PAVE HAWK Helicopters Achieve 10,000 Flight Hour Milestone

STRATFORD, Connecticut -

Nearly 30 years after entering service with the U.S. Air Force, two HH-60G PAVE HAWK helicopters have both achieved 10,000 flight hours during their simultaneous flights on Aug. 30 over Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M. The Sikorsky Aircraft designed-and-built helicopters are the first-ever U.S. Air Force H-60 aircraft to have reached this high flight time milestone. Sikorsky is a subsidiary of United Technologies Corp. (NYSE: UTX).

Designated by their tail numbers 81-23680 and 81-23644, the aircraft are two of 12 operated by the 512thRescue Squadron, which trains HH-60G pilots, flight engineers and gunners for combat search and rescue missions. Two additional aircraft from the same squadron — part of the 58th Special Operations Wing (SOW) — are each expected to achieve 10,000 flight hours later this month.

“As the Air Force’s only personnel recovery training organization, we expect a 10,000 hour helicopter to go do some hard flying days and nights during very challenging flight profiles that are as close as it gets to operating in Afghanistan,” said Col. James L Cardoso, commander, 58th SOW. “And although 3,000 hours past their intended service life, these HH-60G helicopters lose very few sorties, which is a testament to a great aircraft and the fantastic job performed by our maintainers and operators.”

The two aircraft took off together for the 1.5-hour flight, surpassing 10,000 flight hours while on return to base. The 10 passengers on board each aircraft included high and low flight time instructor pilots, student pilots, flight engineers and gunners.

The two aircraft entered operational service in December 1982 (81-23680) and February 1983 (81-23644), respectively, retiring from deployed service in 1994 after nearly 5,000 flight hours in theaters worldwide. During the ensuing 17 years, the 512th Rescue Squadron has amassed an additional 5,000 hours per aircraft, averaging 250 to 300 hours each year.

“This milestone puts an exclamation point on what has been an incredible 50-year partnership for our nation, Air Force Rescue and Sikorsky Aircraft,” said Tim Healy, Sikorsky’s director for Air Force programs. “Igor Sikorsky himself was an enormous fan of the then Air Rescue Service, the forerunner to today’s Air Force Combat Rescue forces, when he said that these airmen ‘have contributed one of the most glorious pages in the history of human flight.’ Sikorsky’s words are even more appropriate today, given the thousands of lives Air Force rescue operators have saved in Afghanistan and Iraq.”

Sikorsky Aircraft commemorated the event with a donation of $10,000 to the That Others May Live (TOML) foundation, a non-profit charitable organization that provides post-secondary educational assistance and other aid to the children and families of Fallen United States Air Force Rescue Heroes who gave the ultimate sacrifice during a rescue mission, training, or other Personnel Recovery (PR) collateral mission.

The 12 HH-60G aircraft operated today by the 512th Rescue Squadron were among the initial deliveries of 112 HH-60 PAVE HAWK helicopters to the U.S Air Force during the early to mid 1980s. An air refueling probe and internal fuel tanks gave the aircraft extended operational reach. In 1991, the Air Force upgraded more than two-thirds of the fleet to HH-60G configuration with satellite communications, inertial navigation/global positioning/Doppler navigation systems and secure communications.