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FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR

PILOTS ARE NEEDED, RIGHT?

For decades, the rhythmic, thumping heartbeat of a helicopter rotor has been a sound of hope. Whether tracking a suspect through a darkened suburb, hoisting a stranded hiker from a crumbling cliffside, or rushing a critical patient to a trauma center, public safety aviation has relied on a singular, indispensable component: the human pilot.

Over my three decades of flying helicopters, I recall theoretical conversations with colleagues about a future in which pilots are not needed. Of course, we would chuckle at the possibility while providing a dozen reasons as to why that eventuality would never happen. However, as we watch the rapid evolution of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) and autonomous flight technology, a pressing question looms over the hangar doors: Are we flying toward a future where the cockpit is entirely empty?

It is easy to look at the staggering capabilities of modern drones and assume the pilot's days are numbered. Today's unmanned aircraft can loiter for hours, map wildfire perimeters with thermal precision, and enter hazardous environments where no commander would risk a human crew. They are cheaper to operate, safer to lose, and becoming smarter by the day.

Yet, to argue that technology will completely ground our public safety pilots is to misunderstand the uniquely chaotic nature of emergency response.

Automated systems thrive on predictability, data, and logic. Public safety thrives on the exact opposite. A search-and-rescue mission in a dense mountain canyon isn't just about calculating coordinates; it requires split-second spatial awareness, navigating unpredictable micro-climates, and managing the delicate physics of a hoist rescue. When a routine patrol transforms into an active crisis, a human pilot brings split-second intuition, a capacity for rule-bending improvisation, and real-time leadership that a remote operator or an algorithm simply cannot replicate.

Instead of an eviction notice for pilots, the advent of unmanned aircraft represents a powerful shift in responsibilities. We are not looking at the death of public safety pilots, but rather their evolution. The future belongs to a hybridized sky. Perhaps tomorrow's airborne law enforcement officers and flight paramedics will act as mission commanders, piloting their own aircraft while simultaneously orchestrating a fleet of tethered or autonomous drones that serve as extended eyes and ears.

Technology will undoubtedly absorb the "dull, dirty, and dangerous" tasks of aerial policing and disaster management, but when lives hang in the balance and conditions turn volatile, the ultimate fail-safe remains human judgment inside the cockpit. The rotor beat will continue—it will just be backed by a digital orchestra.

Lyn Burks,
Editor-In-Chief

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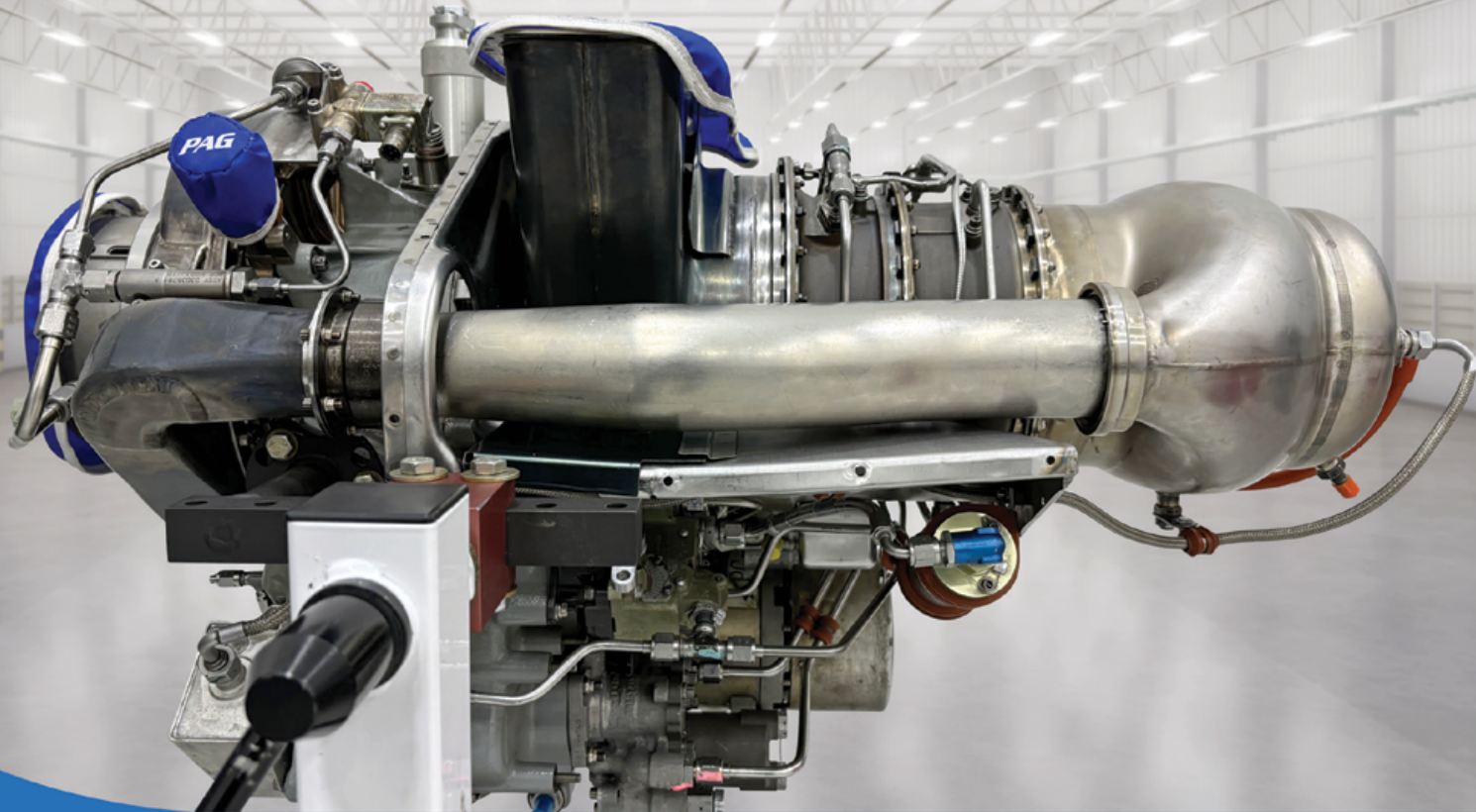
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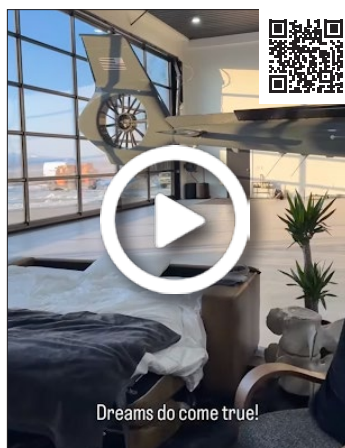
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COVER

A TEAM OF SWEDISH AIR FORCE HKP15 AIRCRAFT GUNNERS ARE USING THE AK4D WEAPONS SYSTEM DURING LIVE FIRING EXERCISES AT THE VILLINGSBERG SHOOTING RANGE.

PHOTO: SVEN VAN ROIJ





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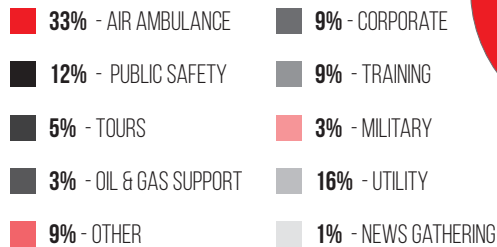
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LAST ISSUE'S SURVEY

AS A PILOT OR MECHANIC, WHICH SECTOR OF THE INDUSTRY DO YOU PRIMARILY WORK IN?



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MY 2 CENTS

BY RANDY ROWLES

“THE FIRST ONE” THE AUTOROTATION THAT ACTUALLY MATTERS

In the helicopter industry, we spend a tremendous amount of time arguing about autorotations: Full down or power recovery? Straight in or 180-degree? Hover entry or low altitude? RPM decay rates... rotor inertia... training frequency... simulator fidelity... Are we arguing about the wrong things entirely?

The most important autorotation is not the prettiest one. It is not the one performed after six practice attempts with a warmed-up pilot and a highly prepared instructor. It is not the one demonstrated at a safety conference or executed by a factory pilot with 12,000 hours in type.

The most important autorotation is “the first one.”

Not the first one of your career or the first one of your recurrent training cycle. It’s the one that reveals who you really are as a pilot on the day before you knew the engine was going to fail. It’s that first maneuver that tells the truth.

Once a pilot completes initial qualification and earns the privilege to carry passengers or conduct commercial operations, the aviation system assumes competency. Rightfully so. Whether under Part 91, Part 135, public use, or utility operations, the pilot is now considered qualified to operate the aircraft safely within the privileges of that certificate and training.

Then something interesting happens—for many helicopter pilots, the training largely stops.

Yes, there are flight reviews. Yes, there are recurrent events. Air medical pilots operating under Part 135 often complete annual training and checking. Some law enforcement units train quarterly. Utility operators may have robust internal programs. However, a very large slice of the helicopter industry will go a year or longer without meaningful emergency-procedure practice.

Some private pilots only accomplish a flight review every other year. That’s two years! Think about that for a moment.

If you are not regularly practicing emergency procedures, proficiency fades—rapidly for some, gradually for others. But it fades for everyone.

That is not criticism; it is simply how human performance works.

Even highly experienced pilots are not immune. The pilot with 15,000 hours may maintain composure better than the pilot with 300 hours, but degraded proficiency is still degraded proficiency. Muscle memory is perishable. Decision-making speed is perishable. Aircraft handling precision is perishable.

The evidence of this degradation appears immediately during recurrent training. It appears on “the first one.”

Every instructor reading this article knows exactly what I mean. The first autorotation of the day is often ugly: rotor RPM excursions, delayed collective reduction, over-flare, under-flare, poor touchdown alignment, slow reactions, stiff control inputs, tunnel vision.

Then suddenly, after a few repetitions, the pilot “gets it back.”

The industry shrugs and says, ‘That’s why we train.’ Fair enough, but perhaps we should pause and ask a harder question: If the emergency had occurred yesterday instead of today, would the outcome have been survivable?

That question makes people uncomfortable because we already know the answer too often falls somewhere between maybe and hopefully. Yet, we continue treating this degraded proficiency as normal.

In some corners of the industry, we have even built entire training philosophies around avoiding realistic exposure to emergency procedures. Insurance pressures, operational costs, aircraft availability, instructor shortages, customer expectations, and organizational risk tolerance have collectively diluted emergency training to the point where many pilots are no longer truly prepared for the aircraft failures they are statistically most likely to encounter.

Adding further concern is the increasing reliance on simulation in lieu of actual aircraft training. Now, before the simulator manufacturers sharpen their pitchforks, let me be clear: simulation absolutely has value. Tremendous value. Modern simulation is exceptional for procedures, instrument work, crew coordination, systems failures, and decision-making scenarios.

But simulation is not the same as reality.

A simulator cannot fully replicate the physiological response of an unexpected yaw event in a real helicopter. It cannot completely reproduce the visual depth perception of a low rotor RPM flare over uneven terrain. It cannot duplicate the physical tension in your shoulders during a hydraulics-off touchdown when the controls suddenly feel like they were filled with concrete by an angry mechanic. (Yes, somewhere in every hydraulics lesson, there is always one pilot silently thinking: *This doesn’t seem OSHA approved!*)

The FAA’s increasing acceptance of simulation in place of in-aircraft emergency training may satisfy regulatory efficiency, but it does not necessarily satisfy operational survival capability. That distinction matters—the objective of emergency procedure training should not simply be regulatory compliance; it should be survivability.

If a pilot cannot successfully manage an engine failure, hydraulic malfunction, or tail-rotor emergency to a survivable outcome, then the intent of training has not truly been achieved, regardless of what the paperwork says.

Meanwhile, operational reality quietly exposes what the industry actually believes about risk. Take the air medical world as an example. Many HEMS operators routinely perform vertical takeoffs and departures from confined or obstacle-rich environments. Why? Because operationally, the industry has collectively concluded that the probability of a wire strike or obstacle collision outweighs the probability of an engine failure during departure.

That is not necessarily reckless thinking. In many environments, it is logical risk

MY 2 CENTS

management, but it also reveals something deeper. We often manage operations assuming the aircraft will not fail because, statistically, it probably will not.

That assumption becomes the safety strategy, and most of the time it works. Until it does not.

The flying public, however, assumes something very different. Passengers believe the pilot has been trained to confidently handle emergencies at any moment, on any day, in any condition. They do not know about “the first one.” They do not realize that many pilots require several practice repetitions before returning to peak proficiency. Frankly, most would be shocked to learn that.

Compare this to the airline world. Airline training environments are heavily proceduralized, measured, standardized, and continuously reinforced. Every phase of flight is evaluated against defined operational expectations. Risk mitigation strategies are deeply embedded into daily operations. Training and real-world execution closely mirror one another.

In much of the VFR helicopter industry, however, the standards are far looser. The minimum acceptable performance standard

frequently allows substantial deviation from perfection. A 70% passing standard is still passing.

As the old joke goes, what do they call the person who graduated last in medical school? Answer: Doctor.

Patients rarely ask where their surgeon ranked academically. We simply assume competence and trust the system worked. Aviation is no different.

Soon, our Helicopter Institute intends to host something unique. Some may call it a competition, but we view it as a data-collection exercise. We plan to invite 10 industry pilots from segments such as law enforcement, air medical, utility, and corporate operations. No instructors. No test pilots, but working line pilots.

Using both Airbus and Bell helicopters common to industry operations, each pilot will perform emergency procedures at approximately six months removed from recurrent training. No warm up. No practice. No second attempt.

Just “the first one.”

There will be autorotations, tail-rotor malfunctions, and hydraulic failures that all require an immediate response. Performance will be measured not by perfection, but by survivability.

Survivability is the metric that actually matters.

Perhaps the results will validate the industry's current approach. Perhaps they will reveal uncomfortable truths. Either way, the data will speak louder than assumptions.

And maybe, just maybe, we will finally start discussing the autorotation that matters most—the one you perform before you knew it was coming.



Randy Rowles has been an FAA pilot examiner for 20 years for all helicopter certificates and ratings. He holds an FAA Gold Seal Flight Instructor Certificate, NAFI Master Flight Instructor designation, and was the 2013 recipient of the HAI Flight Instructor of the Year Award. Rowles is currently the owner of the Helicopter Institute. He can be reached at randyrowlesdpe@gmail.com

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RPMN: WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT POSITION?

FOUNDER AND CEO OF ANTHELION HELICOPTERS AND I'M A HELICOPTER EXPERIMENTAL TEST PILOT.

RPMN: TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH HELICOPTERS.

It was while I was on my first ever cruise as a teenager in Alaska. We did a trip up to the glaciers to go dog sledding—or in our case, falling off, because we were terrible at controlling our sled! We took an AS350 AStar up there and back, and I remember thinking just how cool it, and the pilot, were and how complicated it seemed. From then on, I started reading some fiction novels with one of the key characters being a helicopter pilot, who naturally got all the girls, so I was hooked on beginning the journey!

RPMN: HOW DID YOU GET YOUR START IN THE HELICOPTER INDUSTRY?

Following my desire to get started and emulate one of my heroes from the novels I was reading, I picked up the yellow pages, which in those days was about the size of a nuclear reactor, and turned through it to look for helicopter flight schools. The first one I found was called AlexAir; it was just a few miles away and I thought at that point it was fate. So, off I went to figure out how to get started.

RPMN: IF YOU WERE NOT IN THE HELICOPTER INDUSTRY, WHAT ELSE WOULD YOU SEE YOURSELF DOING?

Interesting question; I could go a number of ways. If I were to stay in aviation in general, getting into the test piloting world in the eVTOL DEP (distributed electric propulsion)/tiltrotor side has an appeal. They suffer from extremely complex and challenging aerodynamic and associated handling issues, which would be fun to tackle.

The space sector, being a general sci-fi geek, also has a huge appeal in many ways.

Out of left field, I've always wanted to start my own rock-climbing gym as climbing is a big passion of mine, although my body doesn't thank me most of the time. I'd also like to have the time to finish my PhD someday before I'm 110 years old!

RPMN: WHAT DO YOU ENJOY DOING ON YOUR DAYS OFF?

What's a day off in the business-ownership world? I enjoy being with my family: teaching my son how to build more complex LEGO sets (for which he has zero patience), climbing and working out with my wife. Managing the zoo we call a household (with two new cats: one crazy kitten and one large 4-year-old with paws the size of trash-can lids; they supplement our existing cat and dog) is an endeavor in itself! Besides that, growing my fruits and vegetables (with varying degrees of success), and reading more about life, the universe, and everything to fill every waking moment.

RPMN: WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST CAREER ACCOMPLISHMENT TO DATE?

