



Sikorsky Archives News

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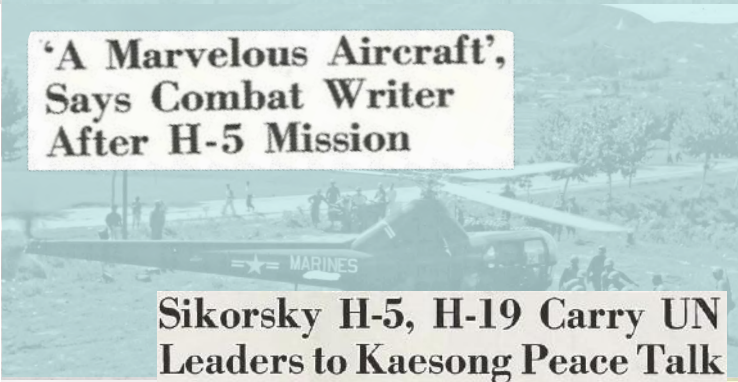
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Sikorsky Helicopters Came of Age in the Korean War

The SIKORSKY NEWS

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'A Marvelous Aircraft', Says Combat Writer After H-5 Mission

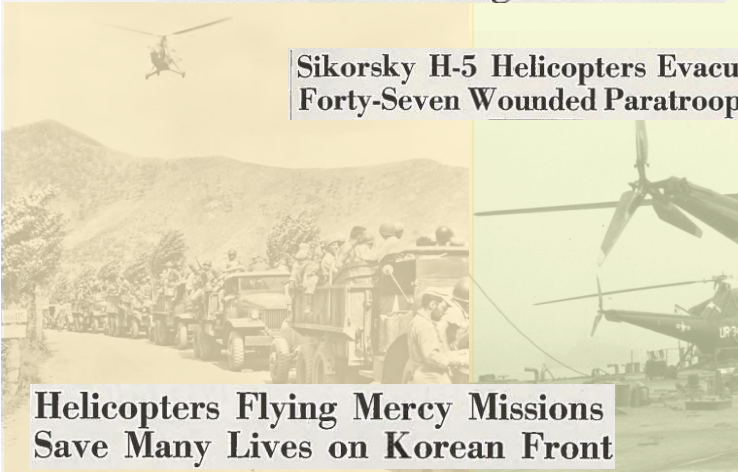


Sikorsky H-5, H-19 Carry UN Leaders to Kaesong Peace Talk

GIs In Korea Find Evacuation 'Copter Their 'Guardian Angel'



Sikorsky H-5 Helicopters Evacuate Forty-Seven Wounded Paratroopers



H-5 Makes 5,000th ARS Pickup



Eighth Army Helicopters in Korea Aid Battalion Trapped by Spring Floods

Helicopters Flying Mercy Missions Save Many Lives on Korean Front

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The U.S. armed forces had few helicopters and little combat helicopter doctrine when North Korean forces surged south into the Republic of Korea (ROK) on 25 June, 1950. The U.S. Air Force flew Sikorsky S-48s and S-51s (H-5s) in Air Rescue squadrons. The Navy and Marine Corps had S-51s (H03S-1s) in Utility and Observation Squadrons. Though the Navy awarded Sikorsky a contract for S-55s (H04S-1s) in April 1950, none of the armed services had viable transport helicopters at the start of the war in mountainous Korea.

The Korean conflict drove rapid combat helicopter development. By August 1950, *Sikorsky News* reported, "The amazing success of Sikorsky 'copters in the bloody warfare in Korea has overshadowed the World War II action of the Sikorsky models R-4, R-5 and R-6." It continued, "The United States Marines in combat on the Korean war-front are using Sikorsky HO3S-1 helicopters as their new weapon over a terrain where maneuverability, low-flying and versatility pay off. Already they are rescuing wounded GIs, removing them to base hospitals; carrying out reconnaissance flights over enemy patrols, and running a general messenger and taxi service."



*Wounded Marine is loaded into a S-51 for evacuation to a hospital.
(Photo from August 1950 Sikorsky News)*



*For Korea – Full Steam Ahead at Sikorsky. Helicopters coming off the Bridgeport assembly lines at a rapid rate. When completed they are flown away by military 'copter pilots.
(Photo from Sikorsky Archives Collection)*

Sikorsky News concluded, "Even more uses are in store for Sikorsky helicopters, which were once considered 'gadgets' but now have come in to their own. The combat potential of the helicopter is widening."

