



base for naval aircrews.

On 15 September 1945, Naval Auxiliary Air Station North Bend was placed in caretaker status, then declared surplus on 6 June 1946. Three months later it was turned over to the War Assets Administration to be disposed of and on 15 September 1947 was decided to the city. Today it is known as North Bend Municipal Airport. The military did not make use of the it until the Coast Guard air station was built in 1974, at a cost of \$ 2.4 million. Commissioning took place on 28 September 1974 and, as it was co-located with sector headquarters, the station became Group/Air Station North Bend with its commanding officer also serving as the sector commander. Today, it is responsible for an area extending from Depoe Bay, Oregon, southward to the California border, encompassing some 220 miles (354 km) of coastline along with the area that stretches 50 miles (80 km) inland as far as Interstate 5.

The original group has expanded since its inception and now consists of the air station, an air facility at Newport, the 110-ft (33-m) Coast Guard cutter *Orcas*, six motor lifeboat stations with two additional SAR detachments, and an Aids-to-Navigation team with five lighthouses and 181 minor aids to navigation. It oversees all of the operations of these units and supports them with all of the usual 'group' services.

The air station was commissioned to address the increase in SAR activity along the Oregon coast during the late sixties and early seventies, and initially three HH-52A Seaguard helicopters were assigned. One was lost when it crashed and sank on 23 November 1980 while attempting to assist a fishing vessel in distress, nine miles west of the Umpqua River entrance. All four crewmen escaped without injury. By 1990, the HH-52s had been replaced by HH-65A Dolphins and five are presently assigned. SAR remains the primary mission although increasingly, activities have embraced more law enforcement and environmental issues. The air station frequently assists federal, state and county agencies as well, responding to calls for assistance with inland searches and medical evacuation of injured loggers.

North Bend is one of four legacy group/air stations in the United States. Recently the Coast

Guard underwent a reorganisation of its shore forces. Some of the legacy groups were co-located with marine safety offices and combined into single operational entities. Responsible for the facility and the assets assigned to it is Capt. Lance Benton.

In addition to the air facilities, the group commander has five HH-65Cs at its disposal. This allows it to have two standing by at 'Bravo Zero', meaning they can launch within 30 minutes, 24 hours a day, year-round. One B-Zero Dolphin is permanently based at Air Facility Newport while the other is at North Bend. The Newport facility was originally established in the mid-eighties to allow quicker response time in the event someone in the local fishing fleet ran into trouble. The HH-52's at North Bend were not in a position to respond fast enough. The duty crew is rotated every day with another from North Bend.

Group North Bend has some 450 people assigned to it of which 150 are attached to the air station. The five aircraft have been assigned based on geographic considerations and it has

model for most air stations operating the type. This equates to a budgeted 645 flying hours per Dolphin.

The decline the size of the fishing fleet in recent years in has resulted in fewer SAR missions. The remaining boats at sea also tend to be in better shape and are equipped with the right safety equipment. Consequently, the search element of SAR missions has become less important and thanks new technologies like GPS, emergency beacons and radios, locating a vessel in distress has become much easier. However, as Oregon continues to be a popular destination for tourists, Coast Guard rescue teams are kept busy with more inland rescues and timber related accidents. While it is not the case for Astoria-based Jayhawks, a single Dolphin from North Bend is regularly deployed aboard flight-deck-equipped Coast Guard cutters during patrols and, as is true for other facilities along the US coast, the number of missions dedicated to homeland defence and law enforcement has been on the rise.



determined that two will be on B-Zero standby. Also taken into consideration was the time needed for the helicopters to receive service updates, go through maintenance cycles and overall crew training requirements. What is paramount is that the readiness level is maintained. In fiscal year 2007, the unit was allocated a total of 3,200 flying hours, based on the standard

Engine problems

Spurred on by an unacceptably high incidence of in-flight engine failures, the Coast Guard decided to impose operational flight restrictions on its 95 HH-65B helicopters in order to maintain safety. To mitigate the problem, it began a priority programme in early 2004 to re-engine its inventory and install new control



Right and upper-right: The French Dauphin (Dolphin) was first acquired by the Coast Guard during the mid-eighties from what was then Aérospatiale Helicopter (later Eurocopter). Ninety-six HH-65As were delivered 'green' for outfitting at its subsidiary in Grand Prairie, Texas. The design incorporated several new technologies of the day, like a composite rotor head, fibreglass rotor blades and a shrouded, 11-blade tail rotor.