N°143 - OCTOBER 2026

ROTOR



Built for the front Line

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The Dutch Touch – how the RNLASF is helping shape the next gen H225M

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Dogs and Helicopters: the H145 goes on paw patrol

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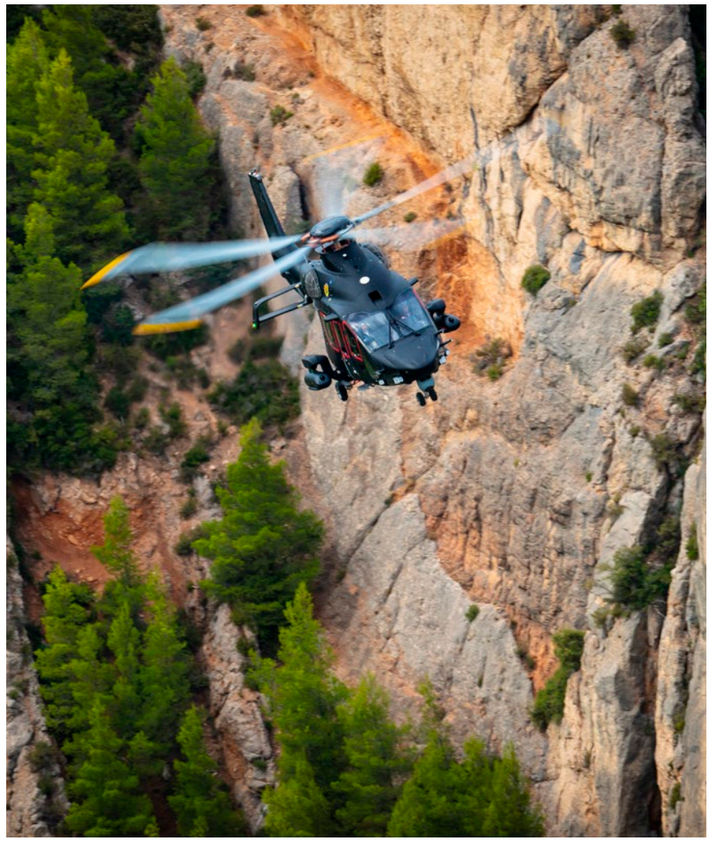
The U010 Aliaca goes vertical

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Matthieu Louvot,
Président Airbus Helicopters

DRIVING INNOVATION WHEN AND WHERE IT MATTERS MOST

At Airbus Helicopters, we have a core mission: to ensure our operators are ready for whatever comes next. With the rapid evolution of contemporary battlefields, fulfilling military and defence requirements represents both a vital imperative and a continuous challenge.

The future is closer than you might think. In this edition of *Rotor,* we showcase the platforms and technologies keeping nations safe. Discover the U145 – a prime example of how uncrewed assets with proven templates like the H145M can expand reach, survivability and teaming capabilities. We also look at the French Navy’s use of the U010 Aliaca, alongside the evolution of the H225M for the Royal Netherlands Air and Space Force – a true testament to engineering that adapts decades into the future.

But capability extends beyond new products and innovation. Learn how our dedicated military support centres work behind the scenes providing tailored expertise to maximise fleet availability and keep missions moving.

Beyond the battlefield, we celebrate the sheer breadth of our fleet: from the H125 starring on a Hollywood film set, to the H135 helping other people reach the stars by supporting NASA rocket launches, and the H145 training service dogs in Donauwörth.

Whether securing front lines, advancing space exploration, or protecting communities at home, our focus remains absolute: driving innovation when and where it matters most.



BUILT FOR THE FRONT LINE

When military operators take to the skies, their success hinges on a single non-negotiable factor: total, unwavering capability. In high-stakes environments, the margin for error is zero, and the people on the front lines require platforms that are decisive, adaptable and battle-ready for the missions they fly. These articles focus on the rotorcraft of today and tomorrow. From the French Navy's use of the U070 Aliaca to the innovations in the U145, and from the immediate and evolving mission readiness of the H225M to scoping the next-generation military helicopter, we take a closer look at how modern rotary-wing solutions are evolving to ensure operators always have the power, precision and reliability to succeed and return home safely.

ARTICLES— **Alexandre Marchand, Belen Morant and Ben Peggie.**

ARE ‘U’ READY FOR THE U145?

In June 2026 during the Berlin Airshow (ILA), Airbus Helicopters presented the U145 — an uncrewed version of its successful H145, offering higher payload and new mission possibilities. Rotor *talked to H145M Programme Manager Constance Pinsdorf to discover the innovative steps required to deliver the company’s latest leap forward.*

ARTICLE — **Ben Peggie**



◀ *Constance Pinsdorf, H145M Programme Manager*



The Airbus U145 can be loaded and unloaded from the front, rear and both sides –providing full cabin access.

WHAT WAS THE CORE MOTIVATION BEHIND DEVELOPING THE U145, AND WHY DO OPERATORS NEED AN UNCREWED VARIANT OF THE H145?

CONSTANCE PINSDORF: Our main motivation was to create an autonomous aircraft based on an existing platform. We want to have an platform that can carry more than the standard H145. We increased the payload. Of course, we also want to use this autonomy to send the aircraft into an area that is more hostile. Therefore, it is really helpful to do it using machines and computers instead of risking human lives.

WHAT SETS THE U145 APART PHYSICALLY FROM A CREWED H145?

C.P.: The main difference is that we can carry a heavier payload. This payload increase is really interesting, especially for the logistical parts to carry heavy goods and parts directly to the front line. Another difference is there is no kind of cockpit installed so we are just using a computer (besides other mechanical modifications) that is able to fly the aircraft. The third main difference is the floor. Now we are able to have true 360º entry access to the loading compartment from the front, the sides and the rear. You must have a zero-level surface so it is completely flat — so boxes can be secured stably.

BEYOND STANDARD CARGO LOGISTICS, WHAT SPECIFIC MISSION PROFILES DO YOU FORESEE?

C.P.: We are mainly focused on cargo transport. Another possibility is that it could be used as an ‘air-launched effect mothership’. They could fly to hostile environments and launch the drones, which then carry out their mission automatically. Meaning in the end, the endurance would be much greater, and of course there is much less risk to the pilot.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN TO CHANGE AN H145 TO A U145?

C.P.: There are different kinds of steps. We have to replace the pilot, meaning the arms and legs must be replaced by automation of the vehicle, and therefore, we must develop dedicated electromechanical actuation, automation of all pilot actions, and so on. Also, dedicated modifications must be foreseen for the starting and landing phases. The other step is replacing the eyes of the pilot. We have to integrate several kinds of sensors. As soon as you fly lower, the helicopter must have enough sensors on board to easily detect its environment, locate obstacles and find a way to manoeuvre around them. In the end, replacing human knowledge, skill and handling.

WILL THERE BE OTHER INTERMEDIATE STEPS THAT CUSTOMERS CAN CHOOSE IN ADDITION TO A FULLY UNCREWED VERSION?

C.P.: Yes, we have the intention to provide “modular” options along the way. The U145 is the series or finalised version, but we could also offer versions based on the intermediate steps. For example, retaining the option to have a safety pilot on board would also be in our interest. If you are flying above urban areas, you usually have meet specific safety regulations, and these can be met much more easily if you have a safety pilot. At least four main major steps are foreseen, and two of them can be reused for existing customers.

