CHC And Sikorsky Commemorate Historic Transatlantic Flight



DALLAS, TEXAS, May 31, 2017 – CHC Group and Sikorsky, a Lockheed Martin Company, are marking the 52nd anniversary of their collaboration on the first transatlantic ferry flight by a civilian helicopter, which was also the first unescorted crossing of the Atlantic by helicopter. This milestone was completed in a Sikorsky S-61N operated by Okanagan Helicopters, which later became CHC.

The aircraft was selected to support a joint venture between Okanagan and British European Airways (BEA) Helicopters, named International Helicopters Ltd., to provide offshore support for Shell in the United Kingdom. The decision to fly the Atlantic rather than ship it saved $26,000 (about $200,000 today) and helped put the aircraft and crew in the history books. The joint venture also introduced the very first Sikorsky S-61N helicopters to support offshore oil and gas exploration in the North Sea.

Okanagan and Sikorsky worked together to prepare the helicopter for the trip, including building the route, securing an increase in gross weight of 21,500 lbs and fitting with a long-range cabin fuel tank to help increase the safety margin for the trip. The all-Canadian ferry crew was composed of World War II veterans from Okanagan and United Aircraft of Canada (UAC - Sikorsky's Canadian agent) with more than 60 years of combined experience: Okanagan pilot Thomas C. Scheer, UAC test pilot W. Ross Lennox, Okanagan maintenance engineer Keith Rutledge and Thomas Harrison, a UAC senior service representative.

The aircraft, S-61N, CF-OKY, followed a flight path that featured several stops and difficult weather in a number of locations. They first left Longueuil, Quebec on May 14 headed north, eventually reaching Frobisher Bay, Baffin Island (now Iqaluit, Nunavut). They encountered strong winds and freezing rain with low ceilings in northern Quebec that kept the S-61N on the ground in Knob Lake for several days. Heavy fog delayed the departure for Cape Dyer for two days and fog was closing in when the crew found a small hole over the remote airstrip that allowed them to land in zero ceiling and 1/8 mile visibility.

The first extended overwater portion of the flight was a 260-nm leg from Cape Dyer across the Davis Straight to Sondrestrom Air Base, Greenland on May 20. The next day, the S-61N climbed to 11,000 feet for a 350-nm crossing of the massive Greenland ice cap to Kulusuk on the mountainous east coast. The lack of visual references over the vast white landscape meant constant instrument monitoring even though the sky was clear.

The longest leg of the flight was across the open ocean from Kulusuk to Reykjavik, a distance of 404 nm. The helicopter flew over pack ice before hitting the open waters of the Atlantic. Primary navigation was one low frequency ADF and dead reckoning, as well as radar fixes provided by USAF early warning radar surveillance orbiting over the Atlantic.

In Reykjavik, the S-61N was met by newspaper and radio reporters and the Canadians enjoyed the warm Icelandic

hospitality. The crew pushed on, flying around the south coast of Iceland to Hoft on the east coast, and then across the Atlantic to Vagar in the Faeroes on May 27 (255 nm), and the next day to Prestwick, Scotland (420-nm). From there, the final destination was the BEA Helicopters base at London Gatwick Airport, where CF-OKY was delivered to International Helicopters on May 29.

The helicopter flew a total of 37 hours, 11 minutes on its trans-Atlantic journey and covered a distance of 3,720 nm at an average ground speed of 100.2 knots. The uneventful flight proved that civil helicopters could safety cross the Atlantic without a fixed-wing aircraft escort and this route evolved into a ferry route that is still in use by CHC and other operators today.

“Since 1952, Sikorsky has worked with us to find new ways to reach beyond limitations and obstacles to help shape the modern helicopter industry,” said Karl Fessenden, President and CEO of CHC Helicopter. “The crew and others who made this flight possible helped open new doors for what rotorcraft are capable and we are proud to be a part of such a historic moment for civil and commercial aviation.”

“The transatlantic flight was an historic moment in the helicopter industry, and Sikorsky is proud to have been a part of it together with CHC,” said Sikorsky Vice President, Commercial Systems & Services, Dana Fiatarone. “We look forward to continue working together with CHC to pioneer innovative new technologies and broaden the mission capability of the helicopter well into the future.”

About CHC
For 70 years, CHC Helicopter has provided safe, reliable, cost-effective helicopter service in some of the most remote and challenging environments around the world. With extensive experience transporting customers in the oil and gas industry, supporting search-and-rescue and EMS contracts, and providing maintenance, repair and overhaul services, our dedication to safety and reputation for quality and innovation help our customers reach beyond what they thought possible. Visit www.chcheli.com for information.

About Lockheed Martin
Headquartered in Bethesda, Maryland, Lockheed Martin is a global security and aerospace company that employs approximately 97,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture, integration and sustainment of advanced technology systems, products and services.

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