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 by Staff Sgt. Stacia Zachary
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7/9/2009 - CAMP BASTION, Afghanistan -- When a combat search and rescue crew boards their HH-60G Pave-Hawk helicopter to perform a mission here, there are a lot of factors that require their attention. Due to the professionalism and dedication of their maintenance crews, the flightworthiness of their helicopter isn't one of those factors.

The maintainers are responsible for performing pre-flight inspections at the beginning of every shift (including routine inspections) as well as any and all maintenance the helicopter may require.

"We're responsible for making sure that the helicopter flies and gets the crew where they need to go - safely," said Staff Sgt. Daniel Prizio, 129th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron crew chief.

Operating in Afghanistan presents the maintenance crews with its fair share of challenges.

"The dust that we have here is very fine and gets in everywhere," said Master Sgt. Brian Taylor, 129th ERQS maintenance production superintendent. "It's really hard to keep the aircraft running because the dust gets in the smallest places and causes premature wear on all of the mechanical components."

Another challenge is getting the right pieces to fix both the routine and non-routine maintenance issues.

"The helicopter wears hard on itself," said Sergeant Prizio, a native of Stanford, Conn. "That combined with dust being a major factor and you see a lot maintenance being done more often. Keeping the right supplies on hand and having the right tools is always a challenge but even more so while deployed."

The maintenance crew is composed of individuals that complement each other so problems are quickly solved and nothing is left hanging.

"We've been lucky so far," said Sergeant Taylor, a native of Newark, Calif. "This team of people working here are doing an outstanding job. They instinctively know what to do without being told. Things that would normally keep a bird grounded are quickly fixed."

The crew's ability to troubleshoot maintenance issues has been a real benefit to the rescue mission.

"We were having a problem with the pressure switches," Sergeant Prizio said. "We kept getting bad readings and the troubleshoot wasn't fixing it. So, after getting in there and really looking at the problem, we realized that the parts were bad. Once we changed them, everything worked and the helicopter was flight-worthy again."

The maintenance crews remain in constant communication with the flight engineers and the pilots to make sure the Pave-Hawks are in top condition. Being able to take their description of a particular concern allows the crew to quickly and accurately diagnose a problem. This, in turn, keeps the mission running.

"We work hand-in-hand with the maintenance crews to make sure everything is working the way it should," said Tech. Sgt. Brock Woodward, 129th ERQS flight engineer. "Without their efforts, it would be impossible to prosecute the rescue mission. The reason we are so successful is because they keep us flying."

Editor's note: These stories are part of a series detailing the different aspects of the combat search and rescue efforts in Afghanistan to aid U.S. and coalition servicemembers, Afghan National Security Forces and civilians.

Photos

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U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jeremy Weninger, 129th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron maintainer, repairs the tail section of an HH-60G Pave Hawk, June 24, 2009, Camp Bastion, Afghanistan. (U.S. Air Force Photo by Staff Sgt. Shawn Weismiller)

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