WHAT IS THE LAUNCH TIMELINE MOVING FORWARD?

C.P.: The helicopter is already prepared from a technical point of view. The maiden flight will take place at the end of 2026, and then there will be roughly up to three more main development steps. We think that we will have everything in place for series production by the end of the decade.

...

...

"It could be used as an 'air-launched effect mothership'. They could fly to hostile environments and launch the drones, which then carry out their mission automatically."

CONSTANCE PINSDORF, H145M PROGRAMME MANAGER



◀ The U145 can be easily loaded and unloaded, facilitating quick re-supply missions.



◀ The U145 is ideal for de-risked counter UAS missions.



◀ The U145 can also be equipped with air launched effects launchers, allowing it to act as a mothership that can release swarms of drones that can work together.

▶ Removing the physical cockpit creates even more space for cargo

THE U145

An uncrewed platform that builds on the versatility and mission efficiency of the H145M to remove the crew risk from operations in hostile and contested areas.

CARGO

OPTION 1: EXTERNAL DROP

Up to **1,600 kg**

The cargo is released automatically at a forward operating base (FOB).

OPTION 2: INTERNAL LOAD

+35% cargo compared to an H145

Nose-opening cargo doors

More than **1,200 kg**

Automatic takeoff and landing

COUNTER UAS

Autonomy development kit (ADK)

Threat detection (EO/IR, radar)

Launcher

Interceptor drones

Enemy drones

AIR LAUNCHED EFFECTS

Loyal Wingman Mothership Standoff deployment

Multi-tube ALE launchers

ALE

High-bandwidth command hub

H145M

Swarm coordination and mesh network

ALE

Threat zone

Infographic: Airbus and BeatrizSantacruz.com



THE U010 ALIACA GOES VERTICAL

Following a trial period conducted in 2024 and 2025, the the French Defence Procurement Agency (DGA) has placed an initial order for the VTOL version of the U010 Aliaca drone. This marks an essential step forward in enhancing the French Navy's surveillance capabilities.

ARTICLE — **Alexandre Marchand**

◀ *The U070 Aliaca hovering as it awaits its next mission*

"In its initial version, the Aliaca launched at sea via a catapult and was recovered in a net. The French Navy first operated this system on an offshore patrol vessel back in 2019. The strong results achieved led Navy officials to extend its use to other vessels and order additional systems in 2020," explains Maxime Caille, Director of the U010 Aliaca programme at Airbus Helicopters. Each system consists of two drones and a ground control station operated by two personnel, each equipped with a ruggedised laptop: one for flight control and the other for payload operations. A single operator could actually handle both flight control and payload simultaneously by partitioning the screen or toggling between displays. Takeoff and landing are automated, and the entire mission can also be pre-programmed.

AN EXTRA EYE IN THE SKY

Deliveries of the additional systems began in 2022 to equip offshore patrol vessels, surveillance frigates and the new overseas patrol vessels as they entered service. On these compact vessels, the U010 Aliaca has served as a set of remote binoculars, capable of seeing beyond the ship's radar horizon without needing to deploy a helicopter. A spokesperson for the French Navy emphasises: "Both in mainland France and overseas, the U010 Aliaca is an invaluable tool for gathering real-time intelligence during maritime security and surveillance missions, as well as combating trafficking and illegal fishing." Among the advantages highlighted by operators, the U010 Aliaca stands out for its minimal logistical footprint and extremely low acoustic signature, enabling discrete overflights of suspicious vessels. Its excellent identification capability — powered by an electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR) day/night sensor turret with 30x optical zoom — is also widely praised. "Real-time video feeds streamed by the U010 Aliaca to the operations room facilitate precise vectoring of interception craft and make it possible to accurately evaluate target threat levels," Navy officials add. Notably, several aircraft are also operated from land for coastal surveillance and maritime approach security. Highly satisfied with the U010 Aliaca as a tactical sensor, the Navy subsequently sought to deploy it on smaller host vessels, which required overcoming the logistical constraints of the catapult-and-net setup. This led to the development study of a vertical takeoff and landing version (VTOL). "Vertical takeoff and landing significantly expand how the drone can be deployed," Navy spokespeople confirm. "Pre-flight preparation takes just a few minutes, and the drone can also be launched in sea conditions that previously would have prevented a safe net recovery." Beyond offshore patrol vessels, surveillance frigates, and overseas patrol vessels, the VTOL version of the U010 Aliaca will also equip even smaller combatants or support ships. It will offer unprecedented flexibility for land-based operations as well. "Adding vertical takeoff and landing capabilities to the existing drone is a genuine technical ...



▲ *The Aliaca is small and easy to deploy, offering operators extra eyes in the sky in a range of situations.*

... achievement. The VTOL variant features a new wing design and a modified fuselage, but it relies on the same core components, including the autopilot and data link. Autopilot design, ground station software, and data link and sensor integration are core areas of our expertise. We have complete mastery over our system, enabling us to adapt and evolve it very quickly," adds Maxime Caille.

OFFERING NEW OPERATIONAL POSSIBILITIES

Trials conducted by the Naval Aviation Practical Trials and Acceptance Centre (CEPA) were carried out from a metropolitan support and assistance vessel (BSAM), which was not originally intended to deploy drones. The vertical flight capability opened up new possibilities by allowing the Navy to expand drone deployment to vessels that were not initially envisioned for such operations. "The entry into service of the U010 Aliaca VTOL version targets a first group of secondary naval vessels," a French Navy spokesperson explained. "Deployment will begin on BSAMs in late 2026, followed by BSAOMs BSAOMs [overseas support and assistance vessels] during 2027." The original order for the fixed-wing U010 Aliaca covered 34 systems, totaling 68 drones. Twenty-seven systems have already been delivered to the DGA, with the remaining seven scheduled for delivery before the end of the year. "The DGA was convinced by the vertical takeoff version and asked us to deliver all seven remaining systems in this VTOL configuration," notes Maxime Caille.

Beyond technical and operational specs, the U010 Aliaca has contributed to the growing drone culture within the French Navy. Looking ahead, the focus is turning towards crewed-uncrewed teaming between helicopters and drones, such as the HTeaming solution offered by Airbus Helicopters. This capability was notably demonstrated in real-world conditions in early October during MDays, featuring a collaborative scenario between the U010 Aliaca, the U030 Flexrotor and an H130 helicopter.

LIGHTWEIGHT BUT TOUGH

Engineered to operate in the most demanding maritime environments, the U010 Aliaca combines robustness, versatility and advanced technology. Featuring a maximum take-off weight of 25 kg, a wingspan of 3.6 m, and a length of 2.2 m, the U010 Aliaca comes with two propulsion options tailored to mission needs: a 100% electric version offering up to 3 hours of endurance and a 50 km data link range, and a hybrid version pushing these performance metrics to 6 hours of flight time and a 100 km operational radius. Certified SAIL III under the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) SORA methodology, it meets strict safety requirements. This qualification allows it to operate over populated areas, opening doors to numerous civil and public safety applications.



▲ *The U070 Aliaca lifts off. Pictured here above land, the VTOL version will soon be in service with the French Navy.*



BLESSED HARPIES

When Ecuadorian nature unleashes its fury, there are no hiding places that will do. Facing forest fires, extreme flooding, or destructive mudslides, the Ecuadorian Air Force's H145 Harpies deploy to the most inaccessible corners of the country to protect and save lives.

