

UH-72A Lakota—A Key Component of Army Aviation Modernization

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Over the last 42 months, the UH-72A Lakota Light Utility Helicopter (LUH) has made impressive strides in providing one of the key components of Army aviation modernization. The new aircraft, which is a variant of the civil EC-145 helicopter, is being fielded to the Army National Guard (ARNG) in the United States and its territories, as well as test and training centers for the active Army. The Lakota is an example of rapid acquisition of a new system that is a commercial/non-developmental item (NDI) due to flexibility in requirements and the willingness of the Army leadership and staff to think outside-the-box.

Two MEDEVAC-configured UH-72A Lakotas fly over the Nation's Capitol. So far, 25 aircraft have been delivered in MEDEVAC configuration. (U.S. Army photo by Matt Potter, UHPO.)



As of Feb. 28, 2010, 99 UH-72A Lakotas have been delivered to the Army. These have been fielded to ARNG units in 11 states and Puerto Rico. Medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) and general support units at the National Training Center and Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) have also received the UH-72A. Additionally, active Army units at Fort Rucker, AL; Fort Eustis, VA; and the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) have been fielded and will operate the new Lakota.

The UH-72A is replacing UH-60 Black Hawk, UH-1, and OH-58A/C helicopters used by the ARNG and active Army. The UH-60s being replaced are freed up to support U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The UH-72A is also a smaller, less costly aircraft that can still fulfill the missions the UH-60s were conducting in the U.S. The cost of supporting the UH-1 and OH-58A/C aircraft had been increasing over the last several years because of parts availability and old age; the UH-72A provides an alternative to these burdens.

LUH Program

The LUH program was created as an outgrowth of the decision to end the Comanche program in spring 2004, by using the Comanche funding for the LUH. After a 1 year protest, a contract for production and support of the UH-72A was awarded to EADS-North America (EADS-NA) in June 2006. The original plan was for the procurement of 322 aircraft, but that has now increased to 345 with the majority (210 Lakotas) destined for the ARNG. The first delivery was in November 2006, just 5 months after contract award. The EADS-NA team has been able to deliver as many as five aircraft in any 1 month and remain on schedule and within the Army cost position.

There were two key components of the LUH program that led to such a rapid acquisition. The first



UH-72A Lakotas are used to support training and certification requirements, such as this freefall parachute certification at Yuma Proving Ground, AZ. (U.S. Army photo by Matt Potter, UHPO.)

component was the decision to accept a commercial/NDI system that would be civil certified by the Federal Aviation Administration. The second component was the decision to use Contractor Logistics Support (CLS) to maintain the aircraft and provide pilot and enlisted maintenance training. Together, these components minimized the investment the Army has had to make in facilities, part supply, and training equipment. At active Army sites, the mechanics are contractor employees. This provides our Table of Distribution and Allowance units and test facilities with a simple “turnkey” operation and support structure. The ARNG uses Army mechanics to perform field-level maintenance with the assistance of Contractor Field Service Representatives and parts supplied by the EADS-NA team. The UH-72A fleet has achieved an Operational Availability (OA) rate of more than 90 percent.

The successful performance on this contract also led the U.S. Navy (USN) to purchase five aircraft to support the training of rotary-wing test pilots at the USN Test Pilot School (TPS) at Naval Air Station Patuxent River, MD. The TPS trains naval aviators and other U.S. service pilots, as well as those from our allies overseas. The UH-72A provides a highly capable and maneuverable aircraft to support the stressing requirements of the TPS testing. The EADS-NA team produced and delivered all five aircraft to the USN in January 2010, enabling the TPS sustainment of its aggressive training schedule.

UH-72A Configurations and Missions

The UH-72A is delivered in primarily two configurations. First is the standard, which seats two pilots and has six crew seats in the rear compartment. The second is the MEDEVAC configuration, which adds an external

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rescue hoist and substitutes provisions for two NATO standard litters in the back. The high tail rotor and large rear clam shell doors help ease loading and removing litter-bound patients. So far, 25 aircraft have been delivered in MEDEVAC configuration.

Beyond the standard and MEDEVAC configurations, further enhancements of the aircraft's capabilities include several Mission Equipment Packages (MEPs). These MEP kits allow the UH-72A to perform specific missions in support of their major command roles. These include a sensor and communication MEP for the ARNG to conduct its security and support battalion missions. Another MEP facilitates the opposing force/observer controller role at the training and readiness centers, which includes unique camouflage paint as well as communication equipment. There will also be another MEP for the aircraft to be stationed at the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands to enhance its over-water capability. These different MEP kits will make the UH-72A more capable and useful to the units. The UH-72A is also certified by the Army to support static and free-fall parachute operations. This supports training at the USMA, as well as at JRTC and other Army sites across the world.

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The UH-72A has been flying in the United States and its territories, accomplishing various missions since it equipped its first unit in November 2006. To date, the fleet has flown more than 20,000 hours in training and support missions. These missions have included homeland security, disaster relief, surveillance, support missions to Hurricane Gustav in Louisiana and Mississippi, and MEDEVAC patient pickup and transport missions at the test and training centers. Since June 2007, any time the space shuttle is diverted to Edwards Air Force Base, CA, because of inclement weather in Florida, the UH-72A aircraft from Fort Irwin, CA, deploy to support those landings. Army personnel are transported daily in the UH-72A to meet their mission requirements.

The rapid acquisition, production, and fielding of the UH-72A Lakota aircraft over the last 3.5 years has allowed the Army to transfer 24 UH-60 Black Hawk aircraft to other missions that

support overseas contingency operations. It has allowed the retirement of aging UH-1 and OH-58A/C helicopters by replacing them with modern, capable aircraft. The use of CLS has provided high OA rates while quickly and efficiently allowing stand up of the units receiving the new aircraft. The more than 90 UH-72A aircraft in use by the Army and ARNG have demonstrated their value by completing numerous missions in support of homeland defense, natural disaster relief operations, and test and training support. The LUH Product Office and EADS-NA team are committed to continuing this production, fielding, and support of the UH-72A at the high standards already achieved to maximize the value of the aircraft performing the Army and ARNG missions.

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The first of five UH-72A Lakotas for the USN sits in a hangar ready to be delivered. The five aircraft will be used to support the training of rotary-wing test pilots at the USN TPS at Naval Air Station Patuxent River. (U.S. Army photo by Matt Potter, UHPO.)