



## FRCSE resurrects demolished Seahawk for Navy squadron

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A Seahawk helicopter flown by the "Red Wolves" of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 84 crashed during night training exercises in July 2009. The two pilots and four crewmembers received minor injuries. The Navy ruled the crash a Class "A" mishap with damages to the aircraft exceeding \$1million. (U.S. Navy photo/Released)

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – A Sikorsky HH-60H Seahawk Helicopter that crashed in Virginia during a night training exercise at Fort Pickett in 2009 underwent extensive repairs at Fleet Readiness Center Southeast (FRCSE) and was returned to a Norfolk-based Navy Reserve squadron in May.

FRCSE artisans and support personnel spent two years rebuilding the mission-critical aircraft for the "Red Wolves" of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 84, who successfully completed a functional flight check at Naval Air Station Jacksonville before heading home May 23.

The accident occurred when the Seahawk's rotor wash caused a tarp used by ground crews to mark helicopter-landing zones to become airborne and entangled in the tail rotor causing the aircraft to flip on its left side during training at Castles Combat Landing Strip July 21, 2009.

The two pilots and four crewmembers all suffered minor injuries. The Navy ruled the crash a Class "A" mishap with



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damages to the aircraft exceeding \$1 million.

HH-60 Planner and Estimator Mike Novak said when the main rotor blades started hitting the ground and coming apart, “things started flying all over the place” causing widespread damage.

Novak served as the liaison between FRCSE and HSC-84 and coordinated parts acquisition for the repairs from the Navy’s supply system. He said FRCSE artisans also stripped components from a helicopter destined for removal from the Fleet and used the donor parts to reconstruct the destroyed aircraft.

“We took a struck aircraft and used several major airframe fittings and components from it,” he said. “We put on a new cockpit from a model “B” donor aircraft and did extensive structural repairs in the cabin overhead, specifically all four main transmission gearbox support beams.

Novak said artisans also performed extensive structural repairs in the left-hand fuel cell area, extensive skin and substructure repairs on the tail cone section using a donor tail pylon, and on top of the helicopter to the engine firewalls.

“We built that whole aircraft, top to bottom, front to back,” said HH-60 Overhaul and Repair Supervisor (Mechanical) Mike Adams. “Our team did a great job. It was very, very extensive. They rebuilt the whole drive train that runs from the main transmission all the way back to the tail rotor assembly.”

Adams credits Aircraft Mechanic Eddie Toney who he said was the “key player” in assembling the main rotor gearbox and main rotor head assembly from scratch using new components. Adams said Aircraft Mechanics Mike Thompson and Jake Naggiar practically rebuilt the whole fuselage. Together they spent a “few thousand hours” on the project.

The job required assistance from numerous trades and professions. Adams said the electricians essentially rewired the whole aircraft, and the avionics technicians had to install communications and radar systems. Production Controller Pat Palompo, Supply Technician George Fickett and HUB Scheduler Andy Hafler worked diligently to obtain supplies and components. Structural Engineering Technician Myles Colley provided invaluable engineering support.

Adams said the sheet metal workers led by O&R Supervisor (Sheet Metal) Scott Wood had to do extensive work, such as rebuilding the structures and numerous fittings before the aircraft mechanics could even begin the reassembly.

“I rebuilt four or five helicopters when I worked in Pensacola, but I have never seen an aircraft in that bad of shape,” said Wood. “I thought they would scrap it, that it would go to the boneyard, but it didn’t. Nothing was simple on this aircraft. When the aircraft rolled it twisted to where everything was out of alignment.”



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Woods said Sheet Metal Mechanics Rob Paffe, Joshua Nix, Jeremy Burns and Ken Harwell rebuilt the airframe and replaced the nose section and main transmission beams. Wood credits the entire HH-60 team for bringing the airframe back to its original configuration, a mighty feat.

The FRCSE Pattern Shop created compound contour stretch molds of the aft metal fuselage covers commonly referred to as skins and sent them for fabrication to another aviation maintenance depot. When the skins arrived at FRCSE, they did not meet the rigorous engineering specifications needed for correct alignment.

“They weren’t exact so we took them back to Jamie Childers, the sheet metal manufacturing supervisor,” said Wood. “He worked his magic and tweaked the skins to make them fit like a glove. When you are doing double curvature, the skins can become buckled. They are fuel skins and they take a large load.”