ARTICLE—**Belen Morant**



at their side

◀ *The crew winch an injured man to safety.*

▼ *The crew rush to fly the next mission.*





The 2113 Combat Squadron of the Ecuadorian Air Force has operated six versatile H145s — nicknamed "Arpías" (Harpies) in honour of South America's largest apex predator bird — since 2021. Major Andrés Ascazubi, squadron commander, explains that in addition to combat rescue, "thanks to the H145's versatility, we also perform transport, reconnaissance, medical evacuation, surveillance, external cargo and hoist rescue missions whenever required nationwide." Captain Carlos Pacheco Morales details this operational reach as "high operability, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We operate across the entire country, in all terrain and in all places. We can reach — and have reached — the Coast, the Highlands and the Amazon regions." This availability achieved a milestone in May 2026: 7,000 operational flight hours logged without registering any incidents or accidents in the country.

FIRE– AND FLOOD–TESTED

Following the winter season, Ecuador faces extreme droughts that have caused massive forest fires in areas such as Loja, Cuenca and even Quito. Against the flames, the Squadron uses the H145s equipped with the Bambi Bucket system, surgically dropping up to 1,200 litres of water per release. "For me, the missions that have left the biggest impact have been firefighting, since we were able to assist and save lives across four different provinces in the country," recounts Captain Héctor Ignacio Loayza Godoy. "We dropped approximately 30,000 litres of water in total during the 2025 fire season. They were long days of work, but with the H145, we accomplished the mission without any issues." The aircraft's easy reconfiguration, versatility, and load capacity have also proven invaluable during floods — streamlining medical evacuations, delivering humanitarian aid,and providing survival kits. "The technology of the H145 is unmatched: it is such a reliable helicopter that we are 100% sure we will reach the location where we are needed, at the exact time requested and meeting all safety standards," adds Captain Pacheco Morales.

THE PRIDE OF FEELING VALUED

Beyond the technology of their H145s, the true driving force of the squadron is its values. "Integrity and mutual trust are extremely important to our Squadron," explains Major Andrés Ascazubi. "I am very proud of our pilots because, while life among helicopters demands many sacrifices and we spend many days away from home, we return happy knowing that the people we serve are satisfied with our work." The commander explains that by mitigating floods, extinguishing fires and evacuating the sick in isolated areas, "the H145 helicopters in Ecuador have served to elevate the image of the Air Force, as the public sees it not as a weapon, but as a service to the population." As Corporal Kevin Marfetán concludes: "When we rescue or help a person, the satisfaction of a job well done is something grand; knowing that we contributed to saving a life is priceless."

THE DUTCH TOUCH

HOW THE RNLASF IS HELPING SHAPE THE NEXT GEN H225M

In 2024 the Royal Netherlands Air and Space Force (RNLASF) chose the H225M to support its special forces missions. Rotor *finds out why the battle-hardened platform was the right fit for the Dutch military and how the platform is evolving to keep its edge in future combat.*

ARTICLE — **Ben Peggie**





▲ *Zorana Franovic, Airbus Helicopters' Head of Contracts for the Super Puma*

Choosing a new helicopter is not something that armed forces take lightly. Major William*, the Project System Integrator, notes that "helicopters have always been quite vulnerable machines, when flying low and slow, compared to jets… we're in an environment which is more dangerous, and it's getting more dangerous every day." The RNLASF's process of choosing a helicopter began by assessing which one would be best to support special operations forces (SOF). The RNLASF's current fleet of Cougars have been in operation for around 30 years. Material and IT Command (COMMIT) Project Manager, Petrick, explained the complexity behind making the right choice for its replacement.

"There were more than 100 different criteria," he explains. "We selected the H225M based on the fact that it's proven for SOF, offers excellent range, cabin capacity and flexibility, interoperability, available mission equipment and compliance to Netherlands Military Aviation Regulations." According to Major William, another factor that tipped the scales in the favour of the H225M was its ability to perform on land and at sea. "It willl operate for both the land forces and the maritime forces. So we were looking for a helicopter which could do both. There are not a lot of medium utility helicopters which can do both."

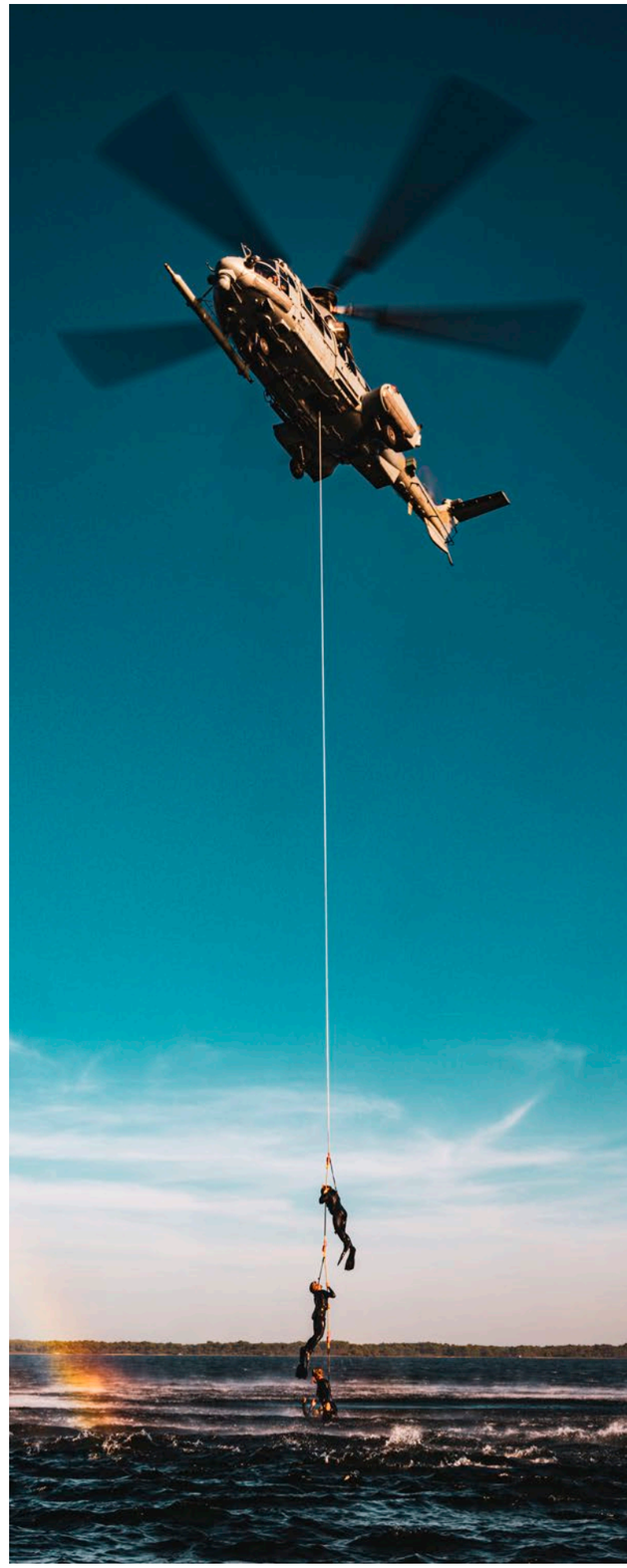
**Last names are omitted to protect the speakers' identities.*

