CUSTOMER FOCUS: US COAST GUARD

News / Manufacturer

“A phenomenal service”

In 2016, US Coast Guard aviation celebrated its 100th anniversary. This service has an illustrious history helping with everything from war efforts to bolstering US borders in homeland security. Below, a closer look.

They changed to orange for missions in the Arctic. Traditionally, US Coast Guard aircraft bear the distinctive “racing stripe” paint scheme – a white body marked with a red and blue stripe. Aboard ice-breakers in the Arctic, someone realised the Coast Guard needed a helicopter livery that would be visible against the snow. Today, its fleet of 100 MH-65* helicopters are painted a bold orange, a sign of the Coast Guard’s versatility in the face of need. Versatility serves in good stead; the Coast Guard is tasked with ensuring the United States’ maritime safety, security and stewardship. A military service and a branch of the armed forces, its missions include search and rescue, homeland security, environmental protection, the interdiction of illegal drugs and migrants, and the enforcement of fisheries laws.

A high volume of missions

It is a visibly huge service. With a total workforce of more than 87,000 – 40,000 of whom are on active duty – the Coast Guard’s presence is recognisable to nearly anyone who has seen its helicopters pass overhead or its boats buzz harbours. The huge ice breakers and cutters – 243 in total – are perhaps its most iconic symbols, yet its 2 groups of smaller “assets” – boats and aircraft – are more ubiquitous, accomplishing a high volume of varied missions. “The Coast Guard is a phenomenal service because we adapt to what is needed,” says Commander Scott Sanborn,

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operations officer and chief pilot of Air Station Houston. “Depending on the mission requirement, the Coast Guard is always ready to respond with an aircraft, a boat, a cutter, or a combination of assets. We will find a way to make it work.”

201 planes and rotorcraft comprise its airborne fleet. In 1985, the Coast Guard began procuring Aerospatiale HH-65 helicopters* and assigning them to air stations— bases serving a particular geographic region. As the Coast Guard’s primary short-range rescue aircraft, they are equipped with a rescue basket, hoist and sling, and, if necessary, a litter or dewatering pump. A SAR crew comprises 2 pilots, a flight mechanic, and an EMT rescue swimmer.

The Coast Guard service can call on more than 87,000 members, of whom 40,000 are on active duty.

“Carry a signalling device”

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Over the course of an 18-year career in which he's seen his share of rescues, Sanborn's advice to boaters is: notify someone where you'll be going and how long you'll be out, carry a signalling device and wear a life jacket. Spotting a man overboard isn't always easy. One such case occurred last year. Two fishermen in Galveston Bay went overboard when their boat swamped. The Coast Guard was alerted when the men didn't arrive back when they were due. For two days, Coast Guard crews searched but, though they located the boat, they couldn't find the men. On their last leg, with minimal fuel remaining, they spotted something from the window. "He was hanging onto an abandoned oil platform," says Sanborn. "He'd spent two days there. Finally, he took off his shirt and got the crew's attention by swinging it around over his head." Sanborn adds that people who join the service do so because they want to help others. "In the Coast Guard, you get talented folks who are motivated to find a way. There's a lot of creativity to come up with a solution."

**MH-65 helicopter: a variant of the Dauphin, it is an enhancement of the HH-65 initial version operated by the USCG.*

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