HSC-84 Pilot Lt. Cmdr. Gabriel Yancey traveled to Jacksonville and flew the successful functional check flight. Also onboard was Chief Aviation Machinist Mate Ben Powers who said there are only 35 operational “H” models serving the Fleet. He said HSC-84 and HSC-85 will soon be the only two Fleet squadrons using the “H” model aircraft.

“We have two other aircraft still operating after receiving a number of extensive repairs at this facility,” said Powers. “FRCSE turns out a good product.”

The twin-engine, medium lift, Seahawk helicopter supports combat search and rescue missions and naval special warfare operations according to the U.S. Navy Fact File. It can operate from aircraft carriers and a variety of other naval and merchant vessels, as well as land bases.



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A badly damaged HH-60H Seahawk Helicopter with mangled main rotor blades and a gash in the left-hand engine work door rests in the dirt at Castles Combat Landing Strip at Fort Pickett, Va., July 21, 2009. An airborne tarp lodged in the rotor causing the aircraft to flip on its side. (U.S. Navy photo/Released)



The tail section of a HH-60H Seahawk helicopter snaps off just forward of the tail rotor during a training mishap at Fort Pickett, Va. in July 2009. (U.S. Navy photo/Released)



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A wrecked Sikorsky HH-60H Seahawk Helicopter arrives at Fleet Readiness Center Southeast in September 2009 where artisans and support personnel will repair the extensive damage caused when the aircraft crashed and flipped on its left side during night training exercises in Virginia. (Photo courtesy Mike Novak)



Major fittings and components from a donor HH-60B helicopter aircraft are used to repair a demolished, mission-critical HH-60 H Seahawk undergoing extensive repair at Fleet Readiness Center Southeast Dec. 10, 2010. (U.S. Navy photo/Released)



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During a visit to Fleet Readiness Center Southeast April 6, 2011, Rear Adm. Steven Eastburg, then the program executive officer, Air Anti-Submarine Warfare, Assault and Special Mission Programs, looks on as Helicopter Production Supervisor Scott Wood points out extensive repairs artisans are performing on a badly damaged HH-60H Seahawk helicopter used for search and rescue and naval special warfare support. The aircraft crashed and flipped during a night training exercise at Fort Pickett, Va. in July 2009. (U.S. Navy Photo by Victor Pitts/Released)



Sheet Metal Mechanic Joshua Nix uses a drill to clean out fastener holes in preparation for reassembling the nose section of an HH-60H Seahawk helicopter at Fleet Readiness Center Southeast April 22, 2011. Artisans used major fitting and components including the cockpit from a HH-60B model helicopter to reconstruct the badly damaged aircraft. (U.S. Navy photo/Released)



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On April 22, 2011, Sheet Metal Mechanic Mike Thompson assembles the main rotor transmission head to be installed on an HH-60H Seahawk helicopter at Fleet Readiness Center Southeast. The aircraft was involved in a training accident injuring the six-member Navy Reserve aircrew at Fort Pickett, Va. in 2009. (U.S. Navy photo/Released)



The Fleet Readiness Center Helicopter Team poses before an HH-60H Seahawk Helicopter at the aircraft maintenance facility May 7. It took the team a year and a half to reconstruct the nearly demolished aircraft using donor parts from an HH-60B model and new components from the Navy's supply system. (U.S. Navy photo by Victor Pitts/Released)



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Aircrew members from Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 84 install an air intake on the number two engine of an HH-60H Seahawk helicopter on the flight line at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla. May 21. The Navy Reserve unit, based in Norfolk, Va., makes final preparations for the trip home. Fleet Readiness Center Southeast artisans performed major overhaul and repairs to the aircraft that was wrecked during night training exercises in 2009. (U.S. Navy photo by Victor Pitts/Released)



An HH-60H Seahawk helicopter piloted by Lt. Cmdr. Gabriel Yancey with Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 84 lifts off from the flight line at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla. May 23. The aircraft was demolished during a crash at Fort Pickett, Va. in 2009. Fleet Readiness Center Southeast rebuilt the mission-critical aircraft, only one of 35 "H" models currently serving the Fleet. (Photo courtesy Mike Novak)