PROVEN FOR TODAY, READY FOR TOMORROW

"The H225M is recognised as an international benchmark for Special Forces operations due to its unmatched combination of heavy-lift payload capacity, high survivability and extended combat radius," explains Zorana Franovic, Airbus Helicopters' Head of Contracts for the Super Puma. Yet, not only is the H225M already one of the best options on the market, but Franovic insists it is set to get even better. "The RNLASF configuration will be one of the most advanced tactical SOF variants ever produced in the Super Puma programme," she explains. "It will feature improvements on cyber security protection, self-protection of the helicopter, communication systems and protection of ground troops and assets." Franovic believes that the Super Puma's multi-functionality is what sets it apart. "Specialised, single-mission military aircraft cannot perform the same variety of operations. The H225M is a versatile multi-mission asset that can be upgraded. It is a continuously evolving combat asset designed to give operators the best possible platform, even beyond 2040." Franovic also points out that the H225M excels in hostile environments, thanks to its 360º electronic warfare self-protection suite, a 4-axis digital flight controls for degraded visual conditions, and versatile tactical extraction systems like fast-roping and special patrol insertion/extraction (SPIE). She states that maintaining the platform's multi-mission capacity while integrating new technology will be essential to it remaining the best option on the market. "Today, our challenge is to keep pace with technological advances, like Teaming, while maintaining the versatility of a single airframe," she says. As work begins on the first of the RNLASF's H225Ms, turning these cutting-edge capabilities into operational reality ultimately comes down to joint execution. "It's a challenging project with a lot of complexity," concludes Petrick. "The cooperation between our team, the RNLASF, and the core team of Airbus — and the communication and transparency we have working together — that's the key to success."

◀ *The Dutch H225M, like the French version pictured here, will be used for special forces operations.*

▶ *One of the key criteria in the RNLASF's choice of the H225M was its performance over sea.*



'SUPPORT THE PROTECTORS'

THE MOTTO AT THE HEART OF MILITARY CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Airbus Helicopters' network of military support centres in France, Germany and Spain aim to deliver tailored support as close to operators as possible.

ARTICLE — **Ben Peggie**



▲ *Workers in the Spanish MSC enjoy working on a rotor.*

At its core, the military support centre (MSC) model represents a fundamental evolution in military aviation support. Moving away from a traditional supplier relationship, an MSC serves as an integrated operational partner designed to maximise fleet availability and deliver end-to-end support tailored specifically to the high-intensity demands of military operators. "The MSCs are the best place to work in the company," explains Guillaume Ramirez, Head of MSC France. "We have a crucial purpose. We wake up every morning and contribute to the defence of our children. Feeling useful for society provides a lot of motivation." These words summarise the philosophy at the heart of Airbus Helicopters' MSCs: delivering for customers flying the most important missions is the only thing that matters. The aspiration is to move beyond a traditional, transactional customer support relationship, instead becoming a national defence partner, an integral part of the country's military ecosystem. In operation for more than a decade, France's MSC has 600 workers, of which 200 are offering on site support (OSS) at military bases. Ramirez explains that by integrating and co-locating Logistics, Technical Support, MRO and Contract Management functions together it creates an agile four-pillar model that improves efficiency. "It's a bit like having a small company in a big company. When you have all those people physically together in the same place, then we can optimise our support to the fleet and react quicker." Spain's MSC arrived four years ago with the main priority of maximising operational fleet availability across all fleets operated by the Ministries of Defence and of the Interior. With a total workforce of 200, 70 of whom offer OSS, Head of Spain, Alberto Morote, discusses the depth of support MSC Spain (MSCE) provides. "MSCE consolidates major maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO), complex retrofits, a primary logistics hub, specialised engineering services, contract and programme management and a training centre in Albacete," he says. "Additional key infrastructure in Getafe covers spare parts cross-docking, component MRO and technical support. This foundation is backed by extensive OSS embedded across strategic operational sites — such as the civil guard hub in Torrejón, five army bases, two air force bases and the primary navy site — even servicing non-Airbus Helicopters products as well." While France and Spain showcase the model's rapid evolution, the MSC Germany (MSCG) in Donauwörth serves as the original blueprint for the entire framework. Established in 1992 to support legacy German Armed Forces platforms, MSCG pioneered the co-located, embedded support concept that has since been exported across Europe. Today, with over 1,200 specialised personnel across 3 competence centres and more than 250 specialists stationed directly across 8 customer airbases, MSCG supports around 270 aircraft — servicing both Airbus and non-Airbus platforms under a unified, customer-centric model.



▶ *In Spain, MSC workers are either based at an Airbus facility like this one in Albacete, or provide onsite support to military operators.*

OPERATIONALLY SPEAKING AND MILITARY SUPPORT CONTRACTS

"What is specific to military customer support is that we have very demanding contracts," says Guillaume Ramirez. "Global support contracts mean Airbus commits to guaranteeing mission success and manages every need and requirement necessary to deliver the mission. This means not only logistic performance, not only technical performance, not only maintenance performance, but every aspect. Basically, our customer buys flight hours, and we need to do whatever it takes to meet the requirement." Ramirez explains that military operators' specific missions also mean that the type of support required is different. "Military ...



▲ *Maintenance in progress in the French MSC*

... regulations and requirements are increasingly geared towards high intensity missions. It's like going from a contract approach to a combat approach." The MSC setup means that technicians are able to work with more efficiency and agility to get operators' helicopters airborne again. This tailored approach is reflected in how MSC Spain delivers its day-to-day services. On the technical side, the organisation provides comprehensive MRO and modification work aligned directly with customer needs — ranging from base and line maintenance to major structural repairs, system upgrades and platform retrofits, such as specialised Medevac kits engineered for cross-platform compatibility across various army fleets. Crucially, this support extends far beyond the factory floor. Through OSS teams permanently embedded at military bases and dedicated deployment support units, Airbus technical specialists deploy alongside military personnel into the field, providing targeted operational support whenever and wherever active missions demand. In Germany, operational support is rooted in deep frontline integration. More than 250 embedded Airbus specialists are stationed directly at 8 customer air bases delivering instant flight-line maintenance and spare parts distribution. Beyond base maintenance, MSCG relies on unique national cooperation models such as the System Support Centre (SUZ) and Cooperative Unit Airframe (KMZ), where military personnel work side-by-side in joint teams with Airbus technicians and software engineers. Commercial frameworks have similarly evolved from traditional time-and-material contracts to advanced performance-based logistics (PBL) packages like NH90 Operational Support, where Airbus manages local and central inventory to guarantee parts availability. "Crucially, the MSCG is not an isolated entity within Airbus," says Klaus Przemeck, Head of the MSC Germany. "It operates in tight synergy with all support disciplines, engineering and programme teams to deliver comprehensive lifecycle support tailored directly to our customers' needs."