While I'm extremely proud to have accomplished a multitude of groundbreaking flying and industry firsts during my tenure as an experimental test pilot, I have to say that getting our company through the COVID pandemic was probably the greatest accomplishment. We were so close, many times, to shutting our doors permanently both during the pandemic and in the following years when we grappled with its after-effects of inflation and uncertain consumer sentiment. The mental toll it took was tremendous, and at the time, forced me to take a second job. I refused to give up after so much blood, sweat and tears, and pivoted business operations in the belief that what we were doing was important.

RPMN: HAVE YOU EVER HAD AN 'OH CRAP' MOMENT IN HELICOPTERS? CAN YOU SUMMARIZE WHAT HAPPENED?

I've had more than my fair share as an experimental test pilot, but that's somewhat expected and inferred by the job description, I'll go back to early in my commercial career. One of the most memorable, for all the wrong reasons, was when I was conducting power-line survey work in Colorado many moons ago. I was flying in all the wrong 'H' conditions in an old beat-up B206 with the standard (terrible) tail rotor blades. I was High, over 8,000 feet, close to the mountains. It was hot, being summer, and I was as heavy as a bank vault loaded up with LIDAR equipment... and pilot snacks. As anyone knows from LIDAR power-line survey work, you're flying low and slow, and making all directional changes



predominantly with the tail rotor rather than the cyclic to keep the aircraft flat and the equipment in view of the lines. On one particular occasion, I let my concentration lapse after flying all day and made a slow, flat left-hand turn onto a line into a tailwind while going 30 knots at less than 300 feet. When I got onto the new line, the aircraft resolutely continued its left turn despite full opposite pedal as I entered an LTE condition. The only thing I could do was 'dive' the aircraft off the line (without getting low-G) to gain airspeed and stability. It gave me a real appreciation for LTE and to always be aware of wind direction.

RPMN: IF YOU COULD GIVE ONLY ONE PIECE OF ADVICE TO NEW PILOTS, MECHANICS, OR SUPPORT PERSONNEL, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

As Al Pacino said in *The Devil's Advocate*, "The worst vice is advice," so I'll say that my biggest suggestion and perspective is how important it is to critically LISTEN and LEARN when deciding to come into any area in the aviation sector, or indeed, to select a school for flight training. The importance of separating the hyperbole and misinformation from social media when you get bombarded from all directions by adverts, crazy videos glorifying questionable behavior, and "expert" opinion pieces is so important. There is a huge amount of opportunity in the future of our industry, and it's an amazing time to get involved with the emergence of so many new and exciting technologies, but be wary of getting sucked in under pretenses that may give you a very distorted view of reality.

RPMN: IN YOUR VIEW, WHAT IS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE FOR THE HELICOPTER INDUSTRY AT THIS MOMENT IN TIME?

I think right now, it's the issue of emerging technologies and how to, or indeed how they should, integrate and interact with existing



legacy platforms and infrastructure. This is from both a regulatory and integration (hardware and software) perspective. There can be no doubt that drones will continue to develop in both complexity, speed, size, and use cases. However, their successful integration into the National Airspace System, keeping them de-conflicted with other manned traffic, has not yet been resolved as far as I am aware. Likewise, the eVTOL DEP industry has an uncomfortable relationship, at best, with the existing helicopter industry, threatening, at least in principle, to take significant urban market share from traditional rotorcraft. However, the true reality of in-service timelines and exactly how they will integrate into large U.S. metropolitan environments is unclear. Lastly, the evolution of AI will undoubtedly create many challenges in how aircraft are piloted in the future.

We are largely deterministic in our software design for fly-by-wire and augmented systems for system behavior predictability. The lure of using AI to develop potentially more powerful non-deterministic control systems will create very challenging and convoluted flight-risk profiles for companies to manage safely.

Do you know someone who would be a good subject for *Meet a Rotor Pro*? Email your suggestion to the editor-in-chief: lyn.burks@rotorpro.com



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CEO OF SALUS AVIATION

BY RICK WEATHERFORD

Greg Edmonds is Kiwi to the core. The CEO of Salus Aviation, which has four locations in New Zealand, and operations in Boulder City, Nevada, and Pretoria, South Africa, proudly proclaims himself a “Kiwi” in the first few seconds of our interview in his native New Zealand accent. And why shouldn’t he? After all, he grew up in his nation’s capital city of Wellington, resides in its largest city, Auckland, and has a passion for its national sport of rugby, which he played in the past and still participates in on both amateur and professional levels.

ALL BLACKS

Edmonds is chairman of the board of Ponsonby Rugby, which he says is “probably the most successful rugby club in the country. We’ve produced 48 All Blacks and they’re some of the great names in the sport.” What’s an “All Black?” Relax. The All Blacks are New Zealand’s winning national rugby team, known for their all-black uniforms, World Cup titles, and [pre-game haka](#).

SALUS AVIATION

Edmonds may well be proud of his Ponsonby club producing champions because the man has produced throughout his whole career and is now winning at Salus Aviation. They lease aircraft and provide needed parts and MRO services around the world. The company currently has a total of 38 aircraft leased out all over,

with even four in Antarctica flying over penguins. The majority of their leases are twin-engine, mid-size helicopters.

Leasing generates 40% of Salus’ revenue, with another 40% coming from its MRO operations, which is challenged by global supply issues. Edmonds said, “I’d be surprised if any executive in aviation didn’t say that the supply chain is their biggest challenge. It’s still very fragile, in my view, and slow. The increasing costs of materials and inventory and very slow delivery times is a continuing and stressful challenge for us.” This is particularly irritating because, the CEO says, “We pride ourselves on making sure our aircraft have 96-98% availability on our contracts.” Finally, the remaining 20% slice of Salus Aviation’s revenue pie is generated from the company’s design work and manufacturing.

WORKING MAN

You might assume it takes a seasoned aviation executive to oversee an aviation company with different revenue streams and services spread over locations from Oceania paradise to Nevada desert to the southern tip of Africa. Well, it is a surprise that Edmonds’ career was not focused on aviation, nor did he begin in business. No, Edmonds started out as a blue-collar electrician, following his parents who employed their skills in tradework: his father laid carpet and

later opened a repair garage; his mom sewed dresses. When Edmonds left high school, he took an electrical-engineering (electrician) apprenticeship, at Wellington’s power company. Upon completing his apprenticeship, in the early 1980s, Edmond recalls, “I got advice from a couple of older blokes to get out of here [the power company] before they institutionalize you and you wind up staying 40 years.”

Edmonds took their advice and took a job with Chubb Electronics installing security systems, cameras, and such. “It was a very interesting job, actually,” he says. “I installed the first ever total access, closed-circuit TV systems in the Parliament building and in museums. That’s standard now, but back then it was new technology.”

SUITED FOR SALES

Then, Edmonds made a life-changing decision that started with a simple question; his manager asked him if he would give sales a try. “It was a difficult decision,” Edmonds recalls. “I’d been working for years with tools in my hands. Did I want to put a suit and tie on and sell stuff?” Edmonds cut a deal—he’d work two days a week with his tools and three days a week in sales. “If I didn’t like sales, my manager said I could go back to being an engineer [electrician] full time.” Edmonds didn’t part with his tools easily; he’s still got those same pliers, wire-strippers and circuit testers from over 40 years ago. (“I



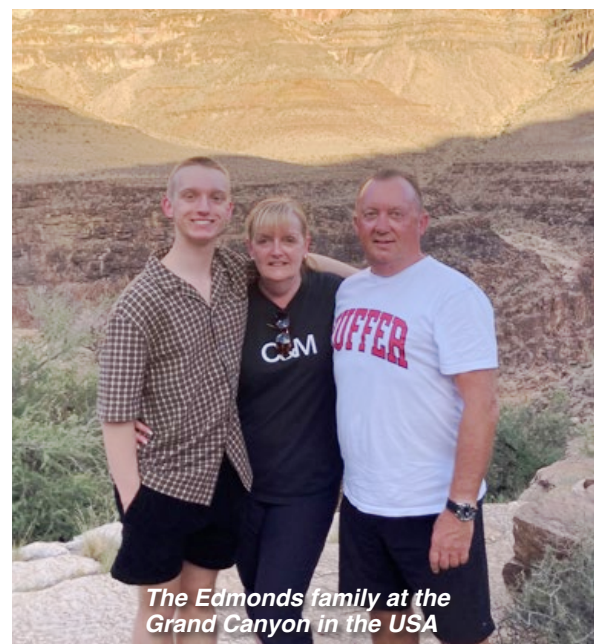
Edmonds on-site at a Salus contract location in Africa



Winning New Zealand's National Provincial Rugby Championship



Rugby World Cup in Japan



The Edmonds family at the Grand Canyon in the USA

don't use them as much as I used to," he concedes.) Edmonds liked selling enough to put down his tools to pick up sales full time. He excelled and was promoted to Chubbs regional manager, which he said "was fantastic."

In 1992, the driven man decided to go in a new direction; he entered the transport industry at Freightways International and moved to Auckland to keep their freight moving. He advanced to national manager, and while working there, he wanted to earn an MBA.

TWISTED TRIUMPH

Edmonds' desire for this degree leads to one of the more satisfying twists we've profiled in Executive Watch. While an MBA is a normal graduate degree for managers, Freightways International said no to this ambition; they would not subsidize Edmonds' education. He remembers his disappointment, "They said they didn't approve the education expense because they didn't think the degree was needed in our industry and they had their own training program." Then, the determined man with a young and growing family did something that likely surprised his employer—he quit to pursue that degree, and he started a consulting company to support his family and him while he studied. Are you ready to smile? Freightways signed on as Edmonds' first client! "They paid me more as a consultant than they paid me as a salaried employee and I was on their consulting payroll even before I began my studies. It was ironic; one week they told me they wouldn't support me as an employee, then the next week they hired me as a consultant after I left." Still, Edmonds has absolutely no resentment toward his former employer. He said, "Freightways was a fantastic company and experience for me. Most of my executive grounding and management skills were acquired with them."

EDUCATION BOOSTS CAREER

Edmonds started that MBA in 1995 from an Ernst & Young executive program taught by the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business in New Zealand, and counts one of his professors then, Alec Horniman, as one his best mentors. Since then, Edmonds has consistently furthered his academic education by completing

executive and leadership degrees and programs from: University of Auckland (1996-98); Australian Institute of Company Directors (2002); New Zealand Institute for Strategic Leadership (2006), and the University of Oxford Saïd Business School (2015).

That hard-won MBA opened up broader opportunities for Edmonds than he'd had when starting with his trade apprenticeship. He joined GE Capital in Auckland as a general manager and after that, in this century, Edmonds worked, consecutively, as a manager and/or executive in the transport industry for New Zealand Post (comparable to United Parcel Service), Air New Zealand (his first venture into the aviation industry where he was their international airports manager), Auckland Transport (his first C-suite position), SRG Global (as executive general manager for New Zealand), and then left SRG in 2020 to lead Salus Aviation Group based in Auckland, as its current CEO.

Edmonds muses on his varied career. He doesn't see himself as leapfrogging from one place to the next. He said, "I was able to do more things than if I'd just stayed in the same job or company my whole career."

WITHDRAWS, BUT...

In another twist, his current position at Salus Aviation is one he did not pursue. In fact, he withdrew his application for a lower position on the company's organizational chart because he didn't see himself as fully qualified. After interviewing to be Salus Aviation's head of operations, Edmonds withdrew his application, to the dismay of Salus' leadership that had invited him to interview. After the interview, "I told my wife I could run the operations: manpower, planning, etc., and turn a profit, but I thought their CEO needed to hire a licensed engineer, someone with a decade or two of hardcore technical aviation and maintenance experience, someone who could look into a turbine and know what it needed."

Six weeks after withdrawing, Edmonds' phone rang—Salus' CEO had surprisingly resigned the day before and Salus Aviation needed a leader right now! Edmonds said, "The person who phoned me said, 'We

always thought you were going to be the eventual CEO, but we couldn't get you in the door to join the team.' A week later, I signed on as CEO and have never looked back; it's been a great run."

COVID CHALLENGE

That run didn't start out so great; Edmonds had to lead his new team through one huge challenge: COVID hit just after he became CEO. He said, "New Zealand was severely impacted with border lockdowns and our business really struggled. A lot of our business then was leasing about 25 aircraft to flying schools and those schools just returned the aircraft to us because no pilots were able to enter the country for training. That was a really bad situation for our company, but thankfully the shareholders supported us through that."

One way Edmonds led his company through that trying time was by bringing people into the decision-making process. "In my early years, I thought I probably knew everything. Through time, you realize you don't, and just because you're the boss, or an executive, that doesn't mean you have to know everything. You just have to work out how to find the answers," he says. "I'm more consultative and collaborative today. In particular, executive teams need to share the challenges of the business or organization and have a say in how to solve challenges at an operational and strategic-direction level. The best decisions are made by organizations when team members are involved."

MADE A DIFFERENCE

Edmonds matured in his career from a young know-it-all tradesman to a seasoned executive CEO. What a varied career it's been! He muses, "I've worked on projects, such as transporting organs, and even building power stations in my early days, that have made a long-term difference in people's lives. I'm most proud of raising a family with kids who are well-grounded in life, but I'm also pretty proud of my career and I think I've done pretty well for a little ol' electrician from Wellington."

As a Kiwi would say, "For sure."

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Safety-Related Information and Resources from the Vertical Aviation Safety Team

WARRANTED RISK

LOOKING BEYOND PROBABILITY AND SEVERITY IN PUBLIC SAFETY AVIATION

Government, military, and public safety aviation exist because society occasionally needs professionals to do what others are unable or unwilling to do, all while accepting elevated levels of known risk.

We understand why public safety operators accept high-risk missions. The questions that remain are:

- How do these operators manage elevated risk?
- What factors come into play when making go/no-go decisions?

Traditional risk management systems focus on two variables: probability (likelihood) and severity (consequence). For commercial operators, that keeps things simple. If the risk is too high, the flight crew must reduce the risk to an acceptable level or avoid it altogether.

Nothing groundbreaking for readers who consider themselves proficient pilots and flight planners. However, for those who conduct government, military, or public safety operations, does mission type factor into your risk-based policy and pre-flight decisions?

If not, perhaps it should.

What is often absent from the formal risk assessment process is a third variable: Gain.

Public safety organizations would do well to incorporate gain into doctrine, policy, and mission planning because pilots are likely already considering it on the fly, literally. Without structured guidance, this creates the conditions for poor dynamic decision-making

driven by noble intentions or heightened emotions. The resulting target fixation or mission mentality all too often leads to preventable tragedy.

Most agencies have formal methods for assessing risk. Few have formal methods for evaluating gain. Instead, gain frequently enters the equation informally through a frantic call, driving rushed or poor decisions. Examples may include:

- “There’s a child involved.”
- “The suspect is considered armed.”
- “The fire is threatening critical infrastructure.”
- “Someone may still be alive.”

Responding to these calls is routine, but what process is used to justify launch?

One of the Coast Guard’s most celebrated and decorated aviators, Vice Admiral John Currier, challenged his service’s flight crews to consider whether the risk they accept is warranted when weighed against the potential gain. Currier asserted that Coast Guard crews must always consider the gain: mission value, public benefit, lives saved, property protected, or threats mitigated.

His article, [*“Risk Management for the Proficient Operator,”*](#) published in the 2013 issue of the Naval Institute Proceedings, recognized that not all risks are equal because not all missions are equal. He argued that professional operators must differentiate between:

- Manageable risk
- Warranted risk

Unwarranted risk

Currier asserts, “If bad things happen while you are conducting a proper mission in a professional manner, leadership at all levels will stand behind you.”

That philosophy now resides on page one of the [*Coast Guard’s Air Operations Manual*](#), which states:

“In the operational environment, mission demands may require on-scene deviation from prescribed instructions or policy when, in the judgment of the pilot-in-command, such deviation is necessary for flight safety or the saving of human life.”

The Missing Variable

Is gain influencing your crews’ decisions? Almost certainly. The question is whether your organization acknowledges it.

When flight crews respond to a missing child, an active shooter, a stranded hiker, or a mariner in distress, are they only evaluating probability and severity? Or are they also considering the potential gain of a successful mission?

If gain is already part of the decision-making process, is it addressed in policy, training, and doctrine? Is it understood consistently across the organization? Or does each crew develop its own interpretation based on experience, culture, and circumstance?

Two crews facing identical circumstances may reach different conclusions regarding

mission acceptance. One may launch. The other may decline. Neither decision is necessarily wrong.

The concern is whether both crews are applying the same organizational framework, or whether they are making ad hoc or subjective risk-versus-gain calculations without clear guidance.

Admiral Currier’s concept of warranted risk recognized that some missions carry extraordinary value, but that value does not grant unlimited permission to accept extraordinary risk.

If your crews are already making risk-versus-gain calculations in the cockpit, perhaps it is time to ensure that your organization’s policies, training programs, and leadership expectations provide a common framework for correctly making those decisions. “Discussing these parameters at 0 AGL and 0 knots is the cornerstone of successful missions for your crews. “They need to know what your organization will, and will not, accept,” said Mark Bruno, the Coast Guard’s current chief of safety and environmental health and a former MH-65D pilot.

