson in Oxfordshire, England, and operated by the Royal Air Force's 28 (Army Cooperation) Squadron, the combat-proven EH101 Merlin is the platform on which the US101 medium-lift executive transport helicopter is based.

"During the past five weeks, this lone Mk3 helicopter has flown approximately 5,000 miles, with virtually no support, in a variety of climates and on a demanding schedule with daily deadlines," said RAF Wing Commander Andy Turner, commanding officer of 28 (AC) Squadron and leader of the transcontinental self-deployment demonstration. "During this time, we have not missed a single planned activity or event as the helicopter has maintained an availability rate of 100 percent."

The RAF Merlin Mk3 has been in the United States since September 20, conducting operational testing at an undisclosed military base on the West Coast in preparation for a possible deployment to Iraq. Enroute to its point of embarkation back to the United Kingdom, the Merlin Mk3 conducted flight demonstrations in San Diego, Albuquerque, Amarillo and Fort Worth, TX, Jackson, MS, Jacksonville and Fort Walton Beach, FL, and New Orleans. For the flight home, the Merlin Mk3 was transported by an RAF C-17 Globemaster III transport aircraft -- just as it was when first brought to the United States earlier this fall.

Team US101 is offering the American-built US101 helicopter to the U.S. Navy to meet the service's Presidential Helicopter Replacement (VXX) program needs. The Navy's VXX award announcement is expected in December.

More than 200 companies in 41 states have been chosen to support Team US101 with key products and services necessary for the President's new Marine One helicopter fleet. Other leading American companies on Team US101 include General Electric, ITT, Northrop Grumman, Kaman Aerospace and Palomar Products. During the course of the helicopter fleet's operational service life, 90 percent of the total life cycle costs will flow to Team US101's American suppliers, creating and sustaining thousands of jobs nationwide while building these new Marine One helicopters.

Team US101 is led by Lockheed Martin Systems Integration -- Owego, which serves as the prime contractor and systems integrator for the American-built US101 aircraft, an American variant of AgustaWestland's successful EH101 multimission helicopter. The US101 team collectively brings unmatched rotorcraft expertise and experience to this program: Lockheed Martin (prime contractor and systems integration), AgustaWestland (aircraft design) and Bell Helicopter (aircraft production), while General Electric will supply each helicopter with three, 2,500 shaft-horsepower CT7-8E engines.

For additional information visit: <http://www.teamus101.com/>

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