

U.S. Navy's First TH-73A 'Thrasher' Arrives at NAS Whiting Field



The Navy's first TH-73A Thrasher arrives at Naval Air Station Whiting Field in Milton, Florida, Aug. 6, 2021. The TH-73A will be assigned to Training Air Wing 5 on base and will replace the TH-57B/C Sea Ranger as the undergraduate rotary and tilt-rotor helicopter trainer for the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jason Isaacs*

MILTON, Fla. The first operational TH-73A "Thrasher" training helicopter landed at Naval Air Station (NAS) Whiting Field in Milton, Aug. 6, the Navy said in a release.

The helicopter will be assigned to Training Air Wing (TW) 5 and will replace chief of Naval Air Training's (CNATRA) TH-57B/C Sea Ranger as the undergraduate training helicopter for the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard.

The helicopter made the two-day transit to the base from the Leonardo Helicopters facility in Philadelphia, where the aircraft was manufactured. CNATRA leadership welcomed the aircraft alongside representatives from Leonardo Helicopters, Vertex Aerospace, who will provide maintenance support for the TH-73A, in addition to local community leaders.

Leonardo Helicopters is contracted to deliver 31 additional Thrashers this calendar year for a total of 130 through 2024 before the Sea Ranger's scheduled sundown in 2025 and will provide the Navy the capacity to train several hundred aviation students per year.

The TH-73A incorporates a modern avionics suite with a fully integrated flight management system, automatic flight control

system, and independent, digital cockpit displays to both pilot stations. It boasts increased performance in power, speed, payload, and endurance over the Sea Ranger, making it comparable to fleet aircraft. These upgrades will help bridge capability and capacity gaps to better prepare newly winged naval aviators as they transition to fleet replacement squadrons for postgraduate training.

In addition to new helicopters, the full Advanced Helicopter Training System (AHTS) includes aircrew training services that provide availability on new simulators, a modernized curriculum, and a new contractor logistics support contract for Thrasher maintenance and flight line support.

“Using current cockpit technologies and a new training curriculum, AHTS will improve pilot training and skills and ensure rotary wing and tilt-rotor aviators are produced more efficiently at a higher quality and are ready to meet the fleet’s challenges,” CNATRA Rear Adm. Robert Westendorff said. “AHTS will meet our advanced rotary wing and intermediate tilt-rotor training requirements through 2050.”

The TH-73As will be housed in a temporary hangar at NAS Whiting Field, while construction of a new helicopter maintenance hangar on base is slated to begin in 2023. Leonardo Helicopters also recently established a TH-73A maintenance support team at Santa Rosa County’s new aviation customer service hangar at Peter Prince Airport in Milton.

“This delivery signifies a new era for Naval Aviation training,” said Capt. Holly Shoger, Naval Undergraduate Flight Training Systems Program Office (PMA-273) program manager. “The combined government and contractor team set new standards to meet much needed requirements in the fleet. We are proud to develop and provide these new capabilities that will improve pilot training for many years to come.”

The TH-73A Helicopter Instructor Training Unit (HITU) team

under TW-5 at NAS Whiting Field will use the first Thrasher to validate the modernized curriculum efforts, which is a requirement prior to training student naval aviators with the new curriculum in the new system.

“The simple cockpit design and layout, pushbutton and toggle switch interface, advanced navigation and communication capabilities, and rapid control response make it the ideal training aircraft and the perfect stepping stone to any service rotary wing platform,” said Cmdr. Dustin Robbins, TW-5 AHTS Fleet Integration Team (FIT) officer in charge. “With its all-digital cockpit and fully integrated Flight Management System coupled with superior power and speed margins, the TH-73A is a lot of fun to fly.”

PMA-273 at Naval Air Systems in Patuxent River, Maryland, oversees the AHTS and TH-73A, and will determine the final disposition of the 35-year-old TH-57 Sea Ranger, which is scheduled to sundown in fiscal years 2022 through 2025.

The TH-73A Thrasher is named for the brown thrasher, a bird common to the skies over the Southeastern United States including Northwest Florida. The inconspicuous, yet territorial, bird is a fearless defender known for its low-level flying prowess.

TW-5 is comprised of three primary fixed-wing and three advanced helicopter squadrons and trains aviators from the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Air Force, and allied nations.