Disclaimer: Each organization must establish a unique risk management policy based on its underlying doctrine, legal authorities, operational environment, and mission requirements.

By Chris Hill, senior director—safety, Vertical Aviation International



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XPONENTIAL 2026 SIGNALS WHAT'S NEXT FOR PUBLIC SAFETY AVIATION

XPONENTIAL 2026 made one thing clear: multi-rotor aircraft, VTOL systems, and autonomous aviation are rapidly moving from emerging technologies to operational infrastructure for public safety, emergency response, and critical operations.

Held this past May in Detroit, XPONENTIAL 2026 brought together thousands of leaders from industry, government, defense, and public safety to examine the future of autonomy across air, ground, and maritime domains. With more than 550 exhibitors and four days of packed programming, the event highlighted how quickly advanced aviation technologies are scaling into real-world deployment.

For the public safety aviation community, several themes stood out.

Drone as first responder (DFR) operations, beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) integration, and emergency response applications remained major focal points throughout the week. Public safety agencies and operators shared how drones and eVTOLs are increasingly supporting search and rescue missions, disaster assessment, wildfire response, tactical overwatch, infrastructure inspections, and situational awareness during critical incidents.

What was once viewed as a supplemental capability is now becoming core operational infrastructure.

The show floor reflected that evolution. Manufacturers and service providers emphasized secure-communication architectures, interoperability, and operational reliability as agencies place greater focus on trusted systems and cybersecurity.

That broader conversation around trust, security, and operational readiness emerged repeatedly throughout the event.

As public safety agencies continue expanding deployment of uncrewed systems, discussions surrounding supply chain resilience, cybersecurity, operational standards, and trusted procurement pathways are becoming increasingly important. Operators are no longer evaluating systems solely on flight performance. They are evaluating whether platforms can reliably support sensitive public safety and critical infrastructure missions at scale.

FAA participation throughout XPONENTIAL reinforced how quickly regulatory and operational conversations are advancing alongside the technology itself. Sessions focused on advanced air mobility, BVLOS integration, and future airspace operations drew significant interest from both public safety and commercial stakeholders.

XPONENTIAL also highlighted how autonomy is becoming increasingly multi-domain. Maritime autonomy, emergency response coordination,

AI-enabled systems, and advanced mobility discussions all intersected with the future of public safety aviation operations.

Detroit proved to be a fitting host city for those conversations. Long recognized as a center for mobility and advanced manufacturing, the city underscored the growing convergence between robotics, manufacturing, autonomous systems, and operational deployment.

The momentum is already building toward next year.

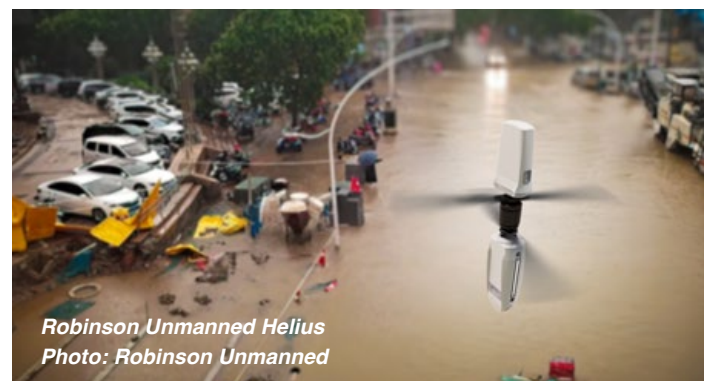
At XPONENTIAL 2026, AUVSI announced that XPONENTIAL 2027 will take place in Miami Beach — a location uniquely positioned to expand conversations surrounding advanced air mobility, weather resilience, coastal operations, maritime autonomy, and emergency response.

With its proximity to major waterways, hurricane response operations, and a rapidly growing AAM ecosystem, Miami is expected to provide an ideal environment for deeper multi-domain operational discussions. [DRONERESPONDERS](#) also expressed their intent to extend and expand its programming presence in Miami, reinforcing the growing role public safety operators continue playing across the autonomy ecosystem.

As the industry evolves from experimentation to operational scale, events like XPONENTIAL are helping shape how multi-rotor aircraft and VTOL systems integrate into the future of public safety aviation.

About AUVSI Membership

[AUVSI](#) membership connects organizations and professionals across the autonomy ecosystem through advocacy, industry collaboration, events, policy engagement, and trusted certification programs. Members gain access to critical conversations shaping the future of uncrewed systems, advanced air mobility, robotics, public safety operations, and autonomous technologies across air, ground, and maritime domains.



*Robinson Unmanned Helius
Photo: Robinson Unmanned*



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AIRBUS INTRODUCES UNCREWED VERSION OF THE H145, THE U145

Airbus Helicopters recently introduced an uncrewed version of its proven H145, the U145, during the ILA Berlin airshow, where the company has displayed a full-scale mock-up of the new model. The U145 complements Airbus' helicopter and uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) offering. A maiden flight with a safety pilot onboard is planned for the end of 2026, with entry into service at the beginning of the next decade.

"With the U145, we are offering our customers an autonomous, uncrewed version of our H145 helicopter - combining the proven airframe, power and useful load of the H145 with the autonomy of a UAS," said Matthieu Louvot, CEO of Airbus Helicopters. "To develop the U145 and its capabilities as a multi-mission UAS, we will be teaming up with leading autonomous mission partners to further expand the UAS ecosystem in Europe," he added.

The H145 is the second crewed helicopter Airbus is converting into an uncrewed version, following the VSR700, which is derived from the Cabri G2. The U145 will feature a specialized sensor suite and artificial intelligence for full autonomy. Compared with a crewed H145 helicopter, the U145 will have no physical cockpit, and will include significant adaptations for cargo, such as an integrated nose door including a foldable loading table and a dedicated cargo floor.

With a maximum take-off weight (MTOW) of 3,800 kg (8,377 pounds), the U145 is being developed as a mission-agnostic solution for civil and military applications, primarily high-volume cargo supply. Its modular design supports expansion into roles like disaster management, firefighting, armed scouting, surveillance, drone mothership functionality for air launched effects, where Airbus is partnering with Matra BAE Dynamics Aérospatiale (MBDA), as well as crewed-uncrewed teaming.

In the United States, Airbus U.S. Space & Defense is, together with its partners Shield AI, L3 Harris and Parry Lab, offering the U.S. Marine Corps a dedicated U.S. development, the MQ-72C, which is a fully autonomous variant of the well proven Lakota UH-72B, tailored to their specific needs.

In total, there are more than 1,800 H145 family helicopters in service for military, parapublic and civil missions, logging a total of more than 8.5 million flight hours. Powered by two Safran Arriel 2E engines, the H145 is equipped with a full authority digital engine control (FADEC). Its particularly low acoustic footprint makes the H145 the quietest helicopter in its class, while its CO2 emissions are the lowest amongst its competitors.

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MAINTENANCE MINUTE

BY MARK TYLER



THE COST OF QUALITY

Quality has a cost. In aviation maintenance, quality often goes unnoticed when it is present — but it is always noticed when it is absent. The real question is: what is the return on your investment?

- Your investment of time?
- Your investment of discipline?
- Your investment of focus and professionalism?

Will your customer consider you an asset or a liability?

In the world of aircraft maintenance, everything matters. This profession requires diligent attention, personal responsibility, and a commitment to performing at a consistently elevated level. There is very little room for complacency when lives depend on the work we perform.

Growing up in the Deep South, my parents instilled in me a strong work ethic. They would always say, “If something is worth doing, then it’s worth doing right.” That principle has stayed with me throughout my career, and I still carry that standard today.

Aircraft mechanics receive a gift called opportunity. We have the opportunity every

day to create value by the way we perform and communicate. Sometimes, that value is found in the small things — cleaning a windshield, wiping up spilled oil, or taking the extra time to clean an engine deck before returning an aircraft to service. Details matter!

Quality can often be seen before a word is ever spoken. Poor workmanship, careless sealant application, or lack of attention to detail usually points to larger concerns beneath the surface. Excellence leaves fingerprints, but so does mediocrity.

As mechanics, our goal is to miss nothing — mechanically or cosmetically. Yet we are human, and there are times when mistakes happen or performance falls short due to fatigue, pressure, staffing shortages, schedule demands, or AOG situations. The difference is not whether a mistake occurs. The difference is how we respond to it.

Professionals take ownership. Amateurs hide it.

When issues arise, they should be corrected immediately, followed by an honest evaluation of the root cause. Open communication and maintenance debriefs are critical to building a culture of

quality and accountability. Quality requires honesty, humility, and commitment.

The consequences of poor quality can be severe: rework labor, aircraft downtime, damaged reputation, low morale, loss of customers, and loss of trust. In the worst-case scenario, inadequate quality can cost lives. This is serious business, and it should always be treated as such.

Quality is easy when conditions are calm. The true test of professionalism is maintaining standards when pressure increases.

The mindset of an A&P mechanic should always be this: Somewhere, someone is trusting me to do the right thing the right way — and you should expect the same from me every single time.

Quality is not accidental. Quality is intentional.

It is built through values, standards, and expectations. Quality becomes part of your reputation, and your reputation will mark you one way or another throughout your career.

- Quality costs time.
- Quality costs effort.
- Quality costs discipline.
- Lack of quality always costs more.

Consistent quality is the standard. **Live it.**



About the author: Mark Tyler dedicated the majority of his career to serving the helicopter EMS community, from base mechanic to director of maintenance. As vice president and general manager of Precision Aircraft Services, Tyler now serves helicopter operators from many sectors, including air ambulance, law enforcement, private owners, etc. When not at work, he can be found spending time with his family or sitting in a tree stand.



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A Heli Alps AS350 is landing on rugged, dusty terrain in the Swiss mountains. The pilot returns to pick up the flight assistant after completing the job. In the background to the left, the stunning Lac de Mauvoisin in Vallée de Bagnes adds depth to the scene.

*Photo: Loïc Froidevaux
Instagram @froidevaux_loic*



A Papillon H130 touches down at sunrise on "Wedding Point" at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. Flying into the ditch never got old!

Photo: Aaron Cordes

Instagram @aaron_drummerarc



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Life Flight Network to Expand Bell Fleet with Three New Bell 407GXis

Bell Textron Inc recently announced the order of three additional Bell 407GXis by Life Flight Network, the largest not-for-profit air medical program in the country with the largest Bell HEMS fleet, operating 35 Bell aircraft. These new mission-ready Bell 407GXis will join their fleet to continue offering rapid response and exceptional emergency medical care across their extensive service area.

“For nearly five decades, Life Flight Network has provided air medical care and transport throughout the western states, and Bell is honored to take part in supporting their lifesaving operations,” said Lane Evans, managing director, Bell. “These new Bell 407GXis highlight the reliability and capability our products provide to supporting lifesaving operations when minutes matter the most.”

Operating a combined helicopter and fixed-wing fleet of roughly 60 aircraft throughout the Pacific Northwest, Intermountain West, and Hawaii, Life Flight Network provides 24/7 ICU-level care and support to hospitals, emergency responders, police, EMS and fire departments.

“At Life Flight Network, every aircraft decision comes down to one thing: our ability to reach patients faster and deliver the best possible care,” said Ben Clayton, CEO of Life Flight Network. “These three Bell 407GXis bring proven reliability and exceptional performance to our fleet, and we’re proud to expand our longstanding relationship with Bell in support of that mission.”

The Bell 407GXi is engineered to meet the demanding requirements of HEMS operations, offering speed, reliability and advanced avionics that enhance safety in critical missions. The Garmin G1000H NXi flight deck improves situational awareness and reduces pilot workload. The aircraft’s powerful engine performance and smooth handling support rapid response times, while the spacious, configurable cabin provides medical teams room and access needed to deliver patient care in flight.

Backed by over 290,000 flight hours and Bell’s proven sustainment network, the Bell 407GXi gives air medical providers like Life Flight Network a platform capable of completing lifesaving transports in challenging environments in a safe, reliable and effective way. Life Flight Network also utilizes other Bell platforms like the Bell 429, totaling over 17,000 flight hours across their Bell fleet.



Safety Flight Achieves the First Entrol Simulator Certification in Brazil

Entrol recently announced the official certification of an FTD Level 5 simulator by the ANAC (National Civil Aviation Agency of Brazil). This marks a major milestone as the first Entrol device to be certified in the country, opening up new growth opportunities in one of the most prominent global helicopter markets.

The certified device is a customized H145 FTD Level 5 operated by the prestigious Brazilian flight school, Safety Flight. Installed in early 2024 and fully homologated after a process with the authorities, the simulator is specifically tailored for internal training, twin-engine transitions, and advanced IFR-H instruction.

Tailored engineering and fleet integration

To meet the school's precise operational requirements, Entrol developed a highly versatile configuration focused on maximizing training efficiency for twin-engine platforms.

A key highlight of this customized H45 unit is the incorporation of a dedicated tactile vibration system. This addition allows pilots to recognize critical aerodynamic states through physical sensation, providing an immersive and realistic environment crucial for high-complexity mission training and regulatory

compliance. This addition allows pilots to recognize critical aerodynamic states through physical sensation, providing an immersive and realistic environment crucial for high-complexity mission training and regulatory compliance.

A relationship built on world-class after-sales service

This milestone strengthens a long-term partnership that began in 2020. After experiencing the reliability of their first Entrol device (an EC135-based simulator) delivered in 2022, Safety Flight decided to expand their fleet with the H145, driven heavily by the manufacturer's top-tier support.

Antonio Gallucci, CEO of Safety Flight, shared a deep perspective on their journey and why they trust Entrol:

"We started our professional life in 1984, when we began the basic helicopter pilot course; back then, there were only four schools in Brazil. Throughout this journey, after executing numerous helicopter missions in the Amazon rainforest, offshore, and executive flights, we decided to undertake our biggest flight: the transmission of accumulated knowledge. In 2020, we saw Entrol on the internet and envisioned the possibility of a great leap.

After establishing a partnership with Entrol, which proved to have state-of-the-art equipment, we also verified something

even more important: first-class, after-sales service. For this reason, we received our second simulator, the H145. After a long process with ANAC, we received the homologation of our FTD, which allowed for even more professional training. With this equipment, we can demonstrate something we have affirmed throughout our careers: it is possible to 'humanize the methods and not robotize the pilots.'"

Consolidating presence in South America

Securing this first ANAC approval confirms that Entrol's technology adapts seamlessly to the strict regulatory and technical demands of the Brazilian market, paving the way for future projects in South America.

Juanjo Lechosa, business development manager at Entrol, highlights the commercial impact of this achievement: "The certification by ANAC is a cornerstone in our strategy for Brazil. It confirms that our technology not only meets the highest technical standards but also responds perfectly to the specific regulatory requirements of the Brazilian market. We are proud to support Safety Flight once again in their mission to provide top-tier training, backed by our commitment to long-term technical support and innovation."



AIRBUS

Czech Ministry of Interior Signs Contract for 11 Airbus H145 Helicopters

The Czech Ministry of Interior and Airbus Helicopters have signed a contract for 11 five-bladed H145 helicopters. These state-of-the-art multi-role aircraft will be operated by the Czech Police Aviation Service, serving as the backbone of its fleet for law enforcement, search and rescue, and emergency medical missions. The comprehensive agreement encompasses not only the delivery of the helicopters but also an extensive training and logistics package to ensure seamless operational integration.

“We are honored that the Czech Ministry of Interior has chosen the H145 to support its vital missions. As the Czech police currently operate the H135, transitioning to the H145 is the logical next step in their fleet’s evolution, allowing crews and maintenance teams to benefit from a high degree of commonality and ensure seamless operational readiness from Day One,” said Thomas Hein, head of Europe region at Airbus Helicopters. “This agreement highlights the H145’s versatility as a multi-mission aircraft, capable of shifting quickly from

demanding police work to life-saving rescue duties. In choosing the H145, the Czech police forces are joining a large number of law enforcement operators across Europe who have placed their trust in this platform, including several state police forces in Germany, the French Gendarmerie, and the Lithuanian Border Guards,” he added.

Airbus and the Czech Republic share a significant 25-year history. Airbus recognizes the country’s strategic importance within the region, as well as its robust capabilities and expertise that continue to power the future of aviation. Airbus currently sources over €200 million worth of goods from the Czech Republic annually, making it a key contributor to the production of its commercial aircraft.

The Czech Police Aviation Service is a long-standing operator of Airbus products, currently utilizing a fleet that includes nine H135 family helicopters. This fleet will be replaced by the five-bladed H145, which will significantly enhance their tactical range and lifting capacity while streamlining maintenance through advanced digital systems.

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THE END OF HYDRAULIC GROUND WHEELS?

HOW AEROMOB REDEFINED RELIABILITY IN HELICOPTER GROUND OPERATIONS

The replacement of hydraulic systems with a fully mechanical design — including, in the HARDMOB line, a patented force-multiplying mechanism that also eliminates traditional lever systems — marks a structural shift in helicopter ground handling, with direct implications for safety, availability, and operational efficiency.

