Although the two configurations look similar on the outside, the MH-65D on the right has improved aircraft computers and a dual digital inertial navigation system not installed in the “Charlie” configuration on the left. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

**Acquisition Update: Coast Guard Outfits Final Air Station With Upgraded Recovery Helicopters**

May 26, 2015

The Coast Guard delivered its 93rd upgraded MH-65D Dolphin short range recovery helicopter to Air Station Detroit May 8, 2015, bringing this segment of the recapitalization and modernization program to full operational capability.

With this delivery, all air stations with short range recovery helicopters now have the upgraded MH-65D. The Coast Guard is in the process of upgrading the last six MH-65Cs, which will be stationed at the Aviation Logistics Center in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, to support depot maintenance activities.

“Achievement of FOC is an important milestone for the program, but this is just one step in a modernization process that will ensure the ability of the aircraft to meet the challenges of the 21st century and improve aircraft reliability and maintainability, ultimately culminating with fielding of the MH-65E,” said Cmdr. Eric Drey, H-65 Conversion program manager.

Since the first MH-65D delivery in 2009, the upgraded airframes have accumulated more than 116,417 flight hours. The “Delta” configuration incorporated a new cockpit computing system that will integrate with the common avionics structure anticipated in the next model of MH-65, the “Echo” model (MH-65E). The attitude gyros and wind estimation system used by pilots for navigation in the MH-65C were replaced with an improved embedded GPS and inertial navigation system. These improvements are not only more capable but also deliver dramatically increased reliability and reduced

maintenance costs. Several other avionics components were replaced to further enhance the reliability of the airframe and avoid increasing replacement costs for obsolete parts.

“Air Station Detroit is proud to have flown the last operational MH-65C and completed the Coast Guard's transition to the potent MH-65D,” said Cmdr. Michael MacMillan, commanding officer of Air Station Detroit. “The last Delta model delivery coincided with the start of the busy recreational boating season on the Great Lakes. The MH-65D will serve well as Air Station Detroit prosecutes the second-most search and rescue cases in the Coast Guard over an expansive area of operations including over 1,100 nautical miles of shoreline and an international border.”

MacMillan said Air Station Detroit crews will appreciate the increased capability of the MH-65D as they tackle a wide range of conditions from extreme snow and subzero temperatures in the winter to those experienced during deployments to the Caribbean to support drug and migrant interdiction. With the delivery of the last scheduled MH-65D this month, Air Station Detroit now is operating with a full fleet of five MH-65Ds.

Coincidentally, MacMillan was on the original design team of the “Delta” model. He also piloted the original flight tests of the MH-65D and was subsequently assigned as the engineering officer at Air Station Atlantic City, New Jersey, which was the first unit to receive the MH-65D and achieve initial operational capability.

In addition to the transition to the common avionics architecture system, or “glass” or digital cockpit, the MH-65E will include an updated Automatic Flight Control System, additional modernization of the avionics system and installation of new sensors. The digital cockpit will provide a common avionics architecture for the Coast Guard’s rotary wing aircraft. Design work on this segment has been completed and the program begins test and evaluation this summer.