

Huey 72-21509

'THE ONLY FLYING HUEY IN THIS COUNTRY IS NOW ON THE UK REGISTER'

An up date

by Phil Connolly

At the end of July 2005 I finally watch my Bell UH1H Huey helicopter arrive at Redhill Aerodrome in Surrey. It had taken nineteen months of hard graft and frustration. There had been several occasions when I had seriously considered throwing in the towel and perhaps look for a more leisurely pastime. But giving in that easily to the bureaucrats is not something I wanted to do, as I knew I wanted to have a flying Huey registered in the UK.

After several visits to the states to find a suitable machine and then to watch the restoration process I started to grapple with the American administrators to acquire the correct licenses to allow me to buy a military helicopter and a license to export it. The hoops I had to jump through to get those pieces of paper just amazed me, and would fill a book if I was to write about some of the information they required. Suffice to say that during this process I had a visit from the local police force at the request of the US departments. I was also visit by the VAT man with who I had a very bizarre conversation.

These hurdles finally over come, it was with great relief that I stood there on a bright Thursday summers morning overlooking an airfield that had great history during World War Two. This historic airfield was going play host to one of the worlds most iconic aircraft. To my relief as the lorry turned the corner with the fuselage strapped on the back I could see it was in as good condition as when it left the States. It had arrived undamaged along with a further load that included the tail boom, and rotors.

Within a very short space of time 509 was unloaded and the skids were in place. This was then put into the main assembly hangar under the overhead crane. No sooner than it had been put on the ground than the engineers set too to put this large helicopter back together.



Surprisingly the boom, main shaft, rotor head and rotors were all in place within a matter of sixteen hours work. A further day or so spent on it saw all the electrics and hydraulics up and running.

The next week I travelled back down to Redhill to meet up with Ralph Chappell who was flying in from the States. Ralph had been training me and my chief pilot Neil Airey in the fine art of flying the Huey. Ralph was to test fly the machine and to act as mentor over the next few weeks and enable us to fly the Huey here in the UK whilst it was still on its US 'N' registration. We were given our permission to fly and so enjoyed three glorious months of flying this wonderful machine around the country.



Photo - Duncan Cabitt - courtesy www.flypast.com

We showed the machine off at the Redhill Air show. We flew to Oxfordshire to do some filming for the new series of Ultimate Force (should be on air early April, third programme in the series I think). We flew back in time to visit the Steam Railway at Embsay, Nr Skipton, for their wartime weekend. Shortly after that we headed north for the RAF Leuchars Air show.

At the end of October 509, now named 'Miss Jo' after my wife Joanne, flew south to Redhill for us to start the work on transferring the machine over to the UK register. Now came the dealings with the Civil Aviation Authority not just to transfer to the UK register but get the Huey issued with a license to fly and to sort out both Neil and my type conversion. The process rather like that in the US has been somewhat protracted, but to a certain extent that wasn't a problem as winter isn't always the best time to be flying. Paper work was set out for the Huey to go on the UK register, with the CAA going through the details with a fine toothcomb.

The week before Christmas I got a call from the CAA asking if I could meet them at Redhill to carry out a test flight. When I arrived on the 22nd I was met by CAA test pilot, Flight Engineer and Geoff Connolly a former test pilot with the CAA. I flew the machine for around an hour and a half whilst the CAA reps checked out the systems and operation of the Huey. From that flight I was notified of some minor faults that they asked be rectified. These were a faulty navigation light, stiff bearing on the cyclic linkage and a fault on the secondary generator. Obviously Christmas just three days away meant nothing could be done until the new year. At the beginning of January I was back down to Redhill to meet up with the CAA yet again for them to satisfy themselves that the work they asked to be done had been carried out to their satisfaction. They were happy with the work and so said they would

issue 'Miss Jo' with the license to fly. At which point they produced the white lettering for the UK registration number of the machine G-UH1H which they proceeded to apply to the boom of the Huey. A couple of days later I received the license. The first major hurdle in the UK had been over come.

Now came the little

problem of Neil and I needing to convert to type, but who was to do this. As there are no other flying Hueys in the country means that there is no-one current on the type to carry out the conversion. However Geoff Connolly who is retired from the CAA is current on the Bell 212, the twin engined version, has been accepted by the CAA to carry out the training. He put forward the training schedule to the CAA who stipulated that both Neil and myself must complete at least five hours flying time with him.

As I write this we are waiting for the go ahead to collect the Huey from Redhill to bring it back north and to continue our training. So fingers crossed by the time you're reading this 'Miss Jo' will be airborne and getting ready for this years air shows after being issued with a display license. In March the crew of the Huey will be attending the Safety Symposium organised by the RAF. All the crews of the aircraft that will be taking part in the Air show circuit this coming summer



must attend otherwise they won't be allowed to take part. Once this is all sorted you will be able to hear and see this extraordinary machine up and down the country. We look forward to

seeing you and showing off the latest 'war bird' to take to the skies here in the UK.

Don't forget you can keep up to date with where we're likely to be by checking our web site on a regular basis www.huey.co.uk