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENTS

This collaborative setup directly enhances operational output for the German Armed Forces. Over three decades, MSCG has transitioned its portfolio to deliver higher mission availability and flight safety across complex domestic and international deployments. From optimising inventory under PBL contracts to managing flight-line MRO, the centres' tailored support model ensures that the German military gets maximum flight hours out of its fleets. "Our greatest pride lies in our mission," states Przemeck. "Every hour of MRO, every complex modification, every tailored engineering service directly translates into safer missions and greater availability for the Bundeswehr, both domestically and



◀ *Teamwork and cooperation is at the heart of Airbus Helicopters customer service.*



◀ *An Airbus Helicopters colleague doing some 'light' maintenance inside a helicopter at the French MSC.*



◀ *Working in the same place means colleagues can easily meet to discuss technical issues and make quick decisions.*

...

"The MSCs are the best place to work in the company. We have a crucial purpose."

GUILLAUME RAMIREZ,
HEAD OF MSC FRANCE



◀ Colleagues at the German MSC hard at work on the main gearbox

... internationally." In France, the MSCs are are equally proud of their successes. "For the Super Puma, over the last 5 years, we cut the maintenance lead times in half, from 28 months, to around 14," explains Ramirez. "On the NH90, we cut them by 20% and in general we are around 30% to 50% more efficient in terms of turnaround times compared to the customer benchmark." For the Cougar fleet stationed near Pau, Airbus has full responsibility for maintenance under externalised support schemes and availability rates have reached roughly 70%, a 30% improvement compared to conventionally managed fleets. The MSC approach has also proven to be effective for the NH90. During a demanding six-month French Navy deployment to the Middle East, five NFH helicopters sustained over 90% operational availability, showing the value of the MSC on an operational fleet. On the other side of the Pyrenees, the MSC model is equally effective. "In Spain, the MSC was instrumental in several successful entry into service milestones, including the NH90 MSPT for the Spanish Navy in Rota and the seamless Spanish Army and Air Force operational deployments," emphasises Morote. He also notes that last year, MSC Spain delivered more than 50 MRO aircraft across its main hub in Albacete and various embedded base locations, while providing critical technical backing for high-stakes international missions — ranging from Spanish Army deployments in Slovakia to complex tactical exercises in the US. These operational achievements have established MSC Spain as a key foundation for long-term fleet growth. Indeed, the centre's proven support model was instrumental in securing the historic milestones signed under the National Helicopter Plan, highlighted by a landmark €4 billion euro agreement to supply 100 new helicopters — including 50 H145Ms — to the Spanish Armed Forces.

NEXT STEPS

With all three MSCs already delivering significant value to the customer, the innate drive to go even further continues to seek new improvements. In France, Guillaume Ramirez says, "our transformation targets three main objectives: readiness for wartime support, improving the performance of MRO activities and enhancing the competitiveness of our services." Looking ahead, MSC Spain is scaling its support footprint across military bases to prepare for upcoming entries-into-service — most notably for the H145M across eight separate locations, for the NH90 and for H175M platforms backed by fleet availability guarantees. To maximise operational readiness, the centre is partnering with DGAM and the armed forces on on a joint fleet availability strategy. "By using predictive digital solutions like ATOF, we can model fleet availability trends, mitigate bottlenecks before they happen and target structural improvements," says Alberto Morote. "This drives our transition toward the industry taking end-to-end responsibility for keeping our customers airborne." Looking ahead, MSC Germany is navigating a massive generational fleet transition while driving operational resilience. The centre is managing the phase-outs of legacy assets while supporting the entry-into-service of new platforms like the H145M LKH and NH90 Sea Tiger — and actively positioning itself to provide industrial support for incoming heavy-lift platforms. Starting in 2026, the centre is also expanding its scope to support the German Federal Police (Bundespolizei). "Our immediate priority is strengthening operational resilience and supply chain readiness under shifting geopolitical conditions," explains Przemeck. "Building on this, we are driving an evolution toward data-driven fleet management by expanding connected services, digital monitoring and analytics to maximise mission availability." While each centre maintains a deeply localised footprint, the overarching strength of the framework lies in the seamless network connecting MSC Germany, MSC France, and MSC Spain. By leveraging cross-border synergies, such as joint bilateral contracts like the French-German NH90 Operational Support framework and mutual MRO capacity backup during peak workloads, the interconnected MSC network operates as a single European support ecosystem dedicated to supporting the protectors.

"This drives our transition to the industry taking end-to-end responsibility for keeping our customers airborne."

ALBERTO MOROTE,
HEAD OF MSC SPAIN.

CAZAUX, France



An NH90 in flight. The 'NH' in NH90 stands for NATO helicopter.

DESIGNING A future military helicopter: HOW ENGRT MEETS FUTURE NATO CAPABILITIES

What will a helicopter need to be decisive on the battlefield, next decade and beyond? European stakeholders are already working together to design the military helicopter of the future and Airbus is playing a key role.

ARTICLE—**Ben Peggie**

ENGRT is the European Next Generation Rotorcraft. "There has been an international NATO-led initiative to scope a future helicopter that will encompass the most advanced technology that is both currently available and will soon become available," explains Ralf Weber, Campaign Manager at Airbus Helicopters. "This project is Europe's response. It should be flying by the end of the next decade."

A design for European security

The scale of ENGRT II is reflected in its backing. Supported by 12 EU Member States, including Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland and Spain, the project aims to mature critical technologies required to protect Europe in highly contested environments. Airbus Helicopters, with Leonardo, co-leads and coordinates a 53-member consortium of industrial and institutional partners who each bring a wealth of technological and industrial expertise. According to Weber, any blueprint will need to blend a range of features as European militaries believe the main needs for the ENGRT are operational durability, easy maintenance and survivability. The ability to operate in areas exposed to enemy weaponry is a particular priority, based on burrent conflicts. "This is what we see in Ukraine," says Weber. "When discussing with our home nation partners, we see interest is in increasing the survivability of the crew and the machine. So we have to find the sweet spot: a machine that is highly sophisticated in terms of its systems: its mission system, its avionics, sensors and even self protection — reducing pilot workload and allowing them to focus on the mission. Then it has to be really manoeuvrable for tactical flight — for example, flying a single-pilot tactical flight 30 ft above the ground at 130 kt at night. That's something that is really challenging, and it will also be an important part of the future role of this helicopter." In addition to maximising the future helicopter's survivability, Weber highlights maintenance as another key driver. "It also has to be robust and resilient from a Support & Services point ...

... of view. Ready for conflict. Our objective is to reduce the maintenance burden for this next-generation machine by 50% compared to existing machines, and really maintain it with standard tools and as small a logistical footprint as possible."

Vital importance

Weber underlines that the project is crucial for several reasons. "Firstly," he notes, "technology is advancing rapidly, and combat is changing in the way of being more connected, multi-domain, and increasingly connected to the whole combat zone in which you operate, via satellites or even looking beyond. Today, our helicopters are one vector of a mission, and we want them to become one part of a whole combat system that can be used in a multitude of ways. So this will bring the systems that are aboard — and the connectivity — to another dimension." This, then, ultimately leads the European nations involved in the project to aim for a consensus or compromise of what they want this rotorcraft to look like.