Sikorsky helicopters were not the only ones to evacuate the wounded in Korea, but Igor Sikorsky was especially proud of their life-saving role. In 1950, his company created the "Winged S" award for pilots of Sikorsky helicopters who accomplished a life-saving rescue, and to honor those rescued. The October 13, 1950 issue of *Sikorsky News* reported that 125 "Winged S" pins had been awarded up to that time due to the many rescue missions being flown in Korea. For the U.S. military, helicopter warfare had just begun



U.S. Marine Corps

Sikorsky began deliveries of the S-51 to the U.S. Navy in November 1946, and in mid-July 1950, Marines from experimental squadron HMX-1 drew a half-dozen helicopters from Pacific-coast Navy units and joined Marine Observation Squadron VMO-6. Four helicopters initially flew reconnaissance, command-and-control, resupply and Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC) missions from Pusan, Korea. S-51s also gave United Nations forces their first helicopter Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) assets in-theater. On August 10, 1950, a helicopter from VMO-6 recovered a downed Marine fighter pilot. In September, another rescued a Navy Corsair pilot from Inchon harbor. By the end of 1950, 23 aircrew had been recovered from behind enemy lines by VMO-6 helicopters.

On 8 August 1950, an S-51 flew the first night Medevac mission. VMO-6 ultimately logged more than 1,000 night-time Medevac flights in Korea with a mix of light helicopters. Marine S-51s were also used to fly resupply missions, in some cases delivering water to units cut off by the enemy and terrain. The helicopters also shuttled ground officers to and from Seventh Fleet ships off Korea to coordinate naval fire support.



As an aerial link in Korea, a Marine S-51 takes off against a rugged mountainous backdrop from a forward command post near the front lines. It's returning to base. (Photo from Sikorsky News August 1950)

Deliveries of the four-seat Sikorsky S-52 (HO5S-1) started in March 1952 to replace the S-51 in the Marine Corps. The first new helicopter arrived at VMO-6 in July 1952 with a detachment from HMX-1.

The Marine Corps envisioned vertical envelopment with helicopters big enough to carry troops and supplies from ship to shore around enemy defenders. The Corps placed an order in August 1950 for 40 S-55 (HRS-1s). HMR-161 became the first Marine transport helicopter squadron in January 1951, received its first S-55 in April, and deployed to Korea in September. Within the month, Operation Windmill saw 10 helicopters haul 12,180 lb of supplies with 18 flights in the first mass helicopter resupply mission. Two days later, HMR-161 used its S-55s for troop lift when Operation Summit relieved a ROK unit with a Marine reinforced reconnaissance company. In the course of the action, the helicopters also evacuated 84 casualties. Hill 884 in east-central Korea was dubbed Mount Helicopter.



Two North Korean military policemen turn to watch a Sikorsky Marine helicopter arrive at Panmunjom with UN armistice delegates. The copter taxi was being used daily by peace negotiators, as the various services offer their copters for the convenient trips. (Photo from January 1950 Sikorsky News)

In 1952, HMR-161 repositioned for missions on Korea's Western Front, and in Operation Pronto airlifted 662 Marines and 10,000 lb. of rations with 99 flights planned on short notice. In Operation Ripple during the summer of 1952, the S-55s quickly repositioned rocket launchers and firing crews before enemy artillery could locate Marine firing positions. When the armistice went into effect in July 1953, the 1st Marine Division supported by HMR-161 maintained defensive positions in Western Korea overlooking the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The early S-55s flew personnel and cargo lift, Medevac, and VIP transport missions. By the time the squadron left Korea, it had logged more than 30,000 flight hours.

U.S. Air Force

The Sikorsky S-48 (H-5D) was the first helicopter to equip the U.S. Air Force Air Rescue Service. It gave way to more powerful S-51 (H-5F). The 3rd Air Rescue Squadron (ARS) had nine S-51s in Japan when the Korean War began, and by late 1950 the helicopters had rescued 73 aircrew down behind enemy lines. Air Force S-51s could also be outfitted with two external litter capsules and in December 1951 flew wounded soldiers directly from front-line aid stations to a hospital ship off the Korean coast.

The Air Force also deployed two S-55 prototypes to Korea in 1951 with an Air Proving Ground Team to form Detachment F of the 3rd ARS. The April 13, 1951 issue of *Sikorsky News* reported, "In 1951 the H-19 (S-55), joined the H-5 in Korea. The much larger aircraft was capable of carrying eight evacuees and a medical attendant. It evacuated wounded soldiers at a rate four times that of the smaller Sikorsky H-5." Production H-19As were ordered that year, and by June 15, 1951, *Sikorsky News* declared, "Big, ten-place Sikorsky helicopters for all the military services are coming off the Bridgeport assembly line at a rapid rate."

