



Updated Icon

Georgia *Bell/Dornier UH-1D*

THE UH-1 HUEY HAS a well-earned reputation for dependability over a 65-year history. Now iconic, its image is synonymous with aircraft of the Vietnam era. This example, owned by a company called G Force Air, came from Germany and was recently restored and upgraded. Andrew LaFollette, EAA 1095160 and chief pilot with Mission Essential and G Force Air, and Matthew Platt of Gardner Lowe Aviation Services led the cockpit transformation of the Huey. Gardner Lowe Aviation Services is a maintenance, installation, and avionics upgrade shop located at Middle Georgia Regional Airport (KMCN) in Macon, Georgia, in the Atlanta area.

The Huey was already something of a standout when it arrived at Gardner Lowe, in part for its German origins. The project UH-1D flew in under its own power, albeit with a cockpit full of foreign-made avionics and instruments. When it left, it was sporting a complement of glass panel displays, a pedestal-mounted iPad electronic flight bag, and an indispensable array of USB power and 6-pin LEMO headset ports throughout the cabin.

A rundown of the Huey's newly installed equipment: Garmin G3X touch system with G5 backup electronic flight instrument system, Garmin GTN 650 touchscreen GPS/nav/comm/MFD, digital helicopter audio panel, dual-link ADS-B In and Out, radar altimeter, multiple USB charging ports, 10 Bose LEMO headset jacks, and an AirGizmos iPad panel dock.

"Except for the curve of the dashboard, there's little in common with that panel versus the old Army UH-1H that I flew," said former Huey pilot Jeff Huntoon, EAA 884309.

The new Huey cockpit more closely resembles the windscreen view of the 747 he now flies for a major cargo airline. The retrofitted Huey made its United States debut at SUN 'n FUN International Fly-In & Expo 2019. It has also been used with local law enforcement in training roles and frequently gives rides to veterans.

AIRCRAFT SUBMISSIONS

Share your craftsmanship with *EAA Sport Aviation* readers worldwide! Send us a photo and description of your project and we'll consider using it in "What Our Members Are Building/Restoring." Please include your name, address, and EAA number. We reserve the right to edit descriptions.

Web: www.EAA.org/submissions

Mail: EAA Publications, Aircraft Projects,
P.O. Box 3086, Oshkosh, WI 54903-3086

Email: editorial@eaa.org

“What’s remarkable about the Huey is that in bringing them back to life one brings back to life other people’s stories in them.” – Andrew LaFollette

“What’s remarkable about the Huey is that in bringing them back to life one brings back to life other people’s stories in them,” Andrew said. “It is truly an amazing machine that almost everyone I talk with, when out flying, has been affected by in one way or another. It’s no wonder they’re still around and will still be around for the foreseeable future.”

German company Dornier built the UH-1D under license from Bell Helicopter, but it was not the same as the United States-built D-model. The “D” in the German-manufactured units stood for Deutsche/Dornier. In fact, the German-built UH-1D helicopters more closely resemble the United States-manufactured UH-1H models.

Registered in Germany as 71+46, this Huey served in the Luftwaffe, both with the German Tactical Air Force Wing 31 and the Kosovo Force, a NATO-led international peacekeeping command.

The Huey had been shipped from Germany in a container.

“It was test flown, and that was it,” Andrew said after the aircraft was reassembled. “The cockpit, minus the German military equipment, consisted of steam gauges and a single VHF comm with barely a transponder. Navigating across the U.S. with basically an iPad, it quickly became obvious that to keep operating in today’s modern airspace, we needed an avionics upgrade.

“The term situational awareness gets thrown around a lot, but I think that nails exactly what we were going after,” he said. “With the G3X and the ability to display traffic, weather, and airspace via one quick touch, this greatly reduces the pilot workload. Especially when operating a helicopter. All of your body parts are being used mostly all of the time.”

Things that get taken for granted and are generally no big deal in an airplane, like changing comms or typing in a frequency, can be a big deal in a helicopter at certain times, Andrew said.

“We went from a single comm that used rotary-style switching to two digital smart

comms with standby frequencies that just about know what frequency you want and load it in for you,” he said. “The synthetic vision is a huge help. With Garmin’s helicopter obstacle database, it has more detailed terrain and a large number of power lines that are overlaid on the screen.”

While they typically fly with two pilots, Andrew said single pilot operations are “a breeze” now that the panel has been completed.

“When we did the panel mod, we were able to lay out the engine gauges in the order that we wanted and moved the really important instruments right in front of the pilot’s view,” he said. “Another example is our starting clock. In the old cockpit, we had to wind it up to make the secondhand start moving, then push a button to activate it for our 40-second start limit. Now, we use a Mid-Continent clock/timer/USB charger, and it’s a very easy one-button start.”

Whether flying veterans, police trainees, or enthusiasts, the Huey makes a lasting impression. Extricating the helicopter from its storied past and giving it a new life means others can feel the sense of pride. Keeping it flying takes commitment, and the costs are significant. However, flying a museum piece where stories can be shared, passions are kindled, and ideas are nurtured makes the effort momentous for all those involved.

Mike Taylor and Andrew Lafayette, EAA 1095160; Atlanta, Georgia. Email: mike.taylor@ctay.net, andrew.lafollette@flymechanic.com.

