



FACT SHEET

U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet

SIKORSKY MH-53M PAVE LOW IV

Air Force special operations forces used the Sikorsky MH-53M to covertly enter enemy territory. Capable of operating at day or night or in bad weather, these helicopters conducted long-range, low-level missions to insert, extract, and resupply special operations forces.



The MH-53 helicopters were originally HH-5 "Super Jolly Green Giants" used by the U.S. Air Force in the [Southeast Asia War](#). Over the years, however, they received many upgrades and improvements. After the 1960s, they were completely re-skinned and had their engines and rotors replaced. Along with the improvements came a new designation, MH-53 ("M" for Multi-mission and "H" for helicopter).

The most significant enhancement to the Super Jollies was the Pave Low program, which modified them for operating at night or during bad weather. Equipped with forward-looking infrared (FLIR) sensors, inertial global positioning systems (GPS), Doppler radar navigation systems, and terrain-following and terrain-avoidance radar, the MH-53 could fly clandestine low-level missions in any weather, day or night.

The MH-53M Pave Low IV has a system that greatly increased the aircraft's capabilities. This system gave the aircrew instant access to the total battlefield situation on a color digital map screen that was compatible with night vision goggles. Using feeds from satellite links, the system displayed nearly real-time information about potential hazards along the flight route such as power lines or enemy electronic threats.

The aircraft on display was assigned to the 20th Expeditionary Special Operations Squadron and its last flight was a combat mission in Iraq on March 28, 2008. During its 38-year career, this helicopter participated in many important missions. It carried the "command element" on the mission known as Operation Kingpin, to rescue American prisoners of war thought to be held at the [Son Tay](#) prison near Hanoi, North Vietnam. It is the last among the five HH-53s that participated in that raid. After Vietnam, it also flew in many more combat engagements including Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom before it was retired.

In 2008 the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) retired the MH-53 from active service.

TECHNICAL NOTES

Crew: Six -- two pilots (officers), two flight engineers and two aerial gunners (enlisted)

Armament: Combination of three 7.62mm mini-guns or three .50-cal machine guns

Engines: Two General Electric T64-GE-100 engines with 4,330 shaft hp per engine

Rotary diameter: 72 ft.

Length: 88 ft.

Height: 25 ft.

Speed: 165 mph (at sea level)

Ceiling: 16,000 ft.

Range: 690 miles

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