

compared with over the sea, the modification is providing improved capability. Generally, the Dolphin's flight profile is to be able to go 150 miles (243 km) offshore in response to a call, and still have sufficient time to perform a rescue and return with fuel reserves.

The target of Group/Air Station North Bend is to allocate around 40 percent of the annual flying-hour budget to aircrew training. This is followed by 20 percent of budgeted hours allocated to SAR missions, split evenly between offshore and inland rescues. Between 15 and 20 percent is allocated to ELT missions, whereas PWCS missions should occupy around ten percent. The latter includes vertical insertion of boarding teams aboard high-interest vessels.

Although Homeland Security patrols have been increased, the lack of a strategic port on Oregon's southern coast means this task can be managed in many cases within combined missions, thereby optimizing flight hours. As in the past, the rest of the station's flight hours are dedicated to supporting the Aids-to-Navigation & Waterways Management mission as well as marine safety, marine environmental protection and cooperation with state, federal and local

agencies. As an example, crews might be requested to search for marijuana plantations, although policing airspace and intercepting aircraft are not part of the Dolphin crew's remit and are not trained for.

MCH: the next phase

More improvements to the Dolphin are in the pipeline and the Coast Guard received funding in Fiscal Year 2007 to begin the next phase of the HH-65's conversion. The Multi-mission Cutter Helicopter (MCH) project calls for more upgrades to the HH-65C through a service-life extension that will refurbish the airframe, tail drive-shaft and anti-torque device. Eventually, a strengthened landing gear, new radar, C4ISR suite (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) and integrated cockpit will be installed. Under the AUF project, the HH-65C will receive upgrades to its communications sub-systems, that will allow interoperability with other Homeland Security and local response agencies. Additionally, the type will be configured and pre-wired to facilitate the installation and removal of special AUF mission equipment



(weapons, armor, EO/IR, HUD). The entire national fleet will go through this modification and North Bend had already swapped out its first airframe, as of the end of 2007.

The future is hard to predict. On the one hand it is unlikely a North Bend Dolphin will ever use its guns in anger, yet demand for its other missions is likely to remain high. Whatever the case, the future for Group/Air Station North Bend looks bright.

Marnix Sap/MIAS

Above: North Bend is home to five HH-65C Dolphins that are now being swapped out, one by one, to undergo the Multi-mission Cutter Helicopter (MCH) upgrade.

Left and below: Training in 'vertical insertion' (placing a boarding party aboard a vessel of interest from a helicopter hovering overhead) is becoming increasingly important. With a mandate to secure the nation's borders, the Dept. of Homeland Security has ordered stepped-up checks of vessels entering US territorial waters.