"What will the military need in conflicts between a very connected, specialised machine in a multi-role environment versus something that is mainly transporting people?" asks Weber. "We are talking about drones, but not only connectivity between one helicopter and one drone, but moving towards a multitude of drones, so controlling many drones while still being fully connected to the battlefield." That, in turn, leads to wider questions (and according to Weber also answers) for military vertical lift operations. "We have seen over recent years a big discussion about whether the crewed helicopter platform still has a role to play on battlefields 15 or 20 years from now," he says. "And the answer is yes. We've seen it in current conflicts. The answer is definitely yes. As long as you transport troops, piloted aircraft are always preferable and a human in the loop on-site will always play an important role in our way of thinking about conflicts. That's why crewed helicopters will continue to play a role."

▼ *Given the volatile geopolitical climate, European governments are currently assessing what the next-generation military helicopter will need.*



"The idea is to ensure that Airbus Helicopters' products, whether present or future, are ready for a multi-domain battlefield."

RALF WEBER, CAMPAIGN MANAGER, AIRBUS HELICOPTERS



► *Ralf Weber believes that crewed helicopters such as the H145M, pictured here, will still have an important role in future battlefields.*

European cooperation driving the future

In addition to defining the scope for the continent's next military helicopter, this European cooperation also continues to strengthen Europe's defence and security infrastructure. "As the EU member states continue to discuss among themselves their future needs and ways of cooperating to improve this European pillar inside the defence alliance, so it's strengthening Europe, and it's strengthening a European response to current threats," emphasises Weber. Being such an integral part of that project enables Airbus Helicopters to take stock and define its strategy. "I think it's a real opportunity to look concretely at where we want to be by the end of the next decade and what concrete steps may be taken to shape our future," says Weber. "These projects show us where our customers want to go and it's up to us to help them shape this." The ENGRT project is separated into phases, the first of which finished at the end of 2025. Airbus is leading the second phase that started in early 2026. Lasting three years and co-funded by the European Union, the new phase of the project represents a decisive transition from a research and technology project into a research and development project. During this period, an analysis of technological readiness levels (TRL) of current technology was done, establishing a baseline for elements such as open system architecture (OSA) and teaming assets with drones. The second phase of ENGRT involves increasing the TRLs. Weber explains, "This means that by the end of ENGRT II, for example, we will have an OSA test bench where we can experiment, see how everything works together, and build from there for future developments." Weber notes that the definition of the new machine is dependent on discussions between the European Commission and partner nations. "The idea is to ensure that Airbus Helicopters' products, whether present or future, are ready for a multi-domain battlefield," states Weber. "So, there is an opportunity for a new platform, but also to improve and accelerate the evolution of other Airbus Helicopters rotorcraft with new technology." The project's position is at a key juncture between the present and future. It will impact concepts as crucial as the fabric of Europe's defence and security, not to mention the continent's cooperation and interdependence. Yet it also serves as a guiding light for Airbus Helicopters' priorities, providing a technological roadmap that will lead to delivering what the company's operators need to keep their citizens safe.

SKY AVIATION: RISING TO THE ULTIMATE CINEMATIC CHALLENGE

Christopher Nolan is undoubtedly one of the most original and iconic directors working today. This year, his interpretation of Homer's Odyssey landed as a global summer blockbuster. Rotor spoke with Cesare Sappino, Managing Director of Sky Aviation — a company that played a pivotal role both in supplying the lens and behind the scenes on set.

ARTICLE — **Ben Peggie**



▲ *Sky Aviation's H125 is ready for 'action'.*

Based in Italy, with operational hubs across the country and in Greece, Sky Aviation offers a wide range of services using its fleet of Airbus H125s. From passenger transport to utility work, Sappino estimates that roughly 30% of the company's activity last year involved capturing aerial imagery for clients like Netflix, Red Bull, and the Sphere in Las Vegas — the latter requiring a specialised 360° camera array. With extensive operational experience in aerial camerawork, the company was fully prepared when Nolan came calling.

Multi-mission versatility

Sappino considers the H125 the ideal camera platform. "First of all, it's exceptionally manoeuvrable and powerful," he explains. "You can execute precise movements during filming that would be difficult with other aircraft. Because we use the H125 for aerial photography, utility work and passenger transport, we can reconfigure the cabin in just a few minutes. On a film set, delays cost serious money, so fleet availability is critical."

The scale of the production required operating across multiple countries. "We filmed in several distinct environments," says Sappino, "primarily on the island of Favignana in Sicily, at Costa Navarino in Greece, and across two locations in Morocco. That meant coordinating and relocating multiple aircraft across the Mediterranean." Beyond the bureaucratic hurdles of securing international flight permits, the production tested the aircraft's versatility far beyond camera work. "Our main tasks also included heavy sling loads — transporting construction materials, equipment and production crew to remote sets," Sappino notes.

A mythic Odyssey

Anyone who has seen the film will remember its striking visuals, particularly the dramatic shots of Odysseus's ship navigating open waters. To pull off these sequences, Sappino relied on guidance from veteran film pilot Craig Hosking. "When flying extremely low over the sea, you have to maintain a precise airspeed," Sappino explains. "You need to be fast enough to avoid generating downwash that sprays water onto the camera lens, but slow enough to capture the action." Then there was the challenge of satisfying Nolan's pursuit of practical realism. "He is meticulous in every detail — not just the cinematography, but the set design and crew management," says Sappino. "Nolan doesn't use CGI. What you see on screen is real. For instance, the 15-metre-tall Cyclops was a massive physical animatronic that we transported across locations using the helicopter's external load setup." Nolan's commitment to shooting on 70 mm IMAX film introduced additional operational variables. "Installing the IMAX housing was challenging because the weight significantly shifts the aircraft's centre of gravity," Sappino adds. "Furthermore, a roll of IMAX film lasts only three minutes. We had to shoot a three-minute run, return to land, wait for a magazine change, and launch again." Thanks to the power and reliability of the H125, Sky Aviation successfully supported Nolan's vision, helping bring an epic saga to life.



"We filmed in several distinct environments, primarily on the island of Favignana in Sicily, at Costa Navarino in Greece, and across two locations in Morocco. That meant coordinating and relocating multiple aircraft across the Mediterranean."

CESARE SAPPINO, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF SKY AVIATION



◀ *On the set of* The Odyssey, *Christopher Nolan's epic summer blockbuster*



The H135

THE HELICOPTER HELPING ASTRONAUTS GET TO SPACE

Few organisations capture the imagination as much as NASA. While helicopters might not immediately spring to mind when we think of space exploration, Rotor *catches up with the team of Airbus Helicopters colleagues who work at NASA and use the H135 to support such inspiring missions.*

ARTICLE—**Ben Peggie**

When NASA's Artemis II blasted off on 1 April 2026, it represented an important step in space exploration. The first rocket launch to carry a crew beyond earth's orbit in over 50 years, it allowed crucial tests to be performed and now paves the way for the upcoming Artemis III mission and Artemis IV—which will ultimately bring humans back to the moon's surface. Helicopters play a role in every crewed launch from the Kennedy Space Center (KSC). Whether that launch is a SpaceX Crew Dragon launch bound for the Space Station, a commercial partner launch by United Launch Alliance, or a Blue Origin launch, a team of Airbus Helicopters colleagues is there to support not only the helicopter missions themselves, but the necessary maintenance that means they can meet NASA's rigorous schedules and deadlines. For a pilot who has been fascinated with space travel from an early age, Craig Neubecker laughs when asked if there are any perks to the job. "Oh, we definitely have the best seat in the house for launches, for sure," he enthuses.

