

= Boeing CH @-@ 47 Chinook in Australian service =

The Australian Defence Force has operated Boeing CH @-@ 47 Chinook heavy @-@ lift helicopters for most of the period from 1974 . Twelve CH @-@ 47C Chinooks were acquired initially , entering service with the Royal Australian Air Force in December 1974 . The eleven surviving aircraft were retired in 1989 as a cost @-@ saving measure , but it was found that the Australian Defence Force 's other helicopters could not emulate their capabilities . As a result , four of the CH @-@ 47Cs were upgraded to CH @-@ 47D status , and returned to service in 1995 with the Australian Army . The Army acquired two more CH @-@ 47Ds in 2000 and another pair in 2012 . The CH @-@ 47Ds were replaced with seven new CH @-@ 47F aircraft during 2015 , and another three were delivered in 2016 .

The Chinooks have mainly been used to support Army units in Australian service , though they have performed a wide range of other tasks . Three Chinooks took part in the Iraq War during 2003 , when they supported Australian special forces . A detachment of two Chinooks was also deployed to Afghanistan during the northern spring and summer months for each year between 2006 and 2013 , when they saw extensive combat . Two of the CH @-@ 47s deployed to Afghanistan were destroyed as a result of crashes .

= = Acquisition = =

During the early years of the 1960s the Australian Army and Royal Australian Air Force ( RAAF ) considered new types of tactical transport aircraft to replace the RAAF 's obsolete Douglas Dakotas . The Army wanted a simple and rugged aircraft that could be purchased immediately for this role , and pressed for the acquisition of de Havilland Canada DHC @-@ 4 Caribous . However , the RAAF regarded the Caribou as inadequate for this role and preferred to acquire a more sophisticated aircraft type , leading to delays in the selection process .

This disagreement came to an end in September 1962 , when as part of the expansion of the military in response to Indonesia 's policy of " confrontation " with its neighbours , the RAAF was directed by the government to conduct an urgent evaluation of short takeoff and landing aircraft and heavy @-@ lift helicopters , which could be purchased to improve the Army 's tactical mobility . A team of seven RAAF officers headed by Group Captain Charles Read , the director of operational requirements , was dispatched to the United States and assessed the Sikorsky S @-@ 61 , Vertol 107 @-@ II and CH @-@ 47 Chinook helicopters . The team judged the Chinook to be clearly the most suitable of these types , and recommended that several be acquired ; this was in line with the Army 's preference . The government subsequently accepted a recommendation made by the RAAF to acquire a package of twelve Caribou fixed @-@ wing aircraft and eight Chinooks , and placed an order for these aircraft within weeks of the evaluation being ordered . The Chinook order was subsequently cancelled by the government when it was learned that it would take several years for the helicopters to be delivered , and the RAAF 's orders of Caribous and Bell UH @-@ 1 Iroquois tactical transport helicopters were instead expanded .

The Australian military continued to consider the acquisition of a heavy @-@ lift helicopters throughout the 1960s , and a formal program was launched by the RAAF in 1969 . Another team of RAAF officers travelled to the United States , and evaluated the Sikorsky CH @-@ 53 and the Chinook . The team leader , Group Captain Peter Raw , ultimately recommended that CH @-@ 53s be ordered . Senior RAAF officers and the Army were not pleased with this outcome , and the Air Board rejected Raw 's report . Read , who was now an air vice @-@ marshal and deputy chief of the air staff , was directed to review the choice of helicopters , and again recommended that Chinooks be acquired . He justified this choice on the grounds that the Chinook could carry more cargo than the CH @-@ 53 and was better suited for operations in the mountains of the Australian @-@ administered Territory of Papua and New Guinea . Read 's recommendation was accepted by the government , and an order for twelve CH @-@ 47C Chinooks was placed in August 1970 . It was planned to rotate the helicopters in and out of service , with six being available at any time . The order was suspended later in 1970 when a series of engine problems affected the United States

Army 's CH @-@ 47Cs , but was reinstated in March 1972 after these issues were resolved . The total cost of the purchase was \$ A37 million . The order made Australia the first export customer for the CH @-@ 47 .

It was decided to station the Chinooks at RAAF Base Amberley , Queensland , located at the midpoint between the Army 's main field formations based in the outskirts of Sydney in New South Wales and the north Queensland city of Townsville . Construction began on support facilities for the helicopters at Amberley shortly after the order for them was confirmed in 1972 .

