



# RICHARD PILLANS

## BOEING UK CHIEF TEST PILOT

It's 6:45 A.M. in Salisbury.

Richard Pillans braves the morning commute, makes small talk with his fellow colleagues and attends the team's daily brief. So far, his morning isn't much different than yours or mine.

Around 10 o'clock, he finally gets to his office—which just so happens to be the cockpit of an advanced multi-mission rotorcraft.

And that's where the trajectory of our typical days begins to diverge.

"As a boy, I had to pick up an extra paper round in Petersfield to save for flying lessons. I started lessons at the age of sixteen and got my pilot's license at seventeen. That was even before I could

drive a car."

Richard, Chief Test Pilot for Boeing Defence U.K. Ltd., is living a childhood dream. He usually flies two to three hours a day. Though he's done this thousands of times, there still remains a sense of wonder in his voice as he walks up the ramp to the CH-47 Chinook and describes the feeling.

"Most people say it's not really a job. It does feel good to get into the aircraft knowing that you're going to get airborne in twelve tons of helicopter. The feeling is kind of the same every time—it feels so free to get up in the air and just see the world from that perspective.

But while one flight in a Chinook may elicit more awe and adrenaline than some will experience in a lifetime, it's still a job—and an important one at that.

"It's humbling. You sit in the pilot's seat and you think that this aircraft has been on operations around the world. The data we gather proves the Chinooks are safe before the frontline fly it. We feel good about supporting the team overseas."

As a test pilot, Richard works with his team to gather information about anything from engine performance to mission systems, ensuring the aircraft is safe to fly on the front line—where Richard also has years of experience.



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"My first squadron in the military was with 663 Squadron, Army Air Corps. [We] had some great times around the world."

You can tell by how fondly he speaks about his first squadron and his time in the British military that supporting the UK is still what drives him and his team every day.



"Even though I left the British military, I still feel like I'm part of it as a civilian test pilot."

After a breathtaking takeoff, we fly over London. Richard's voice crackles over the radio.

"It's very nice to get up in the air and just see the world from that perspective. It feels so free to do so."

What does that perspective look like? Imagine London's most iconic landmarks as you've never seen them before. Buckingham Palace appears as if it's a sandcastle. The London Eye looks like a child's toy. The Palace of Westminster suddenly feels small from the clouds. Appropriately, the Chinook is breathtaking in its own right.

"The Chinooks are important because they can do

almost anything. They can pick up their own weight in cargo. They can move so many troops across great distances. You can fly at high altitude, you can fly in hot weather. There's a joke in the Royal Air Force that whatever the question is, the answer is two Chinooks."

It's getting late. After a smooth landing and a late lunch, Richard and his team analyse closely the data they gathered earlier. It is determined this Chinook is cleared for deployment overseas.

"I just love what I do. I guess that extra paper round paid off."

