

Marine Corps CH-53K Passes Air Refueling Tests



A CH-53K King Stallion heavy lift helicopter refuels from a KC-130J over the Chesapeake Bay on April 6. Sikorsky
NAVAL AIR STATION PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The CH-53K King Stallion aced an air-to-air refueling test this week, successfully demonstrating long-range logistics support capabilities for the U.S. Marine Corps, Naval Air Systems Command said in a release. The 4.5-hour test was accomplished over the Chesapeake Bay with a KC-130J aerial refueling tanker.

“The aircraft went to the tanker this week and it was very successful, proving it is a long-range vertical logistic workhorse,” said Marine Col. Jack Perrin, H-53 heavy lift helicopters program manager.

According to the CH-53K test team, the wake survey test assessed the performance of the aircraft when flying behind the tanker in strong, turbulent air. The aircraft’s crew successfully plugged the drogue, a funnel-shaped basket towed behind the KC-130J. These tests were performed at increasing closure rates to ensure the CH-53K can handle the forces on the refueling probe when contacting the drogue during aerial refueling.

“The aircraft was able to meet the desired performance for all engagements,” Perrin said. “The ‘K’ is the long-range enabler that we need now and into the future.”

The CH-53K King Stallion continues to execute within the reprogrammed CH-53K timeline, moving toward completion of developmental test, leading to initial operational test and evaluation in 2021 and first fleet deployment in 2023-2024.

“The successful air-to-air refueling test reinforces the superior capabilities of the CH-53K heavy lift helicopter and its ability to carry more Marines, cargo and equipment over longer ranges and in more challenging environments than any other rotorcraft in the world,” Bill Falk, Sikorsky program director, CH-53K, said in an April 10 release.

“As the only fully maritized heavy lift helicopter, it will allow the Marines the operational flexibility and reach to fly over open waters to complete long-range missions in support of expeditionary advanced base operations.”