

# AF museum gets copter used in Vietnam, Iraq

By John Nolan

July 8, 2008

(online story)

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE — A combat helicopter was used on a 1970 mission to rescue American prisoners of war in North Vietnam and made its final combat flight this year in Iraq is on display at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force.

The Sikorsky MH-53M was one of 72 that the Air Force bought, beginning in the 1960s, for varied combat missions including dropping off, retrieving and resupplying special operations forces.

The copter placed on display Monday, July 7, carried commanders during a 1970 mission to rescue American prisoners from the Son prison camp near Hanoi. It made its last combat run on March 28 year as part of an attack on enemy insurgents north of Baghdad, Lt. Col. Shawn Henrie, who commanded that mission and spoke Monday during a display ceremony at the Air Force museum.

The MH-53s served their country well beyond the flying lifetimes that they were designed to endure, Henrie told a crowd in the museum's Cold War Gallery.

"This helicopter was designed with a 2,000-hour life expectancy. A lot of these machines have 14,000 hours on them," Henrie said. "So, I think you could say we got our money's worth from the MH-53."

More than 40 of the copters have either been lost in combat or crashed during training missions, said Lt. Gen. Donald Wurster, commander of the Air Force Special Operations Command which is responsible for the MH-53. Crews flying the MH-53s have won a total of 140 Silver Stars, given for heroism in combat, Wurster said.

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## Copter's saga

The Sikorsky MH-53 helicopters have been flown in places including Vietnam, Panama, Haiti, Kosovo, Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan on various U.S. military missions from the 1960s to the present.

The 12 MH-53s still in service are to be retired by Sept. 30, 2008, when the current federal fiscal year ends.

### Sikorsky MH-53M



- ▶ Crew: 6 (two pilots, two flight engineers and two gunners)
- ▶ Capacity: approx. 38 troops
- ▶ Length: 88 ft
- ▶ Rotor diameter: 72 ft
- ▶ Height: 25 ft
- ▶ Empty weight: 32,000 lb
- ▶ Rotor system: 6 blades
- ▶ Maximum speed: 196 mph
- ▶ Range: 600 NM



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