

NIPPI, Marines say goodbye to CH-46

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Apr. 13, 2011

GOODBYE

NAVAL AIR FACILITY ATSUGI, Japan – During the Vietnam War in the mid 60s, the cargo helicopter FORTY SIX (CH-46) made its military debut.

For the Navy and the Marine Corps it is known as “The Sea Knight”. According to Marines.com, its main mission was to transport troops, equipment and supplies.

Now, over 40 years later, the CH-46 is being retired. It’s slow path to retirement is felt by maintainers.

“The CH-46 has been in service since the 60s,” said 1st Lt. Jonathan Hoy, flight line assistant officer-in-charge of the HMM-265 squadron. “It’s a cool community and tradition to be apart of, the very end of a long, long story. To see the last aircraft come out, it’s cool to be apart of.”

For as long as the CH-46 has been around, Nippon Hikouki

(NIPPI) has been there to perform extensive maintenance and repairs on the aircraft.

According to NIPPI officials, NIPPI is a Japanese based aviation company that has been working with US Navy and Marine Corps since 1955. They've been the main aviation maintenance and repair facility not only for Carrier Air Wing FIVE (CVW 5), but for Marine aircraft based in Iwakuni and Okinawa as well.

“These guys do a great job up here,” said Gunnery Sgt. Jeffrey Schoen, quality assurance chief of the HMM-265. “They’re professionals, they do everything by the book. To the “T”. These guys bend over backwards just to make sure everything is the way it should be. They give us the most pristine aircraft they can give us. They take a lot of pride in what they do.”

To date, NIPPI has performed repairs and maintenance on a total of 456 CH-46s.

“I’ve spent 15 years working on the CH-46,” said Hiroshi Kawaguchi, an electrician leader for NIPPI. “The CH-46 is an old aircraft. It sometimes makes it tough to troubleshoot because the problem comes from outside of my expectations. But that’s why I love it.”

According to members of the HMM-265, there are currently only five Marine squadrons across the world still working with the CH-46. What used to be the biggest community in Marine aviation is

rapidly becoming the smallest.

The mission of the CH-46 Sea Knight will not be replaced by just one aircraft. Combined efforts of the V-22 Osprey and P-3 Orion will replace the CH-46 mission.

“I just hate to see the CH-46 go,” said Juno Olaes, aircraft examiner with NIPPI for the Sea Knights. “To me, it’s more like looking at a car that’s almost a classic. It’s so very reliable. The pilots love flying it. I’m sure NIPPI personnel hate to see it go.”