#PARTNER CONTENT

AEROMOB's rise as the world's most reliable helicopter ground wheel manufacturer in 2026 signals a clear turning point in a segment long dominated by hydraulic systems prone to leaks, failures, and operational downtime.

In recent years, the Brazilian company has expanded its footprint among civil and military operators across five continents. This growth reflects a broader shift in how ground operations are evaluated: reliability, simplicity, and ergonomics are no longer secondary considerations — they are operational requirements.

The increasing adoption of HELIMOB and HARDMOB wheels by armed forces and helicopter manufacturers did not occur overnight. It reflects a consistent trend across diverse operating environments — from offshore operations to high-tempo military bases — where ground handling has become a critical factor in both safety and aircraft availability, particularly for skid-equipped helicopters.

MOVING AWAY FROM HYDRAULICS

For decades, hydraulic systems remained the standard despite well-documented limitations. Operators routinely dealt with oil leaks, inconsistent lifting performance, excessive weight, and imprecise fittings. In many cases, wheels failed to lift the aircraft sufficiently, resulting in skid drag during movement and long-term wear.

In high-utilization environments, these limitations translated into measurable operational inefficiencies: delays, increased maintenance, and unnecessary exposure to risk.

AEROMOB took a different approach. Rather than refining hydraulic systems, the company eliminated them entirely.

Its fully mechanical design, built in chromoly steel and manufactured to tighter tolerances than typically seen in GSE equipment, removes key failure points. Without seals, hydraulic fluid, or pressure chambers, the system delivers consistent performance over thousands of cycles, even under harsh operating conditions.

With the HARDMOB line, AEROMOB advanced further. The concept replaces traditional lever-based mechanisms with a patented force-multiplying system developed in-house. The result is lower operator effort, greater movement predictability, and the elimination of variables associated with manual actuation — establishing a new efficiency benchmark in helicopter ground handling.



OPERATIONAL IMPACT

Field feedback consistently highlights two primary gains: predictability and reduced physical effort.

Operators report significantly lower force requirements during maneuvering, driven by optimized load-bearing components and system geometry. At the same time, the simplicity of the design reduces training time. In military units, new personnel are able to operate the equipment effectively within minutes.

Equally important, operational errors no longer translate into equipment damage — a common issue with previous-generation systems.

GLOBAL ADOPTION

Following CE certification, AEROMOB equipment gained traction in the European market and expanded into international operations. Adoption among operators aligned with OEM ecosystems such as Airbus and Leonardo increased visibility and supported broader standardization.

Today, the equipment operates across a wide range of environments — arid, coastal, and high-humidity regions — with consistent performance reported in all conditions.

“The robustness, efficiency, and availability of Aeromob wheels exceeded expectations. We observed a direct improvement in operational capability and safety, both for ground crews and the aircraft.”

— MAJOR RAFAEL, STATE AVIATION COMMAND,
OPERATOR OF AIRBUS HELICOPTER FLEETS



PRECISION AND STANDARDIZATION

Beyond design simplicity, one factor consistently highlighted by mechanics and engineers is machining precision, particularly at the skid interface. Proper alignment reduces structural stress, minimizes wear, and directly contributes to overall reliability.

In mixed-fleet environments — including Airbus, Bell, Robinson, and Leonardo platforms — the ability to standardize across a single wheel family has also simplified logistics and reduced operating costs.



A STRUCTURAL SHIFT

Although investment in helicopter GSE represents a relatively small fraction of an aircraft's total value, its impact on safety, availability, and operational efficiency is disproportionate. Ground handling is often the first step in mission readiness, whether in aeromedical, military, executive, or law enforcement operations.

As aircraft continue to evolve, expectations for ground support equipment are rising accordingly.

AEROMOB's approach aligns with this shift: eliminating critical failure variables, reducing human effort, and delivering consistent, repeatable performance.

In 2026, its position as a global reference reflects more than market recognition — it signals alignment with a new operational standard, where reliability is no longer a differentiator, but a baseline requirement.

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Recoil Aerospace Announces New Expeditionary Fuel System (EFS)

Recoil Aerospace Inc. (Recoil) recently announced the debut of its latest product innovation, the new Expeditionary Fuel System (EFS), which was unveiled at the Army Aviation Association of America (AAAA) Summit in Nashville.

The addition of a fuel pump system to Recoil's existing Expeditionary Fuel Tank (EFT) further expands its mission support capabilities for operators, providing increased immediate access to fuel when needed most. Geared toward the ever-growing need for Forward Arming and Refueling Points (FARP) in remote locales, the EFS is both durable and lightweight – key aspects when operating in austere and/or unexpected locations. Recoil's continued commitment to delivering dependable and mission-ready support to military and commercial customers worldwide is even more evident with this new system.

"Recoil is committed to supporting United States Army Aviation and its ground forces in the ever-expanding dynamic of the modern battlespace. Introducing the Expeditionary Fuel System provides the soldier with a modular, durable, and lightweight solution to agile FARP operations. The EFS provides a 1,000-gallon carbon fiber tank, 150 gallon-per-minute pump, filtration, 50-foot hose reel in a sling loadable, air droppable package, which is scalable with added 1,000-gallon Expeditionary Fuel Tanks. This is the capability gap closer we believe Army Aviation has been looking for," said Joseph Rice, president of Recoil Aerospace.

The addition of the EFS reflects Recoil's continued investment in updating and expanding its product line to support growing global demand.

MD | HELICOPTERS™

Super D20B Upgrade Kit Increases Fuel Efficiency

Early operational results from the Super D20B upgrade program are showing meaningful improvements in fuel efficiency and mission endurance for MD 500D operators. Initial data indicates a reduction in fuel consumption from approximately 35 gallons per hour to 28 gallons per hour—an improvement of roughly 20%.

The performance gains are attributed to increased rotor system efficiency. By incorporating larger main and tail rotor discs, the aircraft operates with lower disc loading, allowing it to produce lift more efficiently and reduce the power required in flight. The result is a net decrease in fuel burn despite the larger rotor system.

These efficiency gains translate directly into extended mission capability. In standard configuration, endurance increases from approximately 1 hour 42 minutes to over 2 hours 12 minutes. When paired with a common 30-gallon auxiliary fuel tank, total endurance improves from about 2 hours 38 minutes to more than 3 hours 17 minutes—adding nearly 40 minutes of additional time on station.

How it Works

Just as importantly, the reduction in fuel burn drives measurable operating cost savings. At typical utilization rates:

300 flight hours per year (up to ~2,100 gal saved)

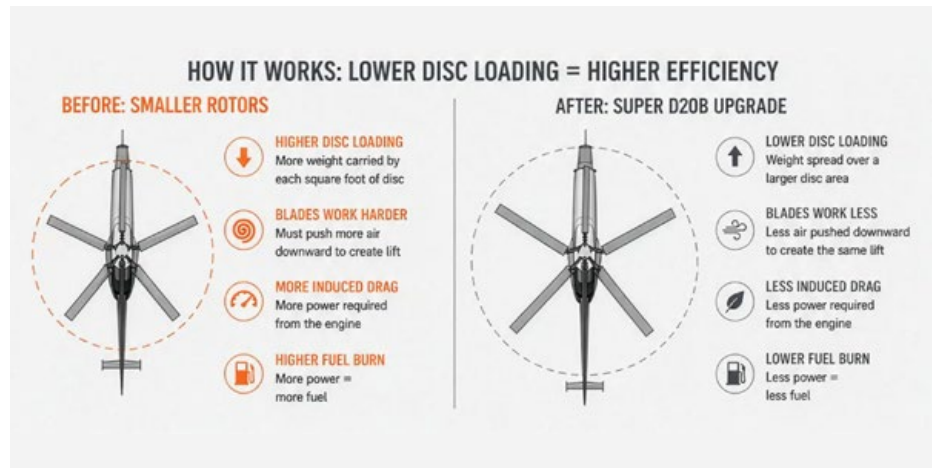
- \$5/gal: ~\$10,500
- \$7/gal: ~\$14,700

600 flight hours per year (up to ~4,200 gal saved)

- \$5/gal: ~\$21,000
- \$7/gal: ~\$29,400

“The key takeaway for operators is simple: the aircraft is doing more with less,” said Ryan Weeks. “The Super D20B doesn’t just improve performance – it increases the value of every gallon of fuel on board and lowers the cost of every hour flown.”

The Super D20B upgrade is designed to provide operators with improved efficiency, extended range, and enhanced operational flexibility without compromising core aircraft performance.



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Adventure Pilot Expands iFly EFB into Dispatch Training with New “Dispatch Mode” Aligned to FAA Standards

Adventure Pilot recently announced the launch of a new Dispatch Mode, a specialized version of iFly EFB developed for flight dispatch and operations training programs.

Dispatch Mode is now available to aviation training institutions, providing a proven electronic training tool designed for dispatcher education and operational coursework within FAA-approved programs.

Purpose-Built for Dispatch Training

Dispatch Mode provides the same trusted foundation as iFly EFB, while adapting key elements to align with FAA Part 65 Dispatch curriculum requirements. Some automated EFB features have been intentionally disabled to encourage manual flight planning and calculation skills—essential competencies for students pursuing FAA Aircraft Dispatcher certification.

Features and Capabilities

- **Authentic Flight Planning Experience:** Core EFB automation is selectively limited, requiring students to manually perform nav-log calculations, fuel planning, and time en route computations.
- **Full IFR Resource Suite:** Includes IFR Plates, Low en route charts, extensive navaid and fix database, and aircraft performance profiles to support realistic dispatch scenarios.

- **Integrated Training Tools:** Enables instructors to simulate real-world dispatch environments with current aviation data and practical planning exercises.
- **Training Application:** Recognized for use as an electronic tool within FAA-approved dispatcher training programs.
- **Proven in Academia:** Successfully deployed within accredited aviation dispatch training environments, supporting realistic, data-driven IFR flight planning and classroom instruction.

“Our goal is to provide dispatch students with the same professional-grade environment they’ll encounter in the field—without removing the discipline of learning the calculations behind it,” said Juanita Boyd, VP of operations at Adventure Pilot. “Dispatch Mode bridges the gap between classroom theory and operational practice.”

Availability

iFly EFB Dispatch Mode is available now for institutional licensing and integration into approved training programs. Schools and training centers can contact Adventure Pilot to discuss deployment and customization options.



Leonardo Deepens U.K. Investment with New Helicopter Support Hub at Elstree

Leonardo recently announced the opening of a new helicopter maintenance and support facility at Elstree Aerodrome, strengthening its long-term commitment to the U.K. aerospace sector and reinforcing its high-tech footprint across the country.

Leonardo continues to bolster the nation's sovereign industrial capabilities, following a landmark £1 billion contract for the U.K.'s New Medium Helicopter (NMH) program. The new site, Leonardo's tenth operational location in the U.K., represents a multi-million-pound investment in high-value engineering capability. It will provide manufacturer-approved maintenance, logistics and technical support for the fleet of Leonardo civil helicopters operating across the U.K. and Ireland, helping to strengthen market resilience, customer proximity and long-term customer support.

The Elstree facility will play a key role in supporting the extensive fleet of Leonardo commercial helicopters operating in the U.K. that serve a wide range of customers, including commercial operators. Around 30 of the 200-strong fleet support community services, including emergency medical services and other specialist users. By expanding Leonardo's original equipment manufacturer (OEM) presence in-country, the site enhances the availability of direct, responsive support for customers while continuing to work in partnership with established U.K. service providers.

Alongside operational capability, the facility will support the creation of secure, highly skilled engineering roles in Hertfordshire, with long-term workforce growth planned as activity ramps up over the coming years. Leonardo is placing a particular focus on developing early-career engineers and technicians, helping to grow the U.K.'s advanced aerospace skills base and create long-term career pathways. The Leonardo team will work in close collaboration with the University of Hertfordshire to provide industrial input to their engineering curriculum, so that students graduate with industry-ready skills.

Operated through the company's Leonardo Belgium subsidiary, which has the responsibility for after sales support, logistics, maintenance of civil and public service helicopters across Europe, the Elstree hub will serve as a critical bridge for European aerospace synergy. It will integrate Leonardo's streamlined continental logistics and experience with the U.K.'s engineering expertise to give skilled support for the U.K.

Vittorio Della Bella, SVP of customer support & training services at Leonardo Helicopters said: "The opening of our Elstree facility marks an important step in strengthening our support for Leonardo's civil helicopter customers in the U.K. and Ireland. This brings us closer to our customers, enhances our responsiveness, and reinforces our commitment to delivering the highest standards of OEM support in a market that depends on reliability, quality and long-term resilience."

Clive Higgins, chief executive officer, Leonardo U.K., added, "This investment reflects our enduring belief in the U.K.'s aerospace excellence and in the importance of long-term customer partnerships. By strengthening our national presence, we are giving our U.K. customers confidence that critical maintenance and support will be assured for decades to come, providing certainty and peace of mind over the full life of their aircraft. At the same time, we are creating meaningful opportunities for the next generation of highly skilled engineers who will sustain the U.K.'s aerospace industry far into the future."

Leonardo holds a significant share of the civil and public service helicopter market across the U.K. and Ireland, with more than 200 helicopters in operation. The company is a leader in the VIP and corporate transport segment, holding a market share of over 50%, reflecting the enduring strength of its Agusta heritage. Synonymous with high performance, comfort and advanced, bespoke solutions, the Agusta brand continues to define excellence in passenger transport. Alongside this, Leonardo plays a vital and expanding role in mission-critical operations across the region, including search and rescue, emergency medical services and energy sector support. Its most successful platforms include the AW109 light twin, the world leading AW139 intermediate twin, the next-generation AW169 light-intermediate, and the AW189 super-medium helicopter.



Loft Dynamics' VR Simulator Achieves FTD Level 7 Qualification in Japan

Loft Dynamics recently announced it has achieved FTD Level 7 qualification from the Japan Civil Aviation Bureau (JCAB)—the highest qualification level for helicopter flight training devices in Japan. The JCAB joins the FAA and EASA in qualifying the company's VR system.

The qualification applies to the Airbus H125 TXi simulator installed at Nakanihon Air, one of Japan's largest helicopter operators. Installed at Nakanihon Air's headquarters at Nagoya Airport, the device is the first FTD Level 7-qualified VR helicopter simulator in Japan and Loft Dynamics' first simulator installation in the Asia-Pacific region.

JCAB's qualification opens the door for broader use of high-fidelity simulator training across Japan's helicopter sector. The device enables operators to deliver more consistent and safety-focused training, reducing reliance on aircraft for scenarios that are difficult, inefficient or impractical to conduct in flight. Pilots can rehearse normal, abnormal and emergency procedures in a controlled environment, while instructors can standardize training and evaluation across a wide range of operational scenarios.

Japan is one of the largest helicopter

markets in Asia, and Nakanihon Air supports a wide range of mission-critical operations including emergency medical transport, disaster response and aerial infrastructure inspection. Until now, access to high-fidelity, qualified helicopter simulator training has been limited in Japan, with much of this training conducted in the aircraft itself. With the Level 7-qualified simulator now in operation, Nakanihon Air pilots can train more frequently for the range of missions they fly across Japan, from emergency response to infrastructure inspection.

The simulator enables pilots to rehearse scenarios including engine failures, autorotation landings, tail rotor failures and hydraulic system malfunctions. Its immersive VR cockpit and full-motion platform allow pilots to repeatedly train across varied terrain and changing weather conditions. The simulator also includes a technical crew member station, enabling coordinated training between pilots and mission specialists for operations such as sling loads.

"Maintaining the highest standards of aviation safety and achieving zero serious incidents remain our core objectives, and Loft Dynamics is a trusted partner in helping us advance these goals," said Shigeharu Matsuoka, president of Nakanihon Air. "The introduction of Japan's first FTD Level 7 VR simulator is an important milestone, giving our pilots the ability to train for complex,

decision-intensive scenarios and rare equipment failures in a safe, controlled environment. By enabling repeated, immersive training, this technology will strengthen pilot readiness and elevate safety across a wide range of operations. It will also allow us to refine the skills of pilots currently on the front lines and, more broadly, accelerate the development of the next generation of aviation talent in Japan."

"This shows what's possible when operators, regulators and local partners align to advance pilot training," said Sebastien Borel, CEO of Loft Dynamics. "Working closely with Nakanihon Air, Inter-Craft and the JCAB, we've been able to bring qualified VR helicopter training to Japan for the first time. As more countries adopt this approach, we raise the standard of safety and enable the next generation of pilots to train more regularly, in more places around the world."

Nakanihon Air's collaboration with Loft Dynamics is part of its broader commitment to safety and innovation. The company operates a dedicated Safety Innovation Hall and maintains a "Zero Accident" safety target, investing in advanced training technologies that strengthen pilot preparedness.

The simulator was delivered through Inter-Craft, which introduced the technology to the Japanese market and coordinated with the JCAB to support its certification.



