CH-53K lifts CH-53K expanding capabilities

A CH-53K from Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 21 (HX-21) performs a recovery rigging evaluation of a CH-53K Engineering Development Model without engines, most gearboxes and tail pylon. This expansion of the aircraft's capabilities, including understanding the flight characteristics and load dynamics in such a heavy lift, ensures the Marine Corps can safely execute a Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel (TRAP) mission in the future. U.S. Navy Photo by Erik Hildebrandt.

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NAS PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The CH-53K King Stallion helicopter, under the direction of H-53 Heavy Lift Helicopters Program Office (PMA-261), achieved a major milestone by successfully lifting another CH-53K King Stallion. The test, performed by Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 21 (HX-21), is part of the

CH-53K aircraft recovery rigging evaluation and a critical step toward developing new operational capabilities and procedures for the CH-53K fleet.

“This is a capability we hope will never be needed in the fleet,” said Col. Kate Fleeger, Program Manager, PMA-261. “However, the continued expansion of the aircraft’s capabilities ensures a faster response to emerging requirements and highlights its ability to perform.”

The primary purpose of the evaluation was to validate the specialized rigging and procedures required to safely recover a downed or disabled CH-53K aircraft, a capability that is not yet standardized in the U.S. Navy’s official salvage manuals. During the test, the team aimed to understand the flight characteristics and load dynamics involved in such a heavy lift, ensuring that the Marine Corps can safely execute a Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel (TRAP) mission in the future.

“The insights and data gathered from this test will directly inform updates to the Aircraft Salvage Operations manual, providing the fleet with standardized procedures for a dual-point external lift of a CH-53K,” said Fleeger.

The lifted aircraft was an Engineering Development Model (EDM) used in the King Stallion program early years of test. The three engines, most gearboxes and the tail pylon were removed prior to the lift to reduce weight to approximately 28,000 lbs., still well within the CH-53K’s current external lift envelope of 36,000 lbs. The EDM will continue to serve the program as it will be transferred to Marine Heavy Helicopter Training Squadron 302 (HMHT-302), New River, North Carolina, where it will be used as a Ground Operations Aircrew Trainer, helping to educate and train the next generation of King Stallion aircrew and maintainers.

This test underscores the remarkable lift capabilities of the

CH-53K and highlights the innovative efforts of the CH-53 Test team at HX-21 to continuously evaluate new fleet capabilities.

PMA-261 manages the cradle to grave procurement, development, support, fielding and disposal of the entire family of H-53 heavy lift helicopters.