◀ *The trail of smoke left by Artemis II as it blasted off for space*

"We're definitely the closest people to it. People ask us all the time, 'Do you hear it? Do you feel it?' And it's ironic because it's all very much dependent on the atmospherics. If you have just the right cloud cover, the sound waves are trapped inside and you can feel it and hear it in the helicopter. But if it's a clear day and not a cloud in the sky, you don't hear it and you don't feel it at all. So, you can be the same two miles away and have a completely different feeling." Neubecker had always dreamed of becoming an astronaut, but majoring in history rather than engineering led him to a 23–year military career instead. He says his role now with NASA is the perfect blend of his background as a pilot and his love of space. Though he never made it into space, his involvement has led to him participating in some incredible missions. "Our primary mission is definitely security for the centre, primarily for launches," Neubecker explains. "For a crewed launch, we have all three aircraft up and available: one armed with M240 machine guns providing airborne use of force to ensure nobody comes in via aircraft or boat to cause harm to anybody; another armed ...



▲ *Andrew Brooks and Craig Neubecker, Airbus NASA pilots*



▲
Inside the cockpit of NASA's H135. The helicopters are used for everything from rocket launches to wildlife conservation surveys.

... for security to escort the astronauts out to the pad until launch; and one set up for medevac in case something goes wrong. For crewed launches, one aircraft is usually also equipped with a high-definition TV camera to film the launch from the air. We also fly daily security sweeps even on non-launch days to ensure that KSC, as the nation's premier space port, remains safe and secure." When not flying missions in support of the launches, they also fly other scientific missions. "KSC is co-located with the 144,000-acre Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge," states Neubecker. "We fly a team of biologists for wading bird surveys, manatee surveys, and bald eagle surveys, which are my favourite. These surveys are flown to ensure the health of the wildlife refuge, and it is awesome to see the harmony and contrast of the wildlife living and thriving amongst the launches of the space centre and it all working together."

The helicopter with the right stuff for NASA

The helicopters not only assist with the launches but have also helped with recovering crewed or uncrewed capsules as they Earth and splash down in the ocean. However, a recent operational shift means they are more likely to land on the Pacific side, so there is less call



Two of NASA's three H135 helicopters. All three are in the air for launches, each with a separate but crucial mission.

for the KSC pilots to get involved in the recovery. Neubecker still underlines the value of the H135 for such a mission. "The space capsules used to splash down in the Atlantic and the Gulf of America, but there's always a little bit of debris when they come back down at re-entry, so they've now started having them re-enter over the Pacific and splash down off the California coast to avoid any debris over populated areas," notes Neubecker. "When they were all on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, we supported every recovery, and it was amazing. They know exactly what time the capsule is coming down, and the night recoveries were just as spectacular as the night launches, watching them come over the horizon, looking like a shooting star coming right at you, and it lands right next to you." The capsule recovery missions show why the H135s that NASA is now using represent a significant upgrade on the previous single-engine helicopters that were in service. "Previously, we did not go more than like a mile or two offshore," says Neubecker. "With the H135, we've done recoveries over 75 miles offshore at night, something that for safety reasons we would not have attempted before. The twin-engine reliability of the H135, and the night vision goggle-compatible, Helionix, full digital glass cockpit allows us to do that, while maintaining great situational awareness through the Helionix digital picture. The autopilot also allows us to fly programmed search patterns hands-off, allowing another set of eyes to be looking outside for any possible targets of interest. For the recoveries and other searches, we also carry an extra crew member or two to operate our sensors. We have an MX-10, electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR) sensor sensor ...

"We definitely have the best seat in the house, for sure, for launches."

CRAIG NEUBECKER,
AIRBUS AND NASA PILOT

... that is integrated fully into this aircraft, which is really nice. The H135 also has single-pilot instrument flight rules (IFR) capabilities,, which is great for the emergency medical services medevac missions, as it allows us to carry two patients along with the flight paramedic and flight nurse if necessary."

"Being a part of NASA's mission, space exploration, returning to the moon and that the world's greatest space exploration operation has a direct link with Airbus Helicopters is impressive in and of itself."

JOSHUA PERETTA,
PROGRAMME LIAISON MANAGER

More than sky-high standards

The three H135s operated for NASA's missions only fly about 100-125 hours per year per aircraft, so though the main challenge is not high-cycle wear, maintenance is still a critical issue. Rocket launches are cost-intensive with extremely narrow windows for launch. "Rocket launches operate on strict orbital windows with zero room for error," explains Lead Technician, Tim Alexander. "Because NASA requires three out of three aircraft flight-ready on launch day, our maintenance planning must be meticulous. We perform our major 12-month and 36-month inspections well clear of launch windows, dedicating the rest of our time to rigorous corrosion control washes, protective coatings, and recurring structural checks. We schedule everything far enough in advance so that no routine maintenance conflict ever jeopardises a launch schedule." What's even more impressive is that it is only a two-person maintenance technician team that ensures the availability of these aircraft. "Having worked on multiple different airframes in the past, I think these are some of the most maintenance friendly aircraft to maintain. I believe the H135 has been a great platform to support NASA's mission here at Kennedy Space Center," says Alexander. As Programme Liaison Manager, Joshua Perretta serves as the on-site focal point for Airbus Helicopters' operation at Kennedy Space Center, effectively connecting this small, geographically separated Airbus team with the company's larger support organisation in Grand Prairie. In addition to ensuring the contract between Airbus Helicopters and NASA is fulfilled, Perretta coordinates the many functions required to keep the programme operating day to day, from maintenance planning, parts and material support, repairs and vendor coordination to training, property accountability, ground support equipment and power-by-the-hour support. He manages contractual deliverables, programme performance and costs while working across Airbus departments, suppliers and NASA organisations to anticipate requirements, resolve issues and ensure the three-aircraft H135 fleet remains available for missions. For NASA, the value extends well beyond supplying pilots, technicians and programme management. Airbus provides an integrated support structure with Perretta serving as the local point of coordination, bringing together the people, material, technical resources and corporate support needed to sustain the operation. That allows NASA to rely on a responsive Airbus presence at Kennedy while maintaining access to the capabilities and resources of the broader company. The result is a small, self-sufficient on-site team backed by a much larger organisation, allowing NASA to focus on flight operations, mission requirements and agency-level coordination. Of course, for the core team of Airbus Helicopters colleagues, there is an enormous sense of pride in their work. As Perretta says: "Being a part of NASA's mission here, space exploration, returning to the moon, and that the world's greatest space exploration operation has a direct link with Airbus Helicopters is impressive in and of itself. It's just great to be a part of that relationship with our partners here."







▲ *Ready for liftoff. The H135 offers the perfect blend of operational efficiency and availability, making it ideal to support NASA's precisely timed mission windows.*

◀ *Tim Alexander and Josh Margroff, Airbus NASA helicopter mechanics*

▼ *Joshua Perretta, Airbus NASA liaison manager*



▲ *The Nordschwaben Red Cross's dog unit and their human helpers pose for a photo.*

DOGS AND HELICOPTERS: THE H145 GOES ON PAW PATROL

The dogs are nervous. They can sense that something is about to happen. In a state of excitement, they sniff the unfamiliar surroundings. After all, their owners are wearing the technical gear that they always have on when they're heading out on a mission. And they drove here with them, to this car park, where other dogs are already waiting with their owners. Five of them are due to undergo important training today. Once the gate to the airfield opens, Miko, Odin, Bella, Mia and Hugo will then see, hear and smell a helicopter.

