First Saudi Helicopter Arrives at Naval Station Mayport

NAVAL STATION MAYPORT, Fla. –The first of several MH-60R Seahawk helicopters purchased by the Royal Saudi Arabian Navy arrived at Naval Station Mayport Oct. 2. The helicopters are part of a training program for Saudi pilots and crew that is expected to last for the next three years.

“This is an exciting day!” said Lt. Cmdr. Ryan Miller, the training officer for the “Airwolves” of Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 40. “This is the first of a series of five aircraft that will be joining us here at HSM 40.”

HSM 40, a helicopter squadron based out of Naval Station Mayport, is playing an imperative role in the training of Royal Saudi Naval officers and crewmen.

“We are responsible for providing the training that the foreign military sales office has contracted with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,” Miller said. “[We will be providing the training] for their 250 plus, pilots, aircrew and maintainers.”

The Saudi detachment was excited to receive their new aircraft.

“We’ve been waiting for this moment for a long time,” said Lt. Cmdr. Mazin Alshahrani, the officer in charge of the Saudi detachment. “We appreciate our partnership with the U.S. Navy and especially the squadron, HSM 40.”

The MH-60R helicopter that the Royal Saudi Navy received is one of the most advanced helicopters in the world and is capable of a multitude of missions.

“This helicopter is really a game changer,” Alshahrani said. “It’s the top of the line and one of the best helicopters that the Saudi government will provide our navy and will be the main mission helicopter of our fleet.”

Once the detachment is fully trained, 10 aircraft, including five from Mayport, will be shipped to Saudi Arabia where a new squadron will be stood up.

“The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has purchased 10 MH-60R helicopters,” Miller said. “Five of those aircraft will be homebased in Mayport for the next three years. [This one] is the first of those aircraft. We expect one more per month for the next four months. The remaining five aircraft will remain in the United States until all of the remaining aircraft are ready to be shipped back to Saudi Arabia to join the Royal Saudi Naval fleet.”

The addition of the aircraft and the training of the Saudi naval personnel is a step to promote global security in the U.S. Fifth Fleet area of operations.

“This is a big milestone for us in the partnership,” Miller said. “We look forward to providing the highest quality of training to the Kingdom. Once the training program is complete in about three years, we look forward to sending all of the aircraft and personnel back home and strengthening the relationship that both nations have towards global security.