= = Operational service = =

= = = Royal Australian Air Force = = =

No. 12 Squadron was re @-@ raised at Amberley on 3 September 1973 to operate the Chinooks . This unit had previously flown bombers between 1939 and 1948 before being renumbered as No. 1 Squadron . The twelve CH @-@ 47s were transported from the United States to Australia on board the aircraft carrier HMAS Melbourne , and were unloaded at Brisbane on 28 March 1974 . In April that year it was reported that six of the helicopters were to be placed in storage as a cost @-@ saving measure ; as of 1979 these aircraft had still not been flown . No. 12 Squadron began conducting training flights on 8 July 1974 , and the unit was declared operational in December the next year .

The Chinooks ' main role in RAAF service was to support the Army . The helicopters were used to transport troops , artillery guns , ammunition , fuel and other supplies . They also provided part of the aeromedical evacuation capability available to the Army . While the Chinooks generally operated in Northern Australia , they made frequent deployments to other parts of Australia , and No. 12 Squadron conducted an annual high @-@ altitude flying training exercise in Papua New Guinea . The CH @-@ 47Cs had a crew of four , comprising two pilots , a loadmaster and one other , and could transport up to 33 passengers or 11 @,@ 129 kilograms ( 24 @,@ 535 lb ) of cargo . In August 1980 , a CH @-@ 47 was flown from Amberley to Malaysia , and used to recover a Royal Malaysian Air Force S @-@ 61 helicopter that had crashed in a remote location . This was believed to have been the longest distance a helicopter had flown up to that time , and remains the longest flight to have been conducted by a RAAF helicopter .

During their RAAF service , the Chinooks also undertook a range of non @-@ military tasks . The helicopters frequently formed part of the Australian Defence Force 's response to natural disasters , including delivering food for people and livestock cut off by floods . They were also used for civilian construction tasks such as emplacing lighthouses and carrying air conditioning plants to the top of tall buildings . On two occasions Chinooks supported Queensland Police Service drug eradication efforts in remote parts of the state by transporting fuel for RAAF Iroquois helicopters and carrying seized narcotics . In August 1981 , two CH @-@ 47s lifted containers from the cargo ship Waigani Express to enable the vessel to be refloated after it ran aground in the Torres Strait . A similar operation was undertaken to free the Anro Asia when it ran aground near Caloundra , Queensland , in November the same year . Another unusual task was conducted in December 1981 when a Chinook transported two bulldozers onto a grounded iron ore carrier near Port Hedland , Western Australia , so that they could be used to reposition the ship 's load .

The RAAF 's Chinook fleet suffered two serious accidents . On 26 June 1975 , A15 @-@ 011 crashed when one of its engine turbines disintegrated . No. 3 Aircraft Depot was assigned responsibility for repairing the helicopter , but it did not reenter service until 21 May 1981 as the maintenance unit lacked experience with major helicopter repairs . On 4 February 1985 , A15 @-@ 001 crashed into Perseverance Dam near Toowoomba , Queensland , after striking power wires . The helicopter 's pilot , an exchange officer from the Royal Air Force , was killed and the other three aircrew suffered minor injuries . The helicopter was written off and used as a fire training aid at Amberley .

In November 1986 the Chiefs of Staff Committee and Minister for Defence Kim Beazley decided to

transfer all of the RAAF 's Iroquois and Sikorsky S @-@ 70 Black Hawk battlefield helicopters to the Army ; the Chinooks remained with the RAAF at this time . In May 1989 the RAAF and Army jointly decided to withdraw the Chinooks from service . This decision was made to reduce costs , the Army believing that the Black Hawks would provide sufficient air lift capability . Due to the Chinooks ' high operating costs , only six of the helicopters were in service at the time . No. 12 Squadron ceased flying on 30 June 1989 , and was disbanded on 25 August that year .

= = = Australian Army = = =

While it was intended to sell the Chinooks after they were withdrawn from service , experience soon demonstrated that the Black Hawks were unable to fully replace them . In particular , it was found that heavy @-@ lift helicopters were needed to transport fuel supplies for the Black Hawks during exercises and operations . As a result , plans to sell the Chinooks were put on hold in late 1989 , and the Army and RAAF began investigating options to reactivate them . The 1991 Force Structure Review recommended that between four and six Chinooks be reintroduced to service to support the Black Hawks , with the helicopters preferably being upgraded to CH @-@ 47D standard .