Midwest Aerospace LTD Celebrates Grand Opening of Midwest Blade Tech

Midwest Aerospace LTD recently announced the official opening of Midwest Blade Tech, its new state-of-the-art facility dedicated to main and tail rotor blade repair and servicing. Located at the company's headquarters in Lowell, Indiana, the facility expands Midwest's capabilities to meet growing demand for high-quality rotor blade maintenance and advanced repair solutions.

Midwest Blade Tech serves as the exclusive distributor of Rotorcraft Repair and Manufacturing's proprietary Dragon Skin Extreme (DSX) coating. Backed by more than eight years of FAA testing and proven performance across a wide range of aircraft, DSX has established itself as a leading solution for erosion and corrosion protection. With over 5,000 operating hours in harsh environments—including agricultural, firefighting, medical, humanitarian, and military operations—DSX delivers exceptional durability and extends the lifespan and performance of rotor blades.

The new facility combines advanced technology, specialized equipment, and a team of highly experienced technicians to provide repairs that meet and exceed industry performance and safety standards. By integrating DSX into its service offerings, Midwest Blade Tech strengthens Midwest Aerospace's ability to deliver innovative, long-lasting solutions to rotorcraft operators worldwide.

"We built Midwest Blade Tech to raise the standard for rotor blade repair," said Joseph L. Giannini, vice president, Midwest Aerospace. "With the right people, the right equipment, and proven solutions like DSX, we're delivering results our customers can depend on."

"Midwest Blade Tech is the right partner to bring DSX to a broader market," said Seth Hardage, Rotorcraft Repair and Manufacturing. "They have the

experience, capability, and commitment to apply DSX the way it was designed—delivering real performance and long-term protection in the field."

The opening of Midwest Blade Tech marks another milestone in Midwest Aerospace's continued growth and investment in the future of aviation support services.

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Southeast Aerospace Receives TCCA Validation for Bell 407 Mission Console STC

Southeast Aerospace (SEA) recently announced it has received Transport Canada Supplemental Type Certificate (STC) validation SA26-19 for its Bell 407 Mission Console Structural Provisions installation.

Issued on May 1, 2026, this validation extends SEA's FAA-approved STC to Canadian-registered Bell 407 aircraft, enabling certified installation for operators across Canada.

SEA's Mission Console solution supports a wide range of special mission operations, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), law enforcement, and other

BY THE NUMBERS

10,560,000,000

The projected USD global revenue for the UAV (drone) taxi industry by 2030. That's a significant increase from estimated 2026 revenue of \$4.47 billion. Notable projects are underway in places like Dubai and South Korea.

6

The number of rotor blades on a Boeing CH 47 Chinook, the most of any commercial helicopter. Its two tandem rotors create a maximum lift capacity of approx. 26,000 pounds.

3,500

The estimated number of helicopter pilots working in public safety roles in the U.S. This includes active pilots flying for federal agencies, state police/highway patrol aviation units, county/municipal units, and private HAA under public contracts.



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multi-mission roles. The system provides a flexible and scalable platform for integrating mission equipment while maintaining compliance with applicable airworthiness standards.

This milestone reflects SEA's continued commitment to delivering certified, mission-ready solutions to a global customer base.

With this certification milestone, Southeast Aerospace continues to expand its portfolio of globally approved aircraft modification solutions supporting mission-ready rotorcraft operators around the world.

17,000

The number of commercial pilots projected to retire by 2030, according to the FAA. The overall aviation industry expects significant retirements, particularly among airline pilots due to that sector's mandatory retirement age of 65.

760+

The number of exhibiting companies expected at the 2026 NBAA Business Aviation Convention & Exhibition (NBAA-BACE) in Las Vegas this October. Rotor Pro is planning to be there with bonus print distribution of our July/August issue, which publishes in late August.

74

The average daily high temperature October 26-28 in Ft. Worth, Texas, which just happens to be when and where this year's Air Medical Transport Conference (AMTC) happens. Rotor Pro also plans to provide bonus print distribution of our July/August issue then and there!



Artistic rendering of R66 TURBINETRUCK equipped with Sikorsky's proven MATRIX™ autonomy system.
Crédit: Robinson Unmanned.



Sikorsky and Robinson Unmanned Secure U.S. Marine Corps Contract for Autonomous Aerial Logistics Program

The United States Marine Corps recently awarded a \$15.5 million contract to Sikorsky, a Lockheed Martin company, for the Medium Aerial Resupply Vehicle – Expeditionary Logistics (MARV-EL) Increment 2 program. The offering selected for award is the R66 TURBINETRUCK, an autonomous cargo helicopter commercially developed by Sikorsky and Robinson Unmanned that combines Sikorsky's proven MATRIX™ autonomy system with the rugged R66 airframe from Robinson Helicopter Company to provide flexible, affordable and rapid combat sustainment.

The ability to deliver ammunition, medical supplies and other essential equipment at the point of need – regardless of terrain, weather, or enemy threat – is critical to the U.S. Marine Corps' continued success. The MARV-EL program fills a capability gap between small tactical drones and large strategic airlifters, delivering a reliable "middleweight" uncrewed logistics platform capable of operating from austere forward operating bases, ship decks or unimproved landing zones. The R66 TURBINETRUCK will support mission success when ground or crewed aviation assets are unavailable and keep personnel out of danger in high-risk scenarios.

The R66 TURBINETRUCK is enabled by the MATRIX system and will leverage similar features as Sikorsky's new fully autonomous S-70UAS™ U-Hawk™ helicopter.

Executive Perspectives

"As we expand the MATRIX family, we also extend the reach of uncrewed solutions for both civil and military customers," said Rich Benton, vice president and general manager of Sikorsky. "The commercially developed R66 TURBINETRUCK is simple, economical and re-configurable; ideal for high-risk, hard-to-reach environments where keeping personnel out of harm's way is essential."

"Our partnership with Sikorsky brings the trusted performance and reliability of the R66 platform into the unmanned logistics arena," said David Smith, president and CEO of Robinson Helicopter Company. "The R66 TURBINETRUCK represents a significant step forward in expanding proven rotorcraft into scalable, autonomous cargo solutions for demanding operational environments. Together, we are delivering a game-changing capability that will enhance warfighter readiness and open new opportunities for safe, reliable and affordable autonomous transport."

"Operators need logistics solutions that can keep pace with rapidly changing mission demands without increasing

complexity," said Paul Fermo, president of Robinson Unmanned. "By combining MATRIX's advanced autonomous capability with the rugged, flight-proven R66 airframe, the R66 TURBINETRUCK delivers that capability whenever and wherever it's needed—no matter the environment."

Why It Matters

The MARV-EL program is the middleweight capability responding to a gap within the Unmanned Logistics System – Air (ULS-A) program.

- **Payload & Range:** MARV-EL requires an uncrewed aircraft that can carry a logistic payload between 1,300 and 2,500 pounds to a combat radius of 100 nautical miles (NM), operating through a common digital handheld device.
- **Delivery:** Robinson Unmanned will deliver the first R66 TURBINETRUCK to Sikorsky for integration, test and evaluation, and demonstration. Capability demonstrations will showcase MATRIX's platform and open architecture design operating on the R66 TURBINETRUCK airframe.
- **Integration:** MATRIX will integrate into the R66 TURBINETRUCK in a similar manner as Sikorsky's S-70UAS U-Hawk helicopter, while incorporating a smaller footprint, different performance parameters and a lower operating cost.
- **Operator Workflow:** Similar to the U-Hawk helicopter, the operator enters the mission objectives into a digital tablet. The system then automatically creates a flight plan, using sensors and algorithms to guide the R66 TURBINETRUCK safely to the target location.
- **Experience:** Sikorsky participated in the U.S. Marine Corps' Aerial Logistics Connector (ALC) Phase 1 in 2025 and will be bringing that experience to MARV-EL Increment 2.



UAE Regulator and Archer Move To Streamlined Approach for Certifying Midnight in the UAE

The UAE General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) recently transitioned Archer's Midnight aircraft into a Restricted Type Certificate (RTC) program, advancing the regulatory path for the aircraft's entry into service in the UAE.

Archer is the first eVTOL manufacturer to transition to an RTC certification track with the GCAA, utilizing an airworthiness pathway aligned with international aviation frameworks.

The RTC program provides an established pathway for Archer to begin limited commercial operations. It also ensures that Midnight is developed under a regulatory baseline that supports long-term commercial viability within the UAE.

This milestone follows several years of technical collaboration between the GCAA and Archer, including multiple on-site inspections by experts at Archer's headquarters and flight test facilities in the U.S., as well as in-country flights with Midnight. It was supported by the Abu Dhabi Investment Office (ADIO) as part of its commitment to establishing Abu Dhabi as a global leader in the Smart and Autonomous Vehicle Industries (SAVI) cluster.

A cornerstone of this advanced regulatory phase is initiating a GCAA Design Organization Approval (DOA) and Production Organization Approval (POA). These designations signify a high degree of trust in Archer's engineering and safety management systems.

"The GCAA is committed to safely integrating innovative aviation technologies into the UAE airspace," said Eng. Aqeel Al Zarooni, assistant director general, Aviation Safety Affairs Sector at GCAA.

Through this program, Archer and the GCAA have made progress across eight workstreams critical to commercial readiness, including aircraft certification, operations, maintenance, flight crew training, airspace, vertiports, security and oversight.

Adam Goldstein, founder and CEO of Archer, said, "The UAE has been one of the most forward-leaning markets in the world for advanced aviation, and the GCAA has been a strong, collaborative partner throughout this process. Advancing Midnight into this RTC program is a major step toward bringing electric air taxis to the UAE."

Midnight is planned to enter service in Abu Dhabi with Abu Dhabi Aviation, Archer's local operating partner and one of the region's leading aviation companies.

Mahmood Al Hameli, group CEO of Abu Dhabi Aviation, said, "This milestone reflects Abu Dhabi Aviation's confidence in the UAE's aviation ecosystem and Abu Dhabi's readiness to embrace practical innovation. It reinforces our commitment to supporting the safe and responsible rollout of advanced air mobility systems, unlocking new opportunities for connectivity, operational efficiency and sustainable economic growth across the Emirate."



Joby Brings Electric Air Taxis to New York City in Week-Long Flight Campaign

Joby Aviation Inc. recently announced the completion of the first-ever point-to-point electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) air taxi demonstration flights in New York City's history, marking the start of a week-long public campaign across the city's existing heliport network. Framed against the most iconic skyline in the world, the campaign offers the first real-world demonstration of how electric air taxis, which are quiet and produce zero operating emissions, will be able to connect the region, linking vertiports, international airports, and communities across the New York metropolitan area.

Joby's aircraft (N545JX) departed from John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) and landed across the city's existing heliport network, including Downtown Skyport, and the West 30th Street and East 34th Street Heliports in Midtown, home to Blade Air Mobility's premium passenger lounges. Together, these sites trace some of the commercial routes the company envisions for New York, connecting Lower Manhattan and Midtown to JFK in under 10 minutes.

"New York has always been a city that defines the future by demanding better," said JoeBen Bevirt, founder and CEO of Joby. "We first flew here in 2023, and now we're showing what the next chapter looks like: a quiet, zero-operating-emissions air taxi service designed to better serve New Yorkers. This week, flying between JFK and Manhattan, we showed what the White House-backed eIPP initiative makes possible and offered New York a look at what's coming."

"The bridges, tunnels, airports, and rail lines that the Port Authority operates move hundreds of millions of people through this region every year, and our job is to make sure that network keeps pace with the future," said Port Authority Chairman

Kevin O'Toole. "This cutting-edge aircraft is exactly the kind of innovation we have a responsibility to test, understand, and help shape for the good of the region and the public. These flights advance our work to determine how next-generation aviation technology can serve the people of New York and New Jersey."

"We operate some of the busiest airports in the world, and with that comes a responsibility to think seriously about what aviation looks like in the decades ahead for our passengers, for our communities, and for the environment," said Port Authority Executive Director Kathryn Garcia. "These demonstration flights are one data point in a larger body of work we're building around next-generation electric aviation, and it reflects our conviction that responsible exploration of these technologies now is how we prepare this region for the future."

Led by the NYC Economic Development Corporation, and in partnership with Skyports Infrastructure and Vertiports by Atlantic, New York City's heliport infrastructure will be electrified in anticipation of the launch of commercial air taxi service.

"These historic Joby flights, linking our city-owned heliport to our airports, are proof that the future of advanced air mobility is no longer a Jetsons-esque fantasy; it's already here," said NYCEDC Interim President & CEO Jeanny Pak. "NYCEDC is thrilled to usher in New York City's transition to electric flight, and these flights mark a real milestone in that journey. Building on the progress we've made alongside Downtown Skyport and Atlantic Aviation since Joby last flew in NYC skies by upgrading the city-owned heliports to support eVTOL charging infrastructure and Blue Highways maritime delivery, NYCEDC is making New York a more sustainable, greener, and innovative transportation landscape for all New Yorkers."

Central to Joby's New York strategy was the 2025 acquisition of Blade Air Mobility's passenger business, now a wholly owned subsidiary of Joby. Blade's operational expertise, broad base of passenger infrastructure in Manhattan and at key New York area airports enabled it to serve more than 90,000 passengers in 2025. Blade provides the foundation for commercial electric air taxi service at scale and will accelerate the city's transition from the use of helicopters to quiet and emission-free aircraft.

In New York, Joby's commercial vision is simple: turn one of the city's most time consuming trips into one of its fastest. Through partnerships with Delta Air Lines and Uber, Joby aims to create a seamless, end-to-end experience that connects ground transportation and air travel in a single journey. In a city where a typical commuter lost, by one estimate, 102 hours to traffic congestion in 2025, Joby's goal is to reclaim that time by transforming a 60-to-120-minute drive to JFK into a seven-minute flight.



Bell Selected by Near Earth Autonomy to Provide Bell 505 Airframe for U.S. Marine Corps' MARV-EL Program

Bell Textron Inc., recently announced it was selected by Near Earth Autonomy (Near Earth) as a partner on the prototyping of an autonomous Bell 505 for the U.S. Marine Corps' Aerial Resupply Vehicle - Expeditionary Logistics (MARV-EL) Increment 2 program. The goal of the program is to prototype an uncrewed logistics aircraft ready for tactical-edge resupply in contested environments and serve as a middle-weight uncrewed logistics asset.

"This platform will be a step forward in transforming the U.S. Marine Corps' autonomous operations and how our warfighters navigate on the battlefield," said Jason Hurst, Bell SVP, Engineering. "We're leveraging our decades of experience with the U.S. armed forces and innovative product development applying it to the versatile Bell 505 for this program."

The awarded contract will deliver an autonomous aerial logistics capability that exceeds MARV-EL performance threshold requirements and accommodates a wide range of payloads and standard containers. Bell will provide engineering support to the Near Earth team on modifications to the Bell 505 for autonomy integration and enhanced cargo handling.

"Bell looks forward to continuing to build upon our relationship and prior autonomy development with Near Earth in support of the MARV-EL program," added Hurst.

In 2024, Bell revealed its Aircraft Laboratory for Future Autonomy (ALFA) platform – a step forward in its autonomous flight efforts. Bell and Near Earth collaborated to integrate an advanced perception system for flight demonstrations on the ALFA aircraft, working towards fully autonomous flight capability.



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Through a strong vendor network, RSI ensures rapid access to additional parts, components, and support to help minimize downtime and keep aircraft mission-ready. Additional offerings include component exchange services and in-house hydraulic component overhaul support.

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Universal Avionics is a pioneer in advanced flight deck solutions, backed by the extensive experience of parent company Elbit Systems in mission-critical environments. The ClearVision® Enhanced Flight Vision System (EFVS) transforms demanding operations by delivering an intelligent, augmented view of the outside world directly to the pilot. The system integrates advanced Enhanced Vision (EVS) and Synthetic Vision (SVS) to provide a high-fidelity view of terrain, obstacles, and helipads, even in near-zero visibility.

At the core of the helicopter solution is the SkyVis™ Helmet-Mounted Display, mounted to the helmet for an unlimited field of regard. The system also adapts across airframes; for fixed-wing aircraft and special missions like aerial firefighting, the SkyLens™ Head-Wearable Display provides the same critical benefits. By projecting key environmental data and head-up symbology directly into the line of sight, ClearVision keeps the pilot's focus out the window—ensuring ultimate safety and situational awareness when it matters most.

"It is a game changer in terms of safety, situational awareness, and it sets a new standard for heads-up display technology. They're gonna realize that they're seeing disruptive technology."

**- Captain Bob Allen, Pilot and
Managing Partner (Nomadic Aviation)**

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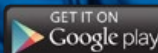
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MIDWEST AEROSPACE: ONE SOURCE. COMPLETE ROTORCRAFT SOLUTIONS.

In today's aviation environment, operators face increasing pressure to maximize aircraft availability while controlling costs and navigating complex supply chain challenges. Finding reliable partners who can provide comprehensive support has never been more important. That's where Midwest Aerospace, LTD. stands apart.