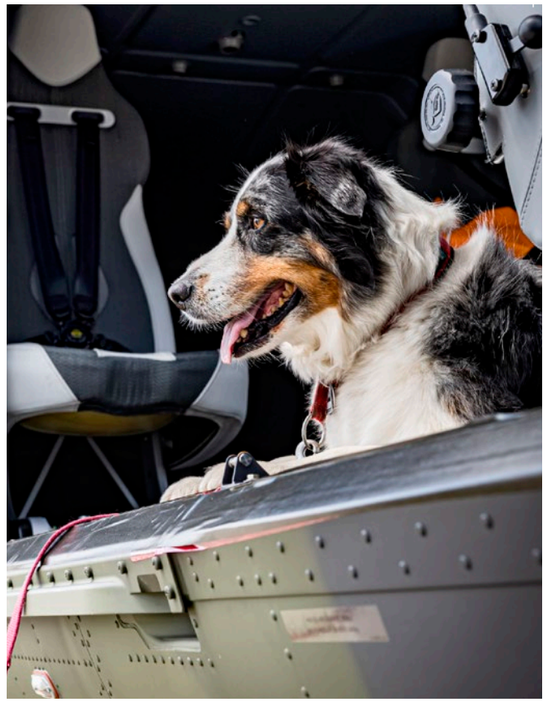
ARTICLE — **Claas Mothbock**



◀ *Good doggy! Odin looks pleased, and rightly so, after completing helicopter familiarisation training.*

Canine support that's not to be sniffed at

The five dogs belong to the canine unit of the Nordschwaben District Association of the Bavarian Red Cross. They are area search dogs, in other words, they search for missing persons over large areas. "That can be older people with dementia, children, suicidal people and people in general who find themselves in a helpless situation," explains Sina Raab, head of the unit. "Last year, we were deployed in 55 missing person searches. We are alerted by the police via the integrated control centre at any time of day or night." A rescue dog team on duty consists of a dog handler, a dog and at least one helper, who search an area covering around 45,000 m². The members of the unit are all volunteers. The dogs belong to them and also live with them. The training to become a sniffer dog begins when the dogs are still puppies and takes about two to three years. It starts with socialisation with people and other dogs, and playfully searching for and finding people in different environments and situations. This strengthens and trains the cooperation between human and dog, and working at a distance and with distractions.



▶ *Canine in the cabin. Mia looks perfectly at ease in the H145.*

"The training and the commitment are very time-consuming. Our members do this work alongside their normal jobs and their family life," says Raab. "In addition, we also visit kindergartens, retirement homes and other public events, since we rely on donations."

An unbeatable team

When the rescue teams go on search missions, there are usually helicopters in the air, flying over the area, which is why the dogs need to overcome their fear of them. That's why they come to Donauwörth, the German headquarters of Airbus Helicopters. There's an H145 standing on the airfield. This type is used by rescue organisations, police forces and armed forces worldwide for a wide range of missions. Wherever human life is at stake, that's where they fly to, so it's highly likely that the dogs will encounter an H145 on a mission. On the first run through, the helicopter stands on the heliport with its engine switched off. The teams approach with the dogs on a lead, walk around the helicopter, then the dogs are placed in the cabin. The dogs show no signs of anxiety. It's then back to the car park. The next test is more demanding. The five-bladed rotor of the H145 is now ...

“Dogs and helicopters are both tireless helpers in the search for missing persons – an unbeatable team.”

JAN SIEWERT, AIRBUS HELICOPTERS
AND NORDSCHWABEN RED CROSS DOG UNIT
VOLUNTEER

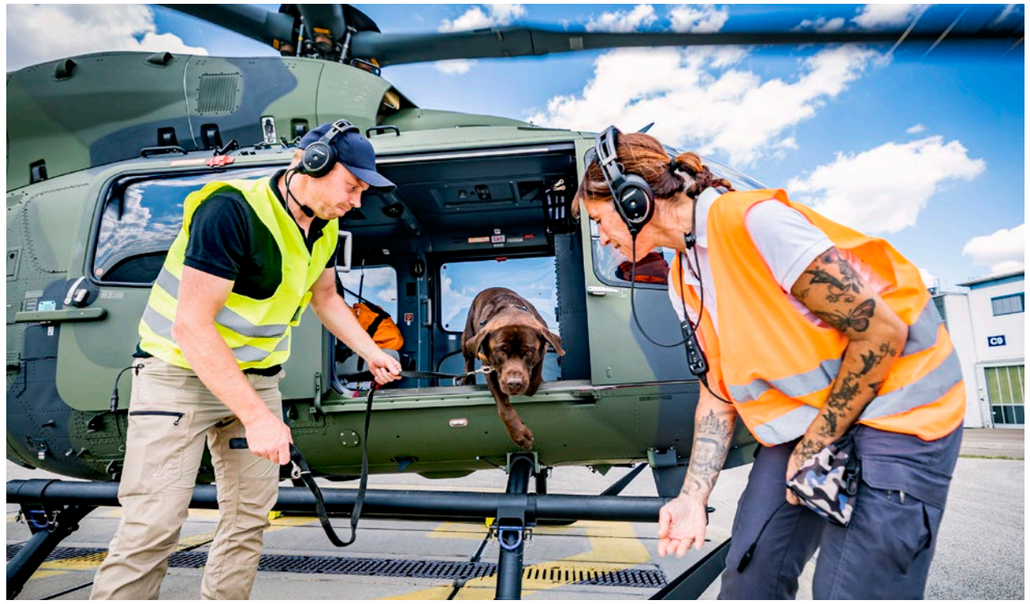


◀ *Dogs and volunteers wait in line. The support of the volunteers helps the dogs adapt to the sounds and vibrations of the helicopters.*

... rotating. The teams approach the helicopter individually, each with two people and one dog. The vibrations and downwash of the rotor unsettle the dogs. The closer they get, the more they cower. All that can help now are kind words from their human partner and a few treats from their pockets at the right moment. The helpers climb into the cabin, then the dog handlers lift their four-legged friends inside. Four of the five dogs overcome their fear, the fifth doesn’t manage it. But that’s not a problem, since area search dogs don’t normally fly with the helicopter. They are deployed in locations where the terrain can also be accessed by car. The primary aim of the training is to ensure that the dogs are not irritated by the presence of helicopters and can carry out their task. The situation is different for rubble search dogs. They look for buried persons, particularly in earthquake areas. They usually get there by helicopter, since access by land vehicles is often not possible. Training to become a rubble search dog is therefore only suitable for dogs with no fear of aircraft. Jan Siewert, who works at Airbus Helicopters in Donauwörth and is also a volunteer helper in the Nordschwaben Red Cross dog unit, is also at the exercise. For him, dogs and helicopters are a very good match: “They’re both tireless helpers in the search for missing persons — an unbeatable team. Quite simply our loyal canine companions.”



▲ *Bruno waits for his turn, supported by volunteers.*



▲ *Training complete! Bruno jumps down. Soon he will be playing a vital role in rescuing people, just like the H145.*


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H145M. Versatile by design.
Reliable by nature.
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