Canada Retires Sea King After More than 50 Years of Service

VICTORIA, British Columbia – The Canadian Armed Forces marked a major military milestone in the retiring of the CH-124 Sea King maritime helicopter, which has served for more than 50 years.

The Sea King will officially retire from service by Dec. 31 as the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) completes its transition to the new CH-148 Cyclone maritime helicopter. But the Canadian Armed Forces paid tribute to the aircraft in a parade held Dec. 1 in Victoria.

Although the Sea King operates from ships, and was originally procured in 1963 to conduct anti-submarine warfare at sea, the aircraft were operated by the RCAF, and was that services longest-serving aircraft. The aircraft were assigned to the 12 Wing and based at Shearwater, Nova Scotia, and Patricia Bay, British Columbia.

The helicopter was capable of day and night operations, and had folding rotor blades so they could fit into the hangars aboard surface combatants. It had an amphibious hull and could land on water.

Canada's CH-124 Sea King fleet has flown in excess of 550,000 hours, and served in NATO and other international maritime operations conducting international peacekeeping, surveillance and counter-piracy as well as anti-submarine warfare. They have deployed all over the world, including the Persian Gulf, Somalia, Yugoslavia, East Timor and Haiti.

Many of the domestic maritime duties in the U.S. that would be conducted by the U.S. Coast Guard, such search and rescue, disaster relief, counter-narcotic operations, and pollution and fisheries patrols, are missions performed in Canada by the

Navy and Air Force. And many of those response and enforcement missions were performed by the Sea King. Most recently, a CH-124 Sea King participated in the RCAF's support to firefighting operations in British Columbia.

"The Royal Canadian Navy has been well served by the Sea King – our longest-range weapon and sensor – for decades. It was an honor to fly with the crew of Black Horse, the helicopter deployed with HMCS St. John's, during the Sea King's last operational deployment supporting NATO assurance measures this summer," said Vice Adm. M. F. Ron Lloyd, commander of the Royal Canadian Navy. "Canada's Navy and the Royal Canadian Air Force continue to forge ahead with an exciting new chapter, marked by the first operational deployment of Avalanche, the Cyclone helicopter currently deployed on NATO operations with HMCS Ville de Quebec."

According to RCAF Commander Lt. Gen. Al Meinzinger, the retirement of the CH-124 Sea King is truly historic for the RCAF.

"No other fleet has served as long as the Sea King, and its 55 years of service are a monument not only to its durability and capability, but to the men and women who operated, maintained and otherwise supported this incredible helicopter," he said.