

*“It’s awesome, yanking and banking around. It’s a kick in the pants.”*

MARINE CORPS CAPT. JEFF HUBLEY, on flying his CH-53E helicopter

# A PROUD MARINE’S PROUD BIRD

SR pilot displays military's largest helicopter at Wings Over Wine Country Air Show

By Lori A. Carter

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

**S**tanding proudly next to his CH-53E, the largest helicopter in the U.S. military arsenal, Marine Corps Capt. Jeff Hubley greeted a stream of well-wishers Saturday at the annual Wings Over Wine Country Air Show.

It was a rare visit to his Santa Rosa home, sandwiched between training new pilots to maneuver the behemoth transport copter and preparing for his next tour of duty in Iraq — his third

since 2003.

From his base at Miramar in Southern California, Hubley, 33, flew the Super Stallion to the air show at the Charles M. Schulz-Sonoma County Airport.

Piloting one of fewer than 200 such helicopters in the U.S. military, and one of only 16 in Iraq, Hubley can count himself among the flying elite.

His parents count themselves among the proudest supporters of their much-decorated son.

“It’s a job that needs to be done,” said Hubley’s father, Al, an Air Force veteran of the Vietnam War. “If he doesn’t do it, then his kids are going to be doing it. In 10 or 20 years, my grandkids will be doing it. He’s good at what

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JEFF KAN LEE / The Press Democrat

Marine Capt. Jeff Hubley of Santa Rosa was in town Saturday for the Wings Over Wine Country Air Show with the CH-53E helicopter he pilots. The air show continues today.

## IF YOU GO

**What:** Wings Over Wine Country Air Show

**When:** 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. today

**Where:** Charles M. Schulz-Sonoma County Airport

## Admission:

\$15 general, \$5 children 6 to 12; \$8 seniors over 65; free admission to children under 6, World War II veterans and active military. Bleachers \$5 more.



JEFF KAN LEE / The Press Democrat

**Al Hubley with his son, Marine Capt. Jeff Hubley, who was at Wings Over Wine Country on Saturday with the CH-53E helicopter he pilots.**

## AIR SHOW: Huge helicopter nimble despite its size

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he does, and that's the kind of people we need."

Thousands of flying enthusiasts in various combinations — fathers and sons, families of four, young couples, senior citizens in veteran's caps — toured dozens of restored aircraft parked on the tarmac Saturday.

The show is the main fundraiser for the Pacific Coast Air Museum, which is raising money to build a new facility — estimated to cost \$4 million to \$6 million — at the south end of the airport.

Greeting Hubley were his kindergarten and fifth-grade teachers, the latter of whom is exhibiting a vintage Jeep at the show.

For those who tour his Super Stallion, Hubley runs down the specs: The 30-year-old aircraft has the greatest lift capacity of any U.S. helicopter at 16 tons; it measures 100 feet in length and is topped by rotors 88 feet in diameter; its maximum weight is 73,500 pounds, including 15,000 pounds of fuel, which can be refilled in flight; its three engines generate about 15,000 horsepower and a top speed of almost 200 mph.

Built to move cargo and equipment, the CH-53E is used more often today for troop transport, particularly as roadside bombs in Iraq have become the deadliest weapons ground forces face. Flanked by two 50-caliber guns, it can carry as many as 55 passengers in addition to its crew of four.

"Don't let its size deceive you," Hubley warned. The Super Stallion is among the fastest and most maneuverable helicopters, often skimming the ground at 200 feet elevation.

"It's awesome, yanking and banking around," he said. "It's a kick in the pants."

As exhilarating as flying can be, Hubley has also experienced the dangers of war, having had several close calls during resupply and tactical missions in Kuwait and western Iraq.

Two years ago in a sandstorm, his helicopter plunged downward from 500 feet, multiple alarms ringing through the tiny cockpit.

"Looking down, I couldn't believe what the instruments were saying," he said. "Everyone (on board) thought we were dead. . . . I don't know how it righted itself."

Hubley recovered control of the helicopter 25 feet above the sandy desert.

His mother, Dottie, knows that story — and another one that hit close to home. Thirty Marines and a Navy corpsman from his division were killed in January near Iraq's border with Jordan when a Super Stallion crashed in a sandstorm.

"It's a constant pull on your heart," his mother said. "You don't hear from them much when they're away."