Midwest Aerospace and its family of aviation companies are dedicated to keeping aircraft mission-ready through integrated parts support, engine expertise, dynamic component repair, rotor blade services, and MRO solutions. Through the combined capabilities of CAPPSCO International, Air Technology Engines, Midwest Blade Tech, Midwest Aerospace Arizona, and strategic partner Rotorcraft Repair & Manufacturing, Midwest Aerospace provides comprehensive support for operators worldwide.

Rather than relying on multiple vendors to address different maintenance, repair, and operational needs, customers gain access to a single, trusted source that is capable of supporting critical aircraft systems from nose to tail.

CAPPSCO International serves as Midwest Aerospace's specialized military engine and MRO division. For more than two decades, CAPPSCO has built a reputation as one of the industry's leading experts on the Honeywell T53 engine platform, supporting military, government, and public-use operators around the world. Its capabilities extend beyond engines to include accessories, fuel controls, governors, gearboxes, inspections, overhaul services, field support, and AOG response. By combining deep technical expertise with extensive inventory and repair capabilities, CAPPSCO helps operators maximize aircraft readiness while extending the life of critical assets.

Supporting the commercial side of the market is Air Technology Engines (ATE), which provides turbine engine maintenance, repair, and overhaul services for commercial operators. Together, CAPPSCO and ATE allow Midwest Aerospace to deliver specialized engine support solutions across both military and commercial aviation sectors, providing customers with access to experienced technicians, responsive service, and comprehensive engine expertise.

Another key component of the Midwest Aerospace family is Midwest Aerospace Arizona, a dedicated repair and overhaul facility specializing in rotating and dynamic components for the Bell helicopter family. Established to meet growing demand for high-quality component support, Midwest Aerospace Arizona focuses on the repair, overhaul, inspection, and exchange of critical Bell components, including transmissions, rotor hubs, masts, gearboxes, swashplates, servos, blades, and other dynamic systems.

Supporting aircraft such as the UH-1, AH-1, OH-58, Bell 204, 205, 206, 212, and 412, Midwest Aerospace Arizona has become a trusted resource for operators seeking cost-effective component solutions without compromising quality. The facility's expertise in Bell dynamic systems complements Midwest Aerospace's broader maintenance and parts support capabilities, allowing customers to source critical component repairs and overhauls from a single, trusted organization.

#PARTNER CONTENT



**WHEN RELIABILITY MATTERS
AND AIRCRAFT AVAILABILITY
IS CRITICAL, MIDWEST
AEROSPACE PROVIDES THE
EXPERTISE, RESOURCES,
AND INTEGRATED SUPPORT
NEEDED TO KEEP OPERATORS
FLYING WITH CONFIDENCE.**

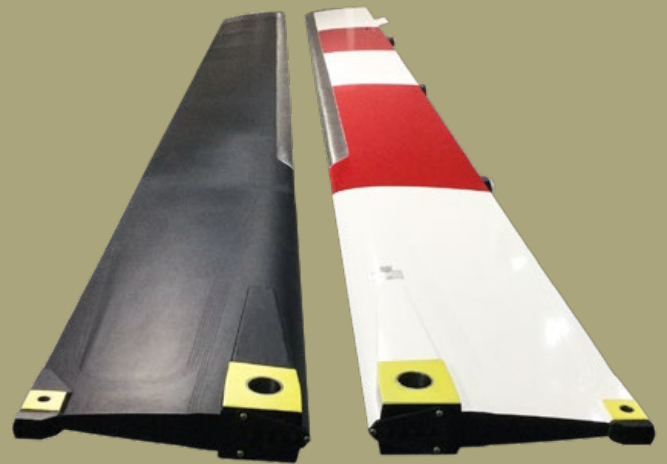
Rotor blade support represents another cornerstone of the Midwest Aerospace portfolio. Through Midwest Blade Tech, customers gain access to specialized rotor blade repair, overhaul, and enhancement services that help improve blade longevity and operational efficiency. The company recently expanded its capabilities with the opening of a new state-of-the-art rotor blade MRO facility in Indiana, marking another significant milestone in Midwest Aerospace's continued growth.

A key differentiator for Midwest Blade Tech is its exclusive distribution of Dragon Skin™ Extreme (DSX), the advanced rotor blade erosion protection coating developed by Rotorcraft Repair & Manufacturing. It is designed to withstand some of the harshest operating environments; DSX helps protect rotor blades from erosion caused by sand, dust, rain, and other environmental conditions that can significantly impact blade performance and service life.

Operators worldwide continue to seek solutions that reduce maintenance requirements while increasing aircraft readiness. Dragon Skin™ Extreme addresses this challenge by providing a durable protective barrier that helps extend blade life and reduce lifecycle costs. The technology has become an increasingly valuable tool for operators seeking to maximize the return on their rotor blade investments.

The relationship with Rotorcraft Repair & Manufacturing further strengthens Midwest Aerospace's ability to provide complete rotorcraft support solutions. As an industry-recognized leader in rotor blade repair, manufacturing and engineering services, Rotorcraft Repair & Manufacturing brings decades of technical expertise and innovation to the partnership. Together, these organizations deliver comprehensive solutions that address the evolving needs of rotorcraft operators around the world.

What truly sets Midwest Aerospace apart, however, is not simply the individual strengths of its companies—it's the power of integration. Customers benefit from seamless collaboration between teams that understand how each component of an aircraft contributes to overall performance and readiness. Whether sourcing difficult-to-find parts, repairing critical components, overhauling engines, protecting rotor



blades, or managing complex maintenance requirements, Midwest Aerospace provides coordinated support designed to simplify operations for its customers.

This integrated approach allows operators to: reduce administrative burden, streamline procurement processes, and work with a team that understands the bigger picture. Instead of managing multiple vendors and service providers, customers gain a strategic partner invested in their success.

As the aviation industry continues to evolve, Midwest Aerospace remains focused on investing in new capabilities, expanding services, and strengthening partnerships that create value for customers. The company's continued growth reflects its commitment to innovation, operational excellence, and customer support.

From hard-to-find aircraft parts and engine services to advanced blade protection technologies and comprehensive MRO capabilities, Midwest Aerospace delivers solutions that help operators stay airborne, mission-ready, and prepared for whatever challenges lie ahead.



IT'S A DOG FLIGHT!

SANPARKS K9S & HELICOPTERS

By Grant Duncan Smith



WATCH VIDEO NOW



Search-and-rescue dogs have been saving lives for decades; their extraordinary sense of smell and hearing make them one of the most powerful force-multipliers in emergency response. In South Africa, these four-legged specialists are increasingly pairing their skills with another vital tool—the helicopter.

From dense bush to rugged mountain terrain, helicopters allow K9 teams to reach areas that would otherwise take hours—or days—to access on foot. For a select group of highly trained dogs and handlers, rotary-wing operations have become a crucial part of modern search and rescue.



FRONT-LINE DOGS

South Africa has a tradition of working dogs in conservation and law enforcement. South African National Parks (SANParks) rangers, private security units, and volunteer organizations all rely on K9s for tracking, detection, and apprehension. Their success record is undisputed, particularly in anti-poaching operations where speed and precision are critical.

Only a small number of these K9 teams are trained to operate with helicopters. Achieving this capability requires an exceptional bond between handler and dog, advanced training, and a deep understanding of aviation safety and procedures.

ENTER K9 SARA

One of the organizations at the forefront of this specialized capability is the K9 Search and Rescue Association of

South Africa (K9 SARA), a non-profit, volunteer organization dedicated to finding missing persons in wilderness, urban, and disaster environments.

Founded in 1998, K9 SARA consists entirely of civilian volunteers and their dogs. These are not government-owned animals, but highly trained companions whose handlers fund their own equipment, transport, and training. Units operate nationally with active teams in Gauteng, the Western Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal.

When people go missing in the mountains or buildings collapse, it is often K9 SARA dogs that help turn potential tragedies into successful rescues.



“GET TO THE CHOPPER”

Speed saves lives—and helicopters provide it.

Many K9 SARA missions require rapid deployment into remote or inaccessible terrain. Helicopters allow teams to: bypass obstacles, reduce response times dramatically, and insert dogs precisely where they are needed.

Of course, helicopters are not a natural environment for dogs. The noise, vibration, confined space, and rotor wash can overwhelm even confident animals. That’s why helicopter operations require specialized training for both dog and handler.

Recent helicopter training sessions conducted by K9 SARA were as serious as they were impressive. While there’s something undeniably endearing about a dog in a flight-ready harness, that appearance pales to their critical, potentially life-saving work.



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HELICOPTER TRAINING

Helicopter familiarization for K9 teams is carefully structured and progressive, focusing on safety, confidence, and operational readiness:

- **Desensitization**
Dogs are gradually introduced to the noise, vibration and movement of helicopters, ensuring the aircraft becomes a familiar working environment rather than a source of stress.
- **Aircraft Familiarization**
Handlers and dogs learn to safely operate around the helicopter, reducing the risk of startle responses during deployments.
- **Entry and Exit Procedures**
Dogs are trained to board and disembark safely, including exposure to winch or hoist scenarios where aerial insertion may be required.
- **Mission Focus**
Even in an unfamiliar airborne environment, dogs must remain task-focused—tracking scent, responding to handler commands and working alongside aircrew.
- **Positive Association**
Training reinforces the helicopter as just another tool of the trade, building trust and confidence rather than fear.

THE RIGHT SNIFF

K9 SARA trains both air-scenting dogs capable of detecting human scent carried on the wind across large areas, and scent-specific trailing dogs that follow individual tracks in urban and wilderness environments.

“These dogs can cover far greater distances than human searchers and locate people hidden in places we might never think to look,” the organization states. “They are trained to international standards, and handlers must be highly skilled in reading their dogs to ensure nothing is missed.”

Training takes approximately two years with teams evaluated every two years to maintain operational readiness. Standards are aligned with those of the American Rescue Dog Association (ARDA), U.S. agency FEMA, and the International Rescue Dog Organization (IRO), of which K9 SARA became a member in 2012.

ON CALL

K9 SARA teams are available 24/7, nationally, and can deploy internationally under the right circumstances. They operate at no cost, responding on instruction from park rangers, Metro EMS, Disaster Management, Wilderness SAR units and the Aeronautical Rescue Coordination Center (ARCC).

It's a remarkable commitment from volunteers, handlers, and dogs alike.





K9 CRITERIA

Prospective K9 candidates must meet strict requirements: under one year old at entry, physically fit, medium-sized, toy-driven, non-aggressive, and without prior protection or attack training. Successful applicants begin a year-long probation before qualifying as operational teams.

For those who make the cut, the reward is not fame or fortune, but the chance to save lives.

Deep in South Africa's Kruger National Park, the fight against poaching and illegal incursions is waged by rangers, aircraft, and the canine class of the animal kingdom. SANParks currently deploy 52 highly trained working dogs across the park, each paired with a dedicated handler and integrated into specialized operational roles, many of them airborne. Sam Madalane, the K9 unit manager, provides insights on how the dogs and handlers are trained.

Within the Special Operations Unit, apprehension dogs are trained across multiple disciplines. These include aerial deployment, night operations, detection work, and long-range tracking— all are capabilities that dramatically extend the reach

and effectiveness of helicopter-supported missions. Ranger dogs, by contrast, focus primarily on ground tracking, following human scent over vast and often hostile terrain.

At entry and exit points, gate dogs play a critical detection role. These dogs are trained to identify explosives, firearms, ammunition, and illegal wildlife products, providing an essential layer of security before threats ever reach the bush.

In high-risk areas, human-scent incursion detection dogs are deployed to hotspot zones, where they are able to detect and follow fresh human scent, which is often the first indication of an illegal crossing or poaching attempt.

TEMPERAMENT BEFORE TRAINING

Before any dog ever approaches a helicopter, careful assessment is essential. Trainers evaluate each dog's temperament and identify a favorite toy or reward item. This becomes the cornerstone of motivation. For the dog, the work must remain a game—positive, engaging, and rewarding. A relaxed, confident dog performs better, especially in the high-noise, high-stimulus aviation environment.





INTRODUCING THE HELI

Helicopter familiarization is conducted methodically, with the emphasis on calm exposure rather than force.

Training begins with loading the dog into the helicopter, with only the pilot on board. Once settled, the rest of the team is introduced. Everyone secures themselves while handlers ensure both dogs and humans are wearing appropriate hearing protection. Normal conversation is encouraged to reduce tension and reinforce calm behavior.

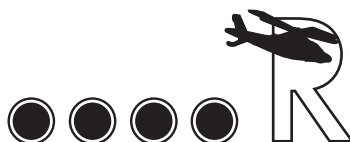
The engine is then started. At idle, the dog's reactions are closely observed while the atmosphere remains relaxed. As power is increased to heavy idle, handlers continuously reward the dog with treats while team members gently touch and interact with

it, making the aircraft feel like just another working environment.

Only after the dog is fully settled does the helicopter lift off. Behavior is monitored throughout the flight and again on landing. There is no rush to exit; observation continues until the dog remains calm and focused. Team members disembark last, reinforcing the idea that nothing about the helicopter experience is unusual or threatening.

As trainers describe it, the goal is simple: draw the picture you want the dog to see.

When done correctly, the result is an airborne K9 — a dog that is comfortably capable under spinning rotors in one of Africa's most challenging operational environments. These teams prove one thing beyond doubt: aviation K9s increase capability.



SWEDISH AT 20



The HKP15 was originally acquired to serve as a cost-effective helicopter training platform but has since evolved into a true workhorse.

HKP15 YEARS

When the Swedish armed forces introduced the HKP15 in the mid-2000s, the aircraft was never intended to become one of the most versatile assets in their rotary-wing fleet. Originally acquired to serve as a cost-effective training platform, the HKP15

has since evolved into a true workhorse. Commander of the 22nd Helicopter Squadron, Major Anderas Pantesjö, informs our photojournalist correspondent, Sven van Roij, on the diversity of assignments of his squadron over the years.

Report and Photos by Sven van Roij
photography@svenvanroij.nl

The Swedish armed forces developed its own military naming system long before joining NATO. Sweden still uses 'HKP' (derived from the Swedish word 'helikopter') as its designation for helicopters. The HKP15, an AgustaWestland AW109 light utility helicopter, is closely tied to Sweden's helicopter reforms in the early 2000s. Until then, the Swedish military operated separate helicopter units for their army aviation, search and rescue ops, maritime aviation, and air force. Major Pantesjö said, "During the times of budget cuts, the Swedish ministry of defense saw economic reasons to put those units together and

create one Helicopter Wing." Pantesjö, who has been flying with Sweden's Air Force for over 20 years, continues, "The establishment of the Helicopter Wing also ensured helicopter operations became more standardized. At the time, we operated the HKP4, HKP9B, HKP10 and HKP11 (respectively the: SeaKnight, Bo105CBS, Super Puma, and AB 412) and the accident rate was higher. Creating a more uniform way of operating helicopters was a positive contribution to our flight safety. Since then, all military flying personnel and material in Sweden became part of the *Flygvapnet*, the Swedish Air Force."

Photo: Swedish MoD/Per Neckman-Åhlin





Two HKP15Bs seen during a night sortie at the Villingsberg shooting range.

TWENTY AIRFRAMES, TWO ROLES

A total of 12 land-based HKP15As and eight maritime HKP15Bs were ordered in June 2001. After several delays, the aircraft were delivered from February 2006 onwards. Pantesjö said, "The aircraft would initially serve as a training aircraft for our HKP14 (NHIndustries NH90) fleet, since the type was cheaper to operate. As delays and limitations affected the HKP14 program, the HKP15 filled our operational gaps. When the HKP15 arrived, we immediately saw its operational usages for our special forces and maritime operations."

The pilots of the 22nd Helicopter Squadron use both the splinter-camouflaged HKP15A and the grey maritime HKP15B, as there are no major technical differences between the two variants. Pantesjö said, "The navy prefers to operate the HKP15B since they can be used on ships, but they can also operate the green helicopters if not being stationed aboard."

AIR FORCE HELICOPTER IN A RAINCOAT

The minor differences are primarily related to additional capabilities for naval operations, such as mooring points for shipboard use and sensor systems including electro-optical forward-looking infrared (FLIR) equipment. The maritime helicopters are also equipped with air conditioning.

The unit assigned with maritime duties is 31 Stingray. Since the establishment of the Helicopter Wing, the HKP15B fleet has been part of the Swedish Air Force, pilots of the 31st are thus Air Force personnel. Pantesjö said, "The naval operations squadron is based in Ronneby and carries out a broad range of missions. The HKP15B is not a purpose-built anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft due to the absence of a sonar. The unit thus has limited capability in ASW-related operations. There is the possibility to install a sonobuoy rack in the back. With its FLIR, and a size that suits landing on the relatively small Swedish naval vessels, the platform is perfect for sea traffic control and other naval warfare roles."

