



# PRESS RELEASE

**Public Affairs Office  
Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces  
Command  
1562 Mitscher Avenue,  
Suite 250  
Norfolk, Va. 23551-2487  
(757) 836-3600  
Fax: (757) 836-3601**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Media Advisory 03-14  
January 10, 2014

## **Weather Impacts Dive Operations for MH-53E Crash**

NORFOLK, Va. – The Navy will temporarily suspended dive operations late Friday on the wreckage of the Navy MH-53E as a safety precaution due to deteriorating weather conditions.

USS Jason Dunham (DDG 109) and USNS Medgar Evers (T-AKE 13) returned to Naval Station Norfolk Friday. USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19) departed the crash site late Friday. USNS Grasp (T-ARS 51), with embarked divers from Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit 2 (MDSU 2), will return to Naval Station Norfolk once it is determined conditions are unsafe to continue dive operations.

Recovery operations at the crash site will resume as soon as weather permits. USS Ross (DDG 71) and USS Oak Hill (LSD 51) will continue to provide security patrols in the vicinity of the crash site until operations are resumed.

"Our priority right now is to bring our missing Sailor back to his family. We have a lot of dedicated, highly skilled men and women working to accomplish just that. However, as weather conditions are expected to worsen in the coming hours, safety is absolutely paramount," said Rear Adm. Kevin Scott, the director of Joint and Fleet Operations.

After locating the wreckage utilizing side-scanning sonar, MDSU 2 divers conducted the first dive from about 5:00 p.m. Thursday. They remained in the water until 10:15 p.m. The divers entered the water again Friday morning. Divers were able to locate the helicopter's engine and other major components in the debris field. Personnel aboard USNS Grasp are also using unmanned underwater vehicles to aid in the search and recovery.

"Dive operations are inherently dangerous and it takes time to methodically search the designated area," said Cmdr. Jeffrey Morgenthaler, commander, MDSU2. "Weather presents a lot of variables into our dive operations and, while our divers are experienced and highly trained, we want to ensure the search for the missing aviator can be conducted as safely as possible."

Five crewmembers were on board the MH-53E when it crashed Wednesday approximately 18 miles off the coast of Virginia Beach. Four of the crew members were rescued and taken to Sentara Norfolk General Hospital for treatment. Lieutenant J. Wesley Van Dorn, 29, of Greensboro, N.C. and Naval Aircrewman (Helicopter) (AWS-3) Brian Andrew Collins, 25, of Truckee, Cal. died as a result of injuries sustained in the crash. Lieutenant Sean Christopher Snyder, 39, from Santee, Calif. is still missing. Of the two other rescued crewmembers, one was released yesterday, and the second remains in the hospital in stable condition and is expected to be released Saturday.

The crew members were all assigned to Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron (HM) 14 based at Norfolk Naval Station Chambers Field. They were flying an MH-53E "Sea Dragon" on a routine mine countermeasure training exercise when the accident happened.

The cause of the crash is being investigated.

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