

# 15° Stormo: Italy's Combat Search and Rescue Wing



For over 50 years, 15° Stormo (or 15<sup>th</sup> Wing) has been tasked with Search and Rescue (SAR) duties for the *Aeronautica Militare* (Italian Air Force). Spread over the whole of Italy, the main base of the unit is at Cervia on the north-east coast, along the Adriatic Sea. The Wing has different squadrons, or Centro CSAR, seven of these being strategically located around Italy at various bases, operating alongside other front-line squadrons. Ready to provide services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, these squadrons perform search and rescue missions for the Italian Air Force as well as on public utility activities

including search for missing persons at sea or in the mountains, providing emergency medical transport for critical patients. Their geographical distribution is to ensure that rescue helicopters are not more than 90 minutes of flight 'away' from any location in mainland Italy.

Re-organised in 1965 by the Air Force as a Search and Rescue Wing, the unit initially operated a mixture of helicopters including the Agusta Bell AB-47 and Agusta Bell AB-204B, plus fixed wing aircraft including the Grumman HU-16A. In 1977, this became a full helicopter wing with introduction of the Sikorsky S-61R, locally designated as

HH-3F *Pelican*. In 1986, the Italian Air Force added the Agusta Bell AB-212 to the unit to further boost capabilities. The Wing has accumulated much experience over the years with the Pelican and the AB-212 and from 1993 onwards, were also engaged in search and rescue tasks in conflict areas abroad, conducted by Italian armed forces such as those in Somalia, Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq. With the move in 2010 to its current base at Cervia, the 15° Stormo was able to further develop its skills and expand mission such as for *Slow Mover Interceptor* (SMI) in air defence, which task was assigned to the unit several years earlier.