With these capabilities, Sweden deployed a HKP15B in support of "Operation Atalanta" in Somalia several times. More recently, the type was deployed aboard the HSwMS *Carlskrona* patrol vessel for maritime surveillance in the Baltic Sea as part of the "Baltic Sentry" operation.

A HKP15A seen during a night sortie at Villingsberg shooting range.



INITIAL FLIGHT TRAINING

Today, all Swedish military helicopter pilots begin their careers at the German International Helicopter Training Center in Bückeburg, regardless of their eventual specialization. After their training in Bückeburg, the trainees return to Sweden and continue their program at the *Flygvapnet*. At the 3rd Helicopter Squadron of the *Flygskolan* (Flight School) at *Luftstridsskolan* (LSS), the trainees will fly the HKP15 for the first time. Since the flight school does not operate its own helicopters, it relies on the helicopter wing's fleet.

Flight school is followed by a year of Combat Readiness Training (CRT) with Pantesjö's 22nd helicopter squadron or the 31st naval-oriented squadron. He said, "The 22nd is placed under the 2nd Helicopter Unit and part of the Helicopter Wing. During their CRT, my trainees refine their skills in realistic scenarios. After completing CRT, pilots may remain within the light helicopter unit or transition to the HKP14F/N (NH-90) or HKP16A (UH-60M), Swedish medium-lift platforms."

FROM TRANSPORT TO FIRE SUPPORT

In addition to their primary CRT mission, Pantesjö's unit carries out a wide range of other tasks, including personnel transport, reconnaissance, and general utility operations. In recent years, a new capability has been introduced: aerial sharpshooting and sniper support roles.

This represents a significant development in how the HKP15 is used at the unit. "These operations are something that we have never done at our squadron before. Since we fall under the command of the army in wartime, we have started taking responsibility to maintain these tasks on the light helicopter system in Sweden," Pantesjö said. For this purpose, the HKP15 can be equipped with weapon systems such as the Ksp 58 (a Swedish variant of the Belgian FN MAG) and the Ak 4D (a license-built version of the Heckler & Koch G3 battle rifle).

For special operations, the helicopter is capable of fast-roping and rappelling using both internal and external attachment points. However, roping operations are not currently being carried out on the type. Pantesjö explained, "This is partly due to the fact that our special forces unit is no longer using this light helicopter. However, we still retain the equipment and several qualified instructors."



A total of eight maritime HKP15Bs were delivered from February 2006 onwards.

DUAL RATINGS

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BRIDGING THE TALENT GAP

Staffing has proven challenging for armed forces and operators all around the world. Pantessjö said, "It's a problem overall in Sweden, and I guess in other countries as well. We simply do not have enough people. At the moment, I am training just four new pilots but a wave of retirements is approaching fast. This does mean more people will leave service than enter the unit. I think we will notice this problem in 2028. It has to do with the different pension ages in Sweden. For pilots, normally they can go at the age of 55 after a certain year of service. In two years from now, a lot of people can go. I am extremely happy a couple of guys have decided to prolong their service and are choosing to stay beyond their official retirement age."

Born in 1983, the major finds himself in an unusual position: being among the oldest active pilots in his unit, yet still part of what should be his mid-career. He said, "That's not desirable, there should be people who are two, three, or five years older than me in that middle layer to transfer their knowledge to the younger generation."

AVAILABILITY AND MAINTENANCE

Since 2012, Saab has had an exclusive agreement with the *Försvarets Materielverk*, Sweden's defense material administration, to ensure the operational availability of the HKP15 fleet.

A significant portion of scheduled missions and training sorties are successfully completed, suggesting the fleet is performing well and the unit maintains a respectable level of operational output. "Since we have 20 aircraft, quite a few of them are available every day. If you look at how many of the planned missions we can actually fly, it's quite a lot," Pantessjö noted.

However, the reality on the flightline tells a different story. Pantessjö said, "Aircraft that are technically part of the available fleet may not always be immediately ready. Maintenance cycles, inspections, and logistical considerations mean some helicopters are kept in a planned rotation or held back until another becomes ready. This way, availability is more of a managed process than a simple number. For example, we are now in a training week at the Villingsberg shooting range with four of our aircraft. All four are working, but it is not always like that."





A significant portion of scheduled missions and training sorties are successfully completed, suggesting the fleet is performing well and the unit maintains a respectable level of operational output.



A gunner is using is Ak 4D (a license-built version of the Heckler & Koch G3 battle rifle) during a live firing exercise at the Villingsberg shooting range.



The pilots of the 22nd Helicopter Squadron use both the splinter-camouflaged HKP15A and the grey maritime HKP15B, as there are no major technical differences between the two variants.

FUTURE OF FLEET

Over the years, the fleet has maintained a strong safety record. Pantesjö said, “Fortunately, we did not have any fatal incidents with the aircraft. We have had hard landings that took months to fix, but these have been resolved without long-term impact.”

However, after two decades of service, the HKP15 fleet faces increasing maintenance challenges. The squadron commander said, “While the aircraft have proven reliable overall, aging systems and limited availability of spare parts are beginning to affect operational readiness. Given the platform’s age and planned retirement timeline, major upgrades are not considered cost-effective. In addition,

it is becoming increasingly difficult and expensive to obtain replacement parts. The future of the platform is closely tied to the upcoming defense budget decisions. We are hoping that we will get enough funding so that we can order new light helicopters.

“When the funding will be clear, I would prefer to acquire the same type that the International Helicopter Training Center at Bückeburg has started to operate. This will reduce the education time in Sweden by three to four months.” The commander does not wish to comment further on the specific type, but it is widely understood to be the Airbus H145M. A decision will have to be made soon, since the HKP15 should leave service around 2030.





After the Silence

**LEADERSHIP, HUMAN FACTORS,
AND FAMILY CARE AFTER ACCIDENTS**

By David McColl



“Preparedness is not about predicting tragedy. It is about respecting the moment when it arrives.”

The phone rang while I was driving my children home from school. Like many people in aviation leadership roles, I answered instinctively. The phone is always on. Calls can mean weather delays, maintenance concerns, crew changes, operational updates, or shifting schedules. In utility helicopter operations, problems rarely wait for convenient moments.

This call was different.

The voice on the other end belonged to another manager. There was no transition into the conversation, no easing into difficult news. I was given the aircraft tail number and told plainly that the pilot and linemen were dead.

The call was on speaker through the vehicle’s Bluetooth system. My children heard it.

I ended the call immediately.

I pulled the vehicle safely off the roadway, disconnected my phone from the Bluetooth system, stepped outside the car, and then returned the call privately. Only then did reality begin to settle in. This was no longer fvc issue

or another safety discussion. Friends, coworkers, and members of our aviation family were gone.

Moments like that divide life into a before and after. This article is not about a particular accident, operator, or organization. It is about what happens after an accident — after the rotors stop turning, after the emergency response stabilizes, after the investigators arrive, and after the first shock begins to wear off.

The aviation industry spends enormous effort discussing accident prevention, operational risk management, safety management systems (SMS), maintenance standards, and regulatory compliance. Those conversations are essential. Yet, there is another side of aviation safety that receives far less attention: the human response after tragedy.

Behind every aircraft tail number are people — families, children, parents, coworkers, and friends. The burden placed upon those responsible for responding in the immediate aftermath can be immense.



THE FIRST PRIORITY: STABILIZE THE SITUATION

In the hours following a serious accident, pressure arrives quickly. Executives want information. Customers want answers. Regulators begin asking questions. Rumors spread internally and externally. In today's world, social media often moves faster than official communication.

One of the most important leadership skills during this phase is resisting the urge to speculate.

The instinct to immediately explain what happened is understandable, but premature conclusions rarely help. Effective leaders understand that the first responsibility is not public explanation — it is stabilization.

That means slowing the situation down. Operational stand-downs, when appropriate, are not admissions of fault. They are tools to regain situational awareness, reduce secondary risk, and allow personnel time to process what has occurred. They also create space for organizations to transition from reaction into structured response.

Respect for the investigative process is equally important. Organizations such as the National Transportation Safety Board exist to improve aviation safety through independent investigation. The role of leadership during this stage is not to shape conclusions but to support the integrity of the process. When appropriate, operators should seek party status so they can contribute technical expertise while respecting investigative boundaries.

Sometimes silence is mistaken for avoidance. In reality, disciplined silence is often professionalism.

EXPERIENCE DOES NOT REMOVE THE WEIGHT

One of the misconceptions in aviation is that experience somehow makes these moments easier. It does not.

Aviation professionals may spend decades operating in high-risk environments, managing emergencies, making time-critical decisions, and accepting enormous responsibility. That experience builds resilience and judgment, but it does not eliminate emotional impact.

In many ways, it deepens it.

Experienced leaders understand exactly what has been lost. They understand the operational realities, the likely suffering of families, the effect on crews, and the long shadow an accident leaves over an organization.

For people in safety leadership positions, the burden can become particularly complicated. You are expected to remain calm and functional while simultaneously managing grief, operational continuity, regulatory coordination, media attention, employee wellbeing, and family support.

There is often little time to process events personally.

Professionalism in aviation has sometimes been confused with emotional detachment, but true professionalism is not the absence of emotion. Rather, it is recognizing when human factors such as grief, fatigue, stress, and shock are influencing decision-making and ensuring systems exist to mitigate those effects.

Human beings do not stop being human because they wear flight suits, carry management titles, or hold safety responsibilities.

THE HARDEST CALL

One of the first responsibilities assigned to me after the accident was contacting the next of kin. Nothing prepares you for that responsibility. There is no perfect script. No ideal wording. No training scenario that fully captures the reality of changing someone's life forever with a phone call.

In those moments, titles disappear. You are no longer simply a chief pilot, manager, director of safety, or company representative. You are a person, a human being, delivering devastating news to a family whose world is about to stop.

Emergency Response Plans often focus heavily on operational coordination, regulatory notifications, media response, and site management. Those elements are important, but organizations sometimes underestimate the emotional and psychological complexity surrounding family notification: How should organizations determine who makes the call? What information should be confirmed first? Should notifications ever occur by phone? Who supports the notifier afterward? What happens when families live internationally? How are language barriers addressed? How are children, parents, or siblings included?

These are not administrative details. They are leadership responsibilities.



CARING FOR MORE THAN THE LEGAL NEXT OF KIN

In the aftermath of one accident response, one of the first support calls I made was to Carolyn Coarsey. Her role is one most people outside aviation never see, yet it becomes critically important during moments of crisis: caring for families after an aviation accident.

Carolyn is the founder and executive director of the Family Assistance Education & Research Foundation (FAERF), a nonprofit organization focused on supporting families and organizations during and after traumatic loss events. Through FAERF, she works to promote what she describes as “emotional safety,” an area of aviation response that historically received far less attention than operational and technical safety.

It is work she performs exceptionally well, not only because of professional expertise, but because of personal experience. Years ago, Carolyn lost her own fiancé in an aircraft accident. That experience shaped the empathy, compassion, and understanding she now brings to families facing unimaginable loss.

One of the most important lessons I learned from observing her work: grief does not follow organizational charts or legal definitions.

Most companies understandably focus on the legal next of kin. That process is necessary, but tragedy rarely affects only one individual listed on paperwork.

What about: the parents? brothers and sisters? close family friends? extended

family standing quietly in the background trying to understand what happened?

Carolyn works to include the wider family unit, ensuring that all significant family members receive support, information, and guidance throughout the process. That can include assistance with funeral arrangements, coordination surrounding the recovery and return of remains, travel logistics, communication support, and helping families navigate overwhelming practical decisions during periods of intense grief.

Current research surrounding trauma and grief increasingly suggests that gratitude and compassionate support can significantly shape long-term healing. As Carolyn explained to me, helping families feel supported during moments of complete helplessness can influence how they carry and process grief for years afterward. In many ways, that is the purpose of emotional safety.

Following the 1996 ValuJet Flight 592 crash and the later crash of TWA Flight 800, the United States enacted the Aviation Disaster Family Assistance Act. For the first time, emotional support and family care became formal components of aviation accident response. The National Transportation Safety Board was designated to serve as the liaison between families and operators, fundamentally changing how the industry approached post-accident care.

Carolyn played a direct role in that evolution. Drawing from her own doctoral

research into what families actually wanted from airlines following aviation tragedies, she contributed to the development of family assistance protocols during a period when the aviation industry was beginning to better understand emotional intelligence, trauma response, and the human side of crisis management.

Traditionally, aviation focused primarily on physical safety, operational control, and technical investigation. Those remain essential, but over time, the industry began recognizing that communication, dignity, compassion, and emotional support are also critical parts of safety culture. Carolyn says, “People remember who showed up. They remember who cared. And they remember who helped carry the burden when everything else felt impossible.”

Those words capture something the aviation industry sometimes forgets in the aftermath of tragedy: technical investigations are essential, but compassion matters too.

People remember those moments for the rest of their lives. They remember whether they were treated with dignity. They remember who communicated honestly.

Finally, they remember whether they felt abandoned or supported during the worst days imaginable.



HUMAN FACTORS CONTINUE AFTER THE ACCIDENT

Within aviation, human factors are often discussed as contributors to accidents. Fatigue, stress, distraction, workload, communication breakdowns, and decision-making are analyzed extensively during investigations.

What receives far less attention are the human factors that emerge after the accident. During one accident response I participated in, it became obvious by midday that many people involved, including myself, had not slept for more than 24 hours. Personnel were emotionally overwhelmed, physically exhausted, dehydrated, and still expected to drive between hotels, accident sites, command posts, and meetings.

In hindsight, it highlighted how easily secondary risks can emerge during prolonged response operations.

Organizations may benefit from proactively arranging transportation, lodging, food, and hydration. These are not comfort measures; they are sound risk-management practices.

In some cases, arranging professional transportation for personnel may be safer than allowing exhausted employees to drive themselves after prolonged accident response operations.

These considerations apply equally to office-based personnel. Administrators, dispatchers, maintenance coordinators, safety staff, and executives are all vulnerable to decision fatigue, emotional overload, and cognitive degradation during extended response periods. Human factors do not stop when the aircraft stops flying.

DOCUMENTATION WITHOUT BLAME

Accidents create an understandable desire for accountability, but accountability and blame are not the same thing.

The most effective post-accident reviews focus on systems, organizational learning, communication pathways, preparedness, and decision-making structures rather than searching for simplistic individual fault.

Strong organizations ask difficult, but constructive questions:

- Were roles clearly defined?
- Were Emergency Response Plans realistic and functional?
- Were personnel adequately supported?
- Did communication systems work?
- Were assumptions allowed to replace procedures?
- Did organizational pressures influence decision-making?
- Were human factors adequately considered?

Blame rarely improves systems. Structure does! Organizations that preserve dignity while still pursuing honest analysis create stronger long-term safety cultures than those driven by fear or scapegoating.

WHAT LEADERSHIP LOOKS LIKE AFTERWARD

Leadership after an accident is rarely dramatic. Most of the time, it is quiet.

It is the willingness to pause operations when necessary. It is accepting difficult responsibilities rather than delegating them downward. It is showing up for families, crews, and employees consistently instead of only during public moments. It is communicating calmly and honestly when uncertainty still exists. It is recognizing when people need relief before they ask for it. Sometimes, it is simply being present in silence.

People inside organizations remember how leaders behave after tragedy. Those memories often shape trust, morale, and organizational culture for years afterward. Poorly managed post-accident responses can compound trauma, damage trust, and create additional harm long after the investigation concludes.

Thoughtful, compassionate, disciplined leadership cannot remove grief, but it can prevent chaos from making tragedy worse.

PREPARATION IS PART OF PROFESSIONALISM

Every aviation professional hopes they never experience a fatal accident response, but hope is not preparation.

Emergency response planning should not exist simply to satisfy regulatory requirements or complete audit checklists. It should exist because one day real people may depend upon it during the worst moments of their lives.