A deal to upgrade several of the Chinooks was reached in May 1991 . Under this arrangement , seven of the surviving CH @-@ 47Cs were sold to the US Army for \$ A40 million , with these funds being used to partly cover the cost of upgrading the remaining four to CH @-@ 47D status . The total cost of the project was \$ A62 million , of which \$ A42 million was required to upgrade the four helicopters and the remainder to cover the cost of spare parts , administration and new facilities for the Chinooks at Townsville . All eleven Chinooks were shipped to the United States in September 1993 , and the upgraded helicopters returned to Australia in 1995 . It was decided to transfer the Chinooks to the Australian Army , as by this time the RAAF no longer had significant expertise in operating the type .

The four CH @-@ 47Ds were assigned to C Squadron of the 5th Aviation Regiment , which was based at Townsville , and also comprised two squadrons equipped with Black Hawks and six Iroquois helicopters used as gunships . Two newly built CH @-@ 47Ds were ordered in 1998 , and joined the other four in 2001 .

Following their transfer to the Army , the Chinooks were used in similar roles to those they had undertaken in RAAF service . The first operational deployment of the Army Chinooks began in November 1997 , when two of the helicopters and three Black Hawks departed for Papua New Guinea . This force was used to transport food supplies in the highlands of the country following a severe drought , and returned to Australia in March 1998 .

In 2003 a detachment of three CH @-@ 47Ds was deployed to the Middle East as part of the Australian contribution to the invasion of Iraq . The detachment formed part of the Special Operations Task Group , and operated from Jordan to transport supplies and personnel to Australian special forces units operating in Western Iraq throughout the initial stage of the conflict . One of the tasks undertaken by the detachment was flying commandos from the 4th Battalion , Royal Australian Regiment to Al Asad Airbase after the facility was captured by Special Air Service Regiment units . This deployment was the first time Australian military helicopters had participated in combat since the Vietnam War .

From 2006 to 2013 a detachment of two Chinooks operated in Afghanistan as part of the Australian forces deployed to the country . The initial detachment arrived at Kandahar International Airport in March 2006 , and was tasked with supporting the Australian Special Forces Task Group in the country . After the Special Forces Task Group was withdrawn in September 2013 the helicopters remained in the country and were used to support Coalition forces , with a particular emphasis on the Australian units which were located in Urozgan Province . The detachment was withdrawn to Australia during the Afghan winters , but redeployed to the country each spring . By the end of the final rotation on 14 September 2013 the helicopters had flown more than 6 @,@ 000 hours in combat and transported almost 40 @,@ 000 personnel .

Two Australian CH @-@ 47Ds were destroyed in Afghanistan . On 30 May 2011 , A15 @-@ 102 crashed in Zabul Province , resulting in the death of an Army unmanned aerial vehicle pilot who was

travelling on board as a passenger . As it was impractical to recover the helicopter , it was destroyed by Coalition forces . The official inquiry into the crash found that it was caused by a known issue in which Chinooks suffered uncommanded pitch oscillations while flying through dense altitudes , and that the aircrew had not been adequately trained to prevent such incidents . Another Chinook was written off following a hard landing in Kandahar Province on 22 June 2012 , resulting in minor injuries to one of its aircrew . Both of the Chinooks at Kandahar International Airport also suffered significant damage in April 2013 , when the airport was struck by a severe hail storm . Two CH @-@ 47Ds were purchased in December 2011 to replace A15 @-@ 102 .

In February 2010 the Australian Government gave final approval for the Army to purchase seven CH @-@ 47F Chinooks to replace the CH @-@ 47Ds . A contract for these helicopters was signed on 19 March that year . The total cost of the CH @-@ 47F project , including the construction of new facilities and the acquisition of two flight simulators , was \$ 631 million . The Australian CH @-@ 47Fs are fitted with equipment to better enable them to operate from the Royal Australian Navy 's Canberra class landing helicopter dock vessels , but are otherwise identical to the aircraft operated by the US Army .

Australia 's first two CH @-@ 47Fs entered service with the 5th Aviation Regiment on 5 May 2015 . At this time it was planned for C Squadron to be fully operational with the new Chinooks by January 2017 . The seventh CH @-@ 47F was delivered three weeks ahead of schedule in September 2015 . A further three CH @-@ 47Fs were ordered in December 2015 for \$ US150 million , including spare parts , related equipment and some support costs . These helicopters were delivered two and half months earlier than planned in June 2016 . The 2016 Defence White Paper and its supporting documentation stated that the CH @-@ 47Fs will receive modifications to better enable them to perform aeromedical evacuation tasks by the 2025 ? 26 financial year , and that it is intended to regularly upgrade the helicopters so that they can continue to be supported through the US military 's logistics system .

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