

DISASTER RELIEF - UK HELICOPTERS TO THE RESCUE



KEY  
MARCH 2016  
ISSUE #336

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# Armada Argos



The Spanish Navy trains its future helicopter pilots on a small fleet of extensively upgraded Hughes H369s, as Patrick Roegies, Paul Gross and Hans Looijmans explain.

THE SPANISH Flotilla de Aeronaves de la Armada (FLOAN – naval air arm) is the sole NATO operator of the Hughes 369 (H369) helicopter. Its first batch of five was acquired in April 1972 and assigned to Sexta Escuadrilla (Eslla 006) at Rota on May 15. The Spanish Navy designated the type Hughes 369HM ASW (anti-submarine warfare) and it soon earned the nickname 'Argo', in reference to its shape being similar to the Argo bird, which resembles a turkey.

Sexta Escuadrilla flew the helicopters off five US-supplied Churruca-class and two Spanish-built Roger de Lauria-class destroyers. For their embarked ASW role, the helicopters were fitted with floats on their

skids and torpedo launchers. A second batch of nine was delivered to Eslla 006 soon after the initial five.

Three more Argos were taken on charge in January 1974 and another four in April 1974. The last pair was delivered in July 1976 and July 1977, at which time the squadron had 14 on strength. The aircraft were painted dark grey, with white high-visibility markings.

## New Roles

With the arrival of the more capable Sikorsky SH-3 Sea King and decommissioning of the Churruca-class, the H369HMs' role changed. Initially they flew training and SAR tasks, but the latter was transferred to other squadrons

and Eslla 006's primary mission became pilot training. Today it also flies in auxiliary roles and on low-intensity operations, including CASEVAC, surveillance and forward air control.

Of the original five helicopters, three were lost, as were two from the second batch, leaving the squadron with nine operational aircraft.

## Naval helicopter training

The naval helicopter training programme comprises three parts. In the first, the cadet undertakes basic flying training at the Air Force Academy at Armilla, Granada. This phase takes three months and includes 50 hours in the single-engined EC120.

The second stage is advanced flight





**Above:** The snug fit of the cockpit means there's little space for the instructor and student. A crew runs through a full engine check prior to departing for an early afternoon familiarisation flight.

**Right:** The upgraded cockpits of the 369HMs are now equipped with large multi-function displays and improved communication suites.

**Below:** Hardly a 'turkey' – the clean lines of the 369HM mean the helicopter has exceptional performance proving ideal for surveillance work where a high dash speed is needed. Mounted on the skids are emergency flotation bags. All photos by author



training, still at Armilla. It takes another three months and includes 50 hours on the Sikorsky S-76. At this point the cadet is trained in instrument flying.

With these phases complete, students transfer to Rota for third-stage training with Eslla 006. Now they are instructed in all aspects of naval flight operations, including deck landing. The squadron uses the last six 369HMs, which have recently been modernised by INDRA.

All the instructors are extremely experienced pilots. Among them, Lieutenant Ignacio Bescos Roldan has 2,100 hours instructing on the Argo, for example, while Lt Jézus Antonio Escudero Campillo has 3,200 hours on the type.

Having completed the nine-month training programme, cadets are transferred to one of the operational naval helicopter squadrons for type instruction and role training.

These squadrons comprise 3 Escuadrilla operating the Agusta-Bell AB212ASW, 5 Escuadrilla on the SH-3H and 10 Escuadrilla with the Sikorsky SH-60. The training unit produces between three and six new pilots annually.

### Modernisation

The six active Argos were upgraded for an additional five to ten years' service, while the other three survivors were withdrawn as a source of spare parts.

The modernisation programme began in September 2012 and ran to February 2015. It improved the helicopters' communication systems through the installation of VHF omni directional radio range (VOR); an instrument landing system (ILS); a Garmin GTN750 GPS, positioned to the pilot's left side; and an electronic flight instrumentation system (EFIS) primary flight display.

The helicopters were also repainted. The standard grey naval scheme and low-visibility markings have replaced their original dark grey colour.

The Argos are nearing the end of their operational service, but Eslla 006 will continue to use them as trainers while it awaits a decision on their replacement.



### Naval Air Arm Hughes H369 Deliveries

Serial	Con. no.	Code	Delvd	Notes
Z.13-1	91-0215M	006-1	1972	Written off Jul 13, 1977
HS.13-2	91-0216M	01-602	1972	Active
HS.13-3	101-0217M	01-603	1972	Written off Feb 12, 1986
Z.13-4	101-0218M	006-4	1972	Written off Feb 22, 1974
HS.13-5	101-0219M	01-605	1972	Stored at Rota
HS.13-6	93-0231M	01-606		Active
HS.13-7	93-0232M	01-607		Active
HS.13-8	103-0239M	01-608		Stored at Rota
HS.13-9	113-0240M	01-609		Stored at Rota
HS.13-10	123-0241M	01-610		Active
HS.13-11	123-0242M	01-611		Active
HS.13-12	143-0243M	01-612		Withdrawn from use
Z.13-13	163-0259M	006-14		Written off Dec 6, 1979
HS.13-14	170-272M	01-615		Active