



# Pave Lows busy until the end

## MH-53 aircrews, civil engineers top most deployed list for fiscal 2008

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If your job in 2008 was flying MH-53 Pave Low helicopters or performing civil engineering duties, the chances are good you were one of the year's most deployed airmen.

The active-duty aircrews spending the most time away from home were those flying the MH-53, a 46,000-pound special operations helicopter in use since the Vietnam War.

On average, MH-53 pilots, flight engineers and aerial gunners logged 144 days on temporary-duty assignments, or TDY, during fiscal 2008, according to Air Force figures.

The second-most-deployed aircrews were the 13-man teams flying EC-130H Compass Calls, electronic warfare planes often based in Afghanistan.

The most-deployed mobility crews were C-17 fliers at 112 days, while the fighter aviators with the highest demand were F-15E Strike Eagle crews at 91 days.

In 2007, the most deployed aviators were F-16 Fighting Falcon pilots flying the Block 40 version of the jet at 118 days. AC-130U Spooky gunship crews were second at 117 days.

The Air Force Specialty Codes in 2008 with the most TDY days were bomb disposal officers, who spent an average of 154 days away from home.

Their enlisted counterparts tied with special operations weathermen for the highest average enlisted TDY days — 124 days.

The Air Force Personnel Center averages TDY days based on travel voucher information.

The deployment numbers continue trends that began shortly after Sept. 11, 2001 — strong requirements for airmen with special operations, air mobility and ground combat support skills. Driving the high deployment times are demand from commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan, budget-driven decisions not to increase the size of some career fields and difficulty training enough airmen for some positions in high demand.

### **FLYING HIGH INTO RETIREMENT**

the high demand for Pave Lows continued until the Oct. 1 retirement of all the aircraft, with aircrews from the 20th Special Operations Squadron flying the final MH-53 mission Sept. 27 over Iraq.

The Pave Low retirement ended the role of Air Force helicopters in special operations. Army units now fill the demand.

Master Sgt. Jason Rushing, a Pave Low flight engineer, said there was no let up in demand for MH-53s even as aircraft were sent to the boneyard and aircrew members transferred out.

"The demand stayed the same even as we lost aircraft and positions. Our wartime commitment never changed," Rushing said.

Rushing now is assigned to the 6th Special Operations Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Fla., and is expecting to cross-train into flying UH-1 Hueys.

Maj. Brian Roberts was among the airmen who flew six Pave Lows on their final Sept. 27 mission — moving supplies and special operations troops between several sites in Iraq.

“It was emotional,” Roberts said.

The camaraderie of the six-member crew was the best part of flying Pave Lows, he said.

“The Pave Low was a beast. The crew made it special for me,” said Roberts, now assigned to the 1st Special Operations Support Squadron at Hurlburt.

Roberts estimated he spent 180 days deployed in 2008; Rushing said he spent about 90 days deployed.

The deployments were spread across several tours, typical of how special operations crews work in continuous rotations.

Looking at deployments by AFSC, the highest TDY rates were among civil engineers and pilots and navigators flying mobility and special operations missions.

Civil engineer officers are in high demand to build and sustain bases as well as handle bomb-disposal tasks.

Among enlisted airmen, most of the top deployed AFSC were in roles involving ground operations — battlefield airmen.

The AFSCs included special operations weathermen (1W0X2), explosive ordnance technicians (3E8X1), and tactical air control party members (1C4X1).

Also scoring high TDY numbers were airmen repairing specialized aircraft, such as U-2 maintainers (2A3X3H) as well as KC-10/E-4 specialists (2A5X1H), and those involved with vehicle operation (2T1X1) and repair (2T3X1).

The AFSC with the most airmen deploying was security forces (3P0X1), with 14,190 airmen away for an average of 99 days.