CH-53K Helicopter Assembly Line Opens At Sikorsky Florida Facility

WEST PALM BEACH, Florida - Sikorsky Aircraft Corp. officially opened a new facility at its Florida Assembly and Flight Operations (FAFO) campus, establishing experimental assembly line operations for the new CH-53K heavy lift helicopter. Sikorsky Aircraft is a subsidiary of United Technologies Corp. (NYSE: UTX).

Since 1959, United Technologies Corporation has been in operation in Palm Beach County with Pratt & Whitney military engine programs and Sikorsky development and certification programs that have included research aircraft such as the XH-59, fly-by-wire aircraft and the UH-60M BLACK HAWK helicopter.

“The production of the next generation of heavy lift helicopter prototype is underway,” said Dennis Jarvi, vice president, Navy and Marine Corps Programs for Sikorsky.

“As we commence assembly line operations at FAFO, we are witnessing the dawn of a new age in rotorcraft development and construction. The CH-53K helicopter is being digitally designed and manufactured. We have created ‘virtual tools’ that will improve the learning process and identify and solve issues before they become costly delays in manufacturing. The CH-53K helicopter stands to become a model of innovative technology and capability when it takes its role in the fleet.”

The CH-53K helicopter Florida Assembly and Flight Operations facility consists of approximately 60,000 square feet of space. The building, originally the home of Pratt & Whitney-Rocketdyne, has been completely updated to create a modern assembly area. Overhead power and air dropdowns, new aircraft work stands, and overhead cranes have been installed to support aircraft final assembly and rotor head/quality control assembly operations.

The state-of-the-art facility also provides wireless data connections to all operator plasma data screens. The new FAFO operation will introduce the use of digital operation sheets to aid in assembly and operate a four-position flight line to produce the new aircraft.

“The CH-53K helicopter team has combined the new advances in technology with the learning of more than 70 years of manufacturing into a robust process that is expected to gain significant efficiencies during the build of the aircraft,” said John Johnson, CH-53K helicopter program manager.

Five System Development and Demonstration (SDD) prototype aircraft will be built at the FAFO facility, with two additional airframe test articles produced at Sikorsky’s main manufacturing plant in Stratford, Conn. Once assembled, the aircraft will be delivered to the Sikorsky Development Flight Center (DFC) in West Palm Beach, Fla., to undergo flight testing.

Mick Maurer, president of Sikorsky Military Systems, said: “The Development Flight Center has been the starting point of many storied aircraft programs for Sikorsky. From building the S-76® series aircraft to testing the complex CH148 helicopter and flying the revolutionary X2 Technology™ demonstrator, the DFC has a history that will soon have a new success story to add to its resumé: the impressive, powerful CH-53K helicopter.”

Sikorsky Aircraft received a $3 billion System Development and Demonstration (SDD) contract on April 5, 2006 to develop a replacement for the U.S. Marine Corps CH-53E heavy lift helicopter. The new aircraft program is planned to include production of more than 200 aircraft. Currently, the CH-53K helicopter is in the SDD phase with all of the major subcontracts awarded and valued at over $1.1B.

The CH-53K helicopter will maintain virtually the same footprint as its predecessor, the three-engine CH-53E SUPER STALLION™ helicopter, but will nearly triple the payload to 27,000 pounds over 110 nautical miles under “high hot” ambient conditions. The CH-53E helicopter is currently the largest, most powerful marinized helicopter in the world. It is deployed from Marine Corps amphibious assault ships to transport personnel and equipment and to carry external (sling) cargo loads.

The CH-53K helicopter’s maximum gross weight (MGW) with internal loads is 74,000 pounds compared to 69,750 pounds for the CH-53E aircraft. The CH-53K’s MGW with external loads is 88,000 pounds as compared to 73,500 for the CH-53E helicopter.

Features of the CH-53K helicopter include: a modern glass cockpit; fly-by-wire flight controls; fourth generation rotor blades with anhedral tips; a low-maintenance elastomeric rotor head; upgraded engines; a locking cargo rail system; external cargo handling improvements; survivability enhancements; and improved reliability, maintainability and supportability. The program is expected to achieve the Initial Operational Capability milestone in FY18.

Sikorsky Aircraft Corp., based in Stratford, Conn., is a world leader in helicopter design, manufacture, and service. United Technologies Corp., based in Hartford, Conn., provides a broad range of high technology products and support services to the aerospace and building systems industries.

This press release contains forward-looking statements concerning potential production and sale of helicopters. Actual results may differ materially from those projected as a result of certain risks and uncertainties, including but not limited to changes in government procurement priorities and practices, budget plans or availability of funding or in the number of aircraft to be built; challenges in the design, development, production and support of advanced technologies; as well as other risks and uncertainties, including but not limited to those detailed from time to time in United Technologies Corporation’s Securities and Exchange Commission filings.