



Air Force, Army complete Blackhawk redeployment

By Staff Sgt. Thomas Sherrod
735th Air Mobility Squadron

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii – Recently, the 25th Infantry Division’s Combat Aviation Brigade redeployed from Iraq Nov. 23, minus some essential equipment: their 34 UH-60L helicopters. They didn’t forget them. Leaving the helicopters behind was a key strategic decision which allowed a seamless transition for the troops replacing them in theater to immediately begin supporting operations. However, the time was fast approaching for the 25th Infantry Division and its Combat Aviation Brigade to resume training for their next deployment cycle. Since training for a Combat Aviation Brigade is not very realistic without helicopters, they had to find a way to replace the 34 helicopters they left in theater.

Finding 34 UH-60L helicopters was the job of Defense Department and Army leadership. But once they found them, they certainly couldn’t fly them miles across the Pacific Ocean ... or could they? That was where U.S. Transportation Command, the DoD’s executive agent for movement of personnel and cargo, stepped in to help.

Once the Army told TRANSCOM what needed to be moved and when it needed to arrive, the plan began to take shape. Based on the relatively short time line and required delivery date, TRANSCOM knew it would need not only a large aircraft but one that was readily available. The contract went to a commercial carrier which operates the Russian-made and operated AN-124, often referred to as the commercial equivalent to the Air Force’s C-5 Galaxy. The AN-124 operator, Polet Air, flew seven missions over a month to transport the helicopters 5,000 miles from Fort Drum, N.Y., to Hawaii.

This is where the warriors of the 735th Air Mobility Squadron at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam come into the picture.

The 735 AMS is charged with enhancing AMC’s mission of Global Reach by perpetuating the mobility mission through its core capabilities of cargo and passenger aerial port operations, aircraft maintenance as well as command and control. Over the course of five weeks, the squadron of nearly 400 dedicated personnel supervised the notification, logistics, planning for the arrival, offloads, and bed down of the helicopters, the AN-124, as well as associated crew and support personnel.

“The 25th CAB has to coordinate with 735th AMS for receiving the AN-124s, getting onto the flight line to download the aircraft, reserving space for parking the UH-60s, and supporting equipment for the rebuild and inventory of the aircraft. We also have to coordinate our flights from Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam to Wheeler Army Air Field,” explained Army Maj. Terry Zoch, Support Operations Transportation Officer for the 25th Combat Aviation Brigade. “The 735 AMS has been ‘on-point’ in notifying us about changes to the mission, calling when missions have arrived, allowing us to leave our support equipment on the airfield for over a month while we rebuild, and in general coordinating for any other support we need making it a smooth, efficient operation.”

Everything the military does is truly a team effort

“The Army Field Support Battalion-Drum worked with the 10th CAB, 25th CAB, Air Force and contracted transport (AN-124) to get the UH-60s out to the 25th CAB. All parties did a great job and were highly professional throughout the process,” said Lt. Col. Curtis Bailey, executive officer for the Army Field Support Battalion-Drum, said.

This is all in a day’s work for the top-notch warriors of the 735th AMS, comprised of nearly 400 military and civilians, who support Air Mobility Command’s mission in the Pacific. This year alone, the warriors safely moved nearly 21,000 short tons of cargo and 93,000 passengers on just over 8,000 DoD airlift missions.

“As a prime en route location we serve as the forward element of AMC to support both AMC’s customers and its interests in Hawaii as well as throughout the Pacific AOR,” said Capt. Mark Klohr, 735th AMS aerial port operations officer. “In the end, we met our goal and exceeded our customer’s expectations for this mission in harmony with the 735th AMS motto of ‘safely, by the book, then on-time.’ It was a job well done by everyone involved.”

The next time an AMC aircraft passes overhead, remember: it takes a dedicated team of total-force professionals to provide “Unrivaled Global Reach for America ... Always!”