



*Army Air helicopters fly over the unearthly landscape of the White Sands National Monument. The dunes themselves were created by gypsum sand being blown across the desert valley floor, resulting in a vast and ever-changing pure white 'sea'. The main range facilities lie to the west of the sands, while Holloman AFB – from where Army Air operates – and the city of Alamogordo lie to the east.*

the test allows the profile to be modified in real time. Specific stages of a missile trajectory can be reproduced to gather data on the firing and control system, all this without actually having to fire a real missile.

Army Air recently finished the Captive Carry stage of the NetFire precision attack missile currently under development, illustrating the important involvement of Army Air in testing new weapons and their systems.

Other test support missions include tracking and the search and recovery of live ordnance, drones and other test items. The helicopter aircrews conduct both internal and external load operations in extreme environmental conditions, as the operating area includes high desert at a mean elevation of 4,100 ft (1250 m) MSL and rugged mountainous terrain at elevations as high as 9,000 ft (2743 m) MSL. The combination of altitude and summertime temperatures that can exceed 45°C on the desert floor requires aircrews to operate in an always challenging high-temperature altitude environment.

As well as their primary roles, Army Air flight crews also participate in local wildlife management programmes that include wildlife survey flights and the capture of a variety of animals



such as mule deer, elk, oryx and desert bighorn sheep. Army Air periodically is called in to respond to local search and rescue requirements, ranging from downed or missing aircraft to lost hikers.

Currently, Army Air flies approximately 700 to 800 hours per year with the JUH-1s, 500 hours per year with the JOH-58s and around 400 to 600 hours per year in the JC-12. The service life of the JUH-1 fleet has been extended through FY 08 and, with an abundance of spare parts, Army Air can easily maintain its Huey fleet in the air for some time to come.

Regarding the fleet of JOH-58s, it seems their lifetime is nearing its end, as already being witnessed in other units in the US Army. It is likely that they will be retired in late 2005. The

service life of the JC-12 is practically indefinite. At this moment no plans or specific requirements exist for any major modifications to the fleet in the foreseeable future.

With defence budgets under continuous pressure, the money available for developmental tests is also being squeezed. Consequently, more and more tests are taking place in a virtual world. However, the need to simulate and test in a real-world environment remains a necessity, and to this purpose the aerial assets of Army Air remain of great importance, offering a wide spectrum of test support capabilities at relatively low cost. They minimise the need to fire real and expensive ordnance, while offering all the flexibility a modern test site like White Sands Missile Range requires.

*Maruix Sap/MIAS*