While Far East Air Force leaders wanted to use their helicopters to recover downed pilots, the Army demanded aircraft be devoted to Medevac. Inter-service agreements in October 1951 and November 1952 finally made evacuation of wounded soldiers an Army responsibility, and put Air Force helicopters under a Rescue Control Center. Helicopters of the 3rd Air Rescue Group typically sat ground alert at forward operating sites while Grumman SA-16 fixed-wing amphibians flew airborne rescue patrols.



A U.S. Air Force Sikorsky H-19B helicopter from the 3rd Air Rescue Group, hoisting USAF Capt. Joseph McConnell out of the Yellow sea off Korea on April 12, 1953. McConnell was shot down by a MiG-15 in his North American F-86E Sabre. (Photo from Sikorsky Archives Collection)

Air Force S-55s ultimately flew United Nations negotiators into enemy territory for cease-fire conferences. From June 1950 to the end of hostilities in July 1953, the 3rd Air Rescue Group was credited with nearly 10,000 UN personnel rescued, nearly 1,000 of them from behind enemy lines.



U.S. Army

The Sikorsky S-55 (H-19C) gave the Army its first true transport helicopter. Starting in 1952, the Army received Chickasaws, helicopters essentially identical to the Air Force S-55s. The 6th Transportation Company (Helicopter) took the S-55 to the Korean theater in January 1953. Operation Terry Blue soon resupplied isolated elements of the 3rd Infantry Division with nearly 34,000 pounds of food, fuel, and ammunition.

In April 1953, Army and Marine S-55s evacuated nearly 700 sick and wounded Prisoners of War in Operation Little Switch. In June they teamed again in the biggest helicopter operation of the Korean War, using 45 aircraft to airlift 800 Republic of Korea troops. In August 1953 the 6th Transportation Company (Helicopter) was part of Operation Big Switch, making more than 1,100 flights to repatriate 5,600 American and Allied POWs from Panmunjom.



In a startling demonstration before top field commanders 21 Sikorsky H-19s airlifted an infantry company of 150 men a distance of five miles in ten minutes. (Photo from May 1953 Sikorsky News)



U.S. Navy

The U.S. Navy's first operational helicopter squadron, Helicopter Utility Squadron ONE (HU-1), was established with S-51 (HO3S-1) helicopters in 1948. Detachments from HU-1 and later HU-2 flew from aircraft carriers, battleships, and other combatants off Korea to give the Navy plane-guard rescue assets and early Combat Search And Rescue capability.



A U.S. Army S-55 repatriating UN soldiers during Operation Little Switch. (Photo from May 1953 Sikorsky News)



On June 22, 1951, an HO3S-1 flown by Lt.(jg) John Koelsch rescued a pilot down in Wonson Harbor. On July 3, 1951, Koelsch launched with aviation mechanic AM3 George Neal from a

tank landing ship off Wonson to rescue a Marine Corsair pilot down 35 miles behind enemy lines.

The helicopter was shot down and the crew captured with the fighter pilot. John Koelsch died in captivity and became the first helicopter pilot awarded the Medal of Honor by Congress.

S-51s also gave the Navy an early form of airborne mine countermeasures. When North Korean mines blocked Wonson harbor in October 1950, the helicopters warned of mine lines ahead of surface minesweepers. Navy squadron HU-1 ultimately received a presidential unit citation for rescuing airmen and sailors, directing naval gunfire, and spotting sea mines in Korea. With modern technology, the same missions today are fulfilled by Sikorsky MH-60R and MH-60S Seahawks.



Sikorsky Navy S-51's saved lives and souls. Here, a Catholic Chaplain being transported by helicopter to decks of fighting ships for Mass in Korea. (Photo from Sikorsky Archives Collection)

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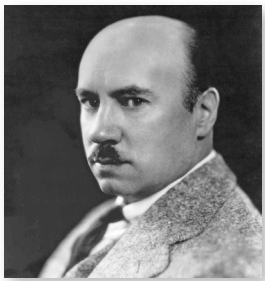
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The earliest dated "Winged S" Air Rescue Certificate was awarded to Jimmy Viner on November 29, 1945.

Prepared by Art Linden, John Bulakowski and Frank Colucci with graphic art and layout by Jodi Buckley. (All photos from pages 1 and 8 from Sikorsky Archives Collection)



“For me, the greatest source of comfort and satisfaction is the fact that our helicopters have saved up to the present time (1969) over fifty thousand lives and still continue with their rescue missions. I consider this to be the most glorious page in the history of aviation.”

Igor Sikorsky



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