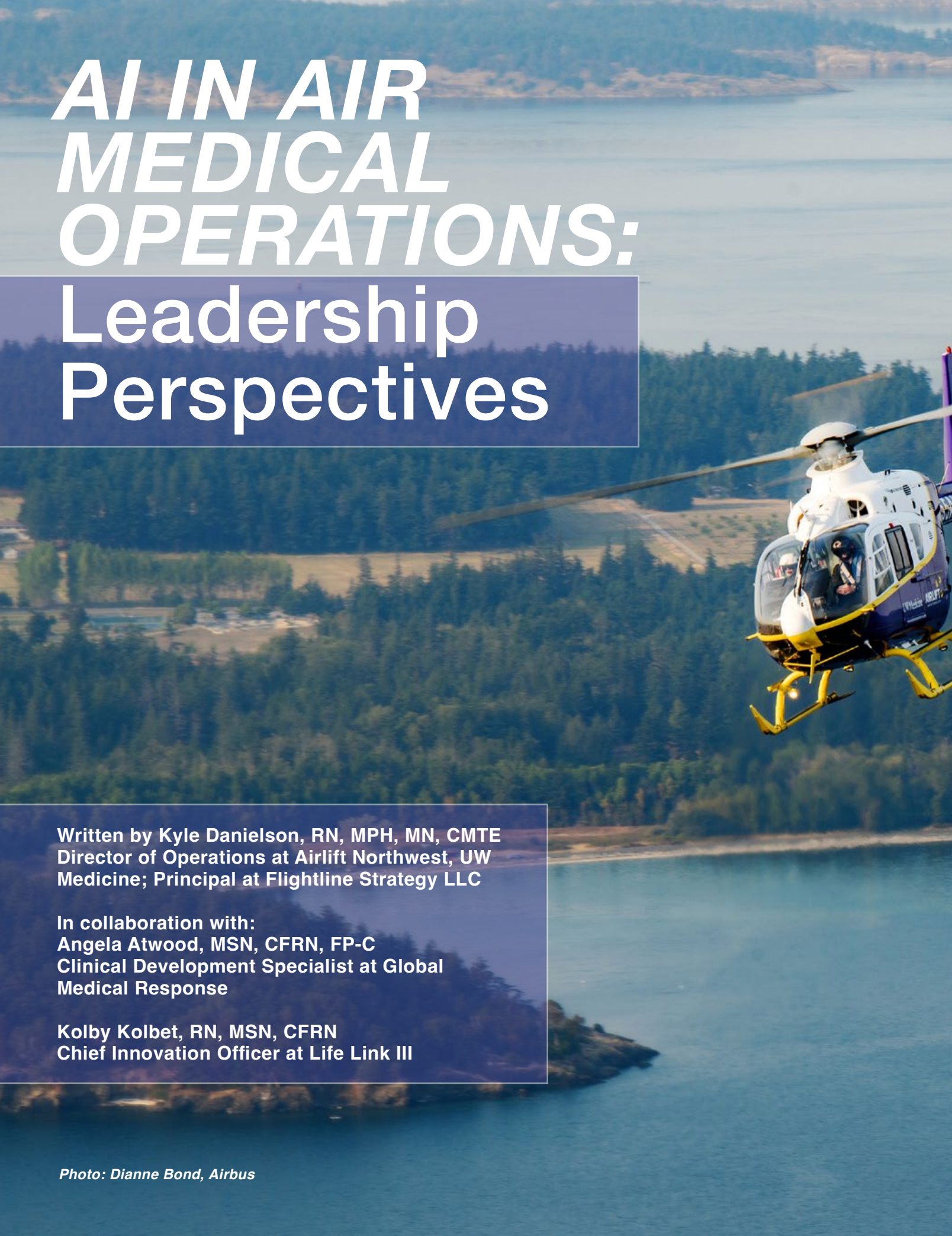
Organizations such as the Flight Safety Foundation and the International Civil Aviation Organization continue publishing guidance on emergency response planning, organizational resilience, and human factors because these realities are not theoretical. Preparedness is not pessimism; it is professionalism. Ultimately, caring for people after an accident is just as much a part of aviation safety as preventing the accident itself.

Long after investigations close and reports are archived, families still live with the loss.

They remember who stood beside them after the silence arrived.



AI IN AIR MEDICAL OPERATIONS: Leadership Perspectives

A white and yellow helicopter is shown in flight, moving from the right side of the frame towards the left. The helicopter has "AIRLIFT" written on its side. The background consists of a dense green forest, a body of water, and distant hills under a clear sky.

Written by Kyle Danielson, RN, MPH, MN, CMTE
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Chief Innovation Officer at Life Link III

Across several industry meetings this past year, I've been struck by how few air medical executives have a clear roadmap for artificial intelligence in their organizations, but this isn't surprising given the rapid pace of AI development.

Leaders' questions consistently focus on where to begin and how to balance compliance and costs with the promise of improved safety, clinical quality, and operations. The challenge is that AI features are appearing in the operations, clinical, and quality applications we already use, faster than our organizations can absorb them. There's also a growing body of research using AI for clinical decision support, accident analysis, pilot and clinical training performance, and dispatch optimization, among other areas.

Kolby Kolbet, chief innovation officer at Life Link III, and Angela Atwood, clinical development specialist at GMR, are two colleagues working through these questions in their own programs. Vendors are racing to integrate AI features, and as Kolbet has put it, "everyone's trying to do something just to be first." While the features may arrive quickly, the downstream costs surface later in implementations that weren't well built or clearly mapped across the organization.

What follows are five leadership approaches with a set of AI readiness questions at the end. These approaches are grounded in air medical operations but have clear parallels to firefighting, offshore, and public safety operations.

Photo: Dianne Bond, Airbus



BMF Patient Ambulance
Photo: Lyn Burks



AI LITERACY

AI literacy is the work most programs are doing right now, and it is the right starting point. As Atwood has explained, “the issue is a lot of people don’t know what it’s capable of or where the capabilities currently exist.” AI is much broader than the chat assistants most people imagine. It includes a range of methods, such as large language models, computer vision, and predictive analytics, with use cases spanning from ambient AI in clinical documentation to dispatch decision support and demand forecasting.

Once teams see the full scope of the field, their thinking shifts. Atwood has seen this change firsthand: “People went from really not knowing anything besides ‘ChatGPT helps me with my email’ to exploring all kinds of use cases.” She’s been successful in treating AI literacy as another educational opportunity for staff at all levels.

Before choosing any tools, the team needs a shared understanding of what AI is and isn’t, and the leadership team must agree on the direction. Kolbet said, “The challenge right now is helping everybody see that vision.”

With literacy established and leadership aligned, the next step is to focus on a problem AI is well-equipped to solve.

LEAD WITH THE PROBLEM

Before choosing any AI tool, it’s important to clarify the problem we want to solve. Whether it’s improving dispatch reliability, monitoring clinical guideline adherence, or identifying new hotspots in patient demand, the best use cases come from clearly defined problems. As Atwood said, “It’s always helpful to define a problem to solve that most people can rally around.” A shared problem creates momentum.

Instead of beginning with the technology and asking where the team fits, start with the work the team already does and determine where AI fits within it.



BMF Crew Patient
Photo: Lyn Burks



Photo: Dianne Bond, Airbus



BMF Patient Load
Photo: Lyn Burks

PROVIDE APPROVED TOOLS AND ACCEPTABLE USE

There's a concept called shadow AI that occurs when programs heavily restrict AI use, prompting staff to use unauthorized tools outside their official environment, often on personal devices. Concerns about compliance and risk increase when this happens. Kolbet observes, "If we block everything, they're going to find a way to use it." Conversely, as Atwood has seen, "If you put a tool out there that people know they can use safely, and it's supported, it's going to have everybody look for ways to solve problems differently."

Start by creating an acceptable-use policy and providing some vetted tools or platforms. As leaders, we have the opportunity to make the safe choice the easy choice.

MAP END-TO-END IMPACT

Kolbet said, "We are not trying to solve yesterday's problems with AI. We are creating new solutions with tools that did not exist before." This forward-looking perspective involves system requirements that most programs underestimate. AI rarely improves a process in isolation.

Take predictive analytics on patient demand, for example. An AI model can identify patterns in flight volume by hour, day, and season, which is useful for adjusting shift times or expanding coverage. While the operational plan seems logical on paper, in practice it relies on hiring, training, and onboarding new pilots, clinicians, and dispatchers, processes that can take months. Therefore, AI detects patterns faster than the operations team can respond. This also highlights why the teams using the tool need to be involved in its development.

ANTICIPATE SECOND-ORDER EFFECTS

While AI can improve efficiency in our daily work, the supporting data infrastructure usually needs to scale up as well, and the costs increase accordingly. So, even if an automation project costing \$180,000 is considered high-value for the organization, you might discover you need a vendor for data integration, leading to thousands of dollars in monthly support fees. "So, all of a sudden, you have data fees that you never had before," Kolbet notes.

In another example, Kolbet's team at Life Link III has been using ambient AI in the clinical setting to streamline documentation. The technology works for documentation, but the audio capture overlaps with what the FOQA system considers flight-quality data, raising a governance issue that spans both clinical and operational areas. Leaders should anticipate these types of second-order effects.



“We are not trying to solve yesterday's problems with AI. We are creating new solutions with tools that did not exist before.”

- Kolby Kolbet

ASSESS AI READINESS

Air medical leaders are guiding the direction and strategy of our programs. AI provides new inputs that, when used effectively, support the existing strategy. It also broadens what's achievable for our patients and programs. These six questions help assess AI readiness and set teams up for success:

1

How do your leaders define the role of AI in the organization?

2

What does your team understand about AI, and where are the knowledge gaps?

3

What problem is your AI work aimed at solving?

4

What approved tools and guidelines for acceptable use does your team follow?

5

What are the staffing, cost, and governance implications of your top AI use case?

6

How are your frontline providers involved in developing AI tools?

Photo: Dianne Bond, Airbus



Kyle Danielson
Photo: Katheryn Moran

Kyle Danielson is the director of operations at Airlift Northwest, UW Medicine and principal at Flightline Strategy LLC



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Trends in Airborne Public Safety

By James Careless

The days of helicopter-only police units are coming to a close as drones play an increasingly important role in aerial law enforcement. It's not only the addition of drones that is transforming this sector. "Air units are becoming far more data-driven and integrated," said Mike Bucari, Leonardo Helicopters' head of marketing for the Americas. He said, "Aircraft are no longer standalone assets—they're an integral part in a much broader network that includes ground units, drones, real-time operating centers, and AI-assisted analytics."

As a result of this trend, law enforcement helicopters "must incorporate capabilities such as live video downlink, LTE/5G connectivity or Starlink-type solutions, and cloud-based evidence systems, which are becoming standard expectations," Bucari told *Rotor Pro*. "There's

also a major shift toward a manned-unmanned teaming model. Drones are handling more routine, lower-risk missions—perimeter searches, accident reconstruction, and overwatch—freeing helicopters to focus on high-speed pursuits, tactical insertions, and extended overwatch."

"As more public safety agencies across the U.S. adopt and expand their drone programs, departments can work more effectively and efficiently to save lives and keep their officers safe," noted Wayne Baker, director of stakeholder engagement with the drone manufacturer DJI. "For example, drones enable officers to plan safer approaches for themselves and suspects in high-risk situations."

Following are a few of the trends currently driving the evolution of airborne law enforcement.





SPLITTING THE WORKLOAD

When it comes to missions, the integration of drones into aerial law enforcement is leading to a division of labor between the two. “Typically, our helicopters are deployed to car theft incidents and surveillance of expansive environments where criminal activity or the missing person can move across a county or city during the operation,” said David Smith, president and CEO of Robinson Helicopter Company. “Drones are often used in cases where there are barricaded individuals, breaking-and-entering cases, and other crimes that are less likely to cover a large area.”

Roberto Sifuentes, sales manager of Airborne Solutions at Hensoldt—a major German multinational corporation specializing in defense and security electronics—noted, “There is a certain overlap in the distribution of tasks, but generally you can say helicopters are preferred in high-impact missions where flexibility and man-in-the-loop decisions are needed. Drones are typically operated in missions requiring persistence and stealthiness.”

According to Leonardo’s Bucari, the workload split between helicopters and drones is dictated by factors such as risk, cost, endurance, and mission complexity. As a result, municipalities

are building a complementary model in which both drones and rotorcraft are part of a comprehensive law enforcement solution, rather than choosing one over the other.

“Helicopters remain the go-to for high-speed, dynamic, and high-risk missions,” said Bucari. “That includes vehicle pursuits where speed, range, and continuous tracking, matter—something drones still struggle with due to battery life and airspace limits. Helicopters are also critical for tactical operations: inserting or extracting SWAT teams, supporting K9 deployments over large areas, and providing overwatch during active incidents.”

At the same time, drones are being enhanced to carry heavier payloads while staying aloft longer. Add in ever-tougher drones with improved imaging capabilities, and these uncrewed platforms are “increasingly being used for every imaginable task,” Baker said. “Additionally, when helicopters are unable to respond due to weather or terrain, drones can be used. For example, during Hurricane Helene, the DJI FlyCart 30, which can carry up to 88 pounds, was used to deliver water and medicine to those trapped, as the roads were destroyed. In that mountainous terrain, it was not as easy to fly a helicopter to do this task.”



GROWING TEAMWORK

There was a time when the teaming of helicopters and drones on shared missions seemed to be the stuff of science fiction. That's no longer true. "Helicopter-drone teaming is already happening and becoming standard in bigger municipalities that have the money for both," said Bucari. "It's still evolving. Right now, it's best described as coordinated cooperation, not fully unified operations."

This state of coordinated cooperation is due to the current limitations of drones, which do not have the range or speed to work with helicopters as equal partners. “This is why, from a Leonardo Helicopters perspective, the larger metropolitan departments that have the funding for both helicopters and drones are working together in a semi-integrated model,” Bucari said. “The drone provides close-in, low-altitude detail to the team of both aviation and ground personnel. The helicopter maintains a wide-area overwatch, tracking movement, coordinating ground units, and managing the bigger picture.”

Sometimes this teaming can be used in unexpected ways to deliver substantial results. A case in point: “In Torrance, California, we saw an instance where a search for a suspect of a home invasion was tracked by both a helicopter and a drone,” said Smith. “The helicopter was used to distract the suspect, who was moving from one backyard to another. At the same time, the drone was able to track the suspect until they were in a position of vulnerability, at which point they peacefully surrendered.”

For more conventional teaming arrangements during disasters, Baker said, “We have seen drones used to quickly locate trapped individuals, allowing helicopters to rescue them with their hoist systems. This was done during the flooding events in Texas in July 2025, where drones located victims and guided helicopters or rescuers to save them.”



ADDING AI TO MISSIONS

Artificial intelligence (AI) seems to be everywhere these days, and for good reason. “AI can speed up air-based law enforcement and reduce costs,” said Sifuentes. “For example, AI does a tremendous job in face/car identification and classification.”

So, how far has AI made its way into airborne law enforcement? On this point, opinions differ.

“We have not seen a significant contribution at this point,” Smith said. “However, part of Robinson’s manned/unmanned system uses artificial intelligence to assist in target identification and the management of small drone swarms after they are deployed from a helicopter.”

Over at Leonardo Helicopters, the company is using AI to support practical, pilot-centric automation.” It’s not flashy autonomy, but systems that reduce workload, improve safety, and make single-pilot operations more manageable,” said Bucari. “For law enforcement crews, that translates directly

into better mission effectiveness and lower risk in high-tempo environments. The automation on the flight side complements this by freeing up cognitive bandwidth. The pilot isn’t fighting the aircraft while simultaneously trying to support a complex mission.”

Of course, pilots need to be properly trained to use automation to its full potential. “Such training is essential to avoid introducing new safety risks, such as over-reliance on automated functions, which can lead to distraction, underestimation, and other unintended behaviors during flight,” Bucari said.

AI is also finding its way into law enforcement drones. “Many new DJI drones feature intelligent capabilities that ensure the safety of the aircraft, pilot, and surrounding environment by providing enhanced situational awareness of terrain obstacles and warnings of approaching crewed aircraft, to name a few,” said Baker. “Likewise, our drones can be programmed for automated missions. However, they do not fly autonomously as a pilot is still required to manage the flight routes and can take control of the aircraft instantly to avoid incidents.”





Photo: Leonardo Helicopters



Photo: Leonardo Helicopters





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Photo: Robinson Helicopter Company

WHERE HUMANS FIT

When one talks about the future of airborne law enforcement—especially given the growing capabilities of AI and autonomous flight—the inevitable question comes up: Will there always be a place for human pilots in airborne law enforcement?

Smith says yes. “We believe there will always be a need for human skills in the management of the airborne law enforcement mission set. The public will demand it and it will ensure that drone algorithms are being guided and trained by knowledgeable human pilots and TFOs.”

Bucari agrees with Smith, at least for now. “As of today, the answer is yes,” he said. “While it is impossible to predict what technologies may emerge over the next five, 10, or 15 years that could fundamentally reshape aviation, the need for pilot involvement remains clear. The ability to make sound judgments under pressure, maintain real-time situational awareness, and adapt quickly to evolving conditions will continue to be essential

to successful operations, whether in airborne law enforcement, emergency medical services, or offshore transport.”

Sifuentes is also positive that people have a place in airborne law enforcement. “For the foreseeable future, human pilots will be employed in all missions that entail *ad hoc* decisions, volatile conditions and serious consequences,” he said.

So agrees Baker. “Yes, of course,” he said. “Drone pilots will always have a place in airborne law enforcement. DJI drones are designed to be piloted by a human operator as outlined by the FAA’s Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) regulations. While some of our drones can be programmed for automated missions with an FAA waiver, a human operator can always take control and fly the drone as the situation dictates.”

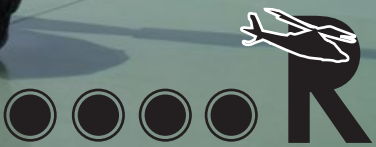
The bottom line: Although technology is changing the very nature of airborne law enforcement, these experts believe that humans will remain central to its operations.



Photo: DJI



Photo: DJI





FIDAE 2026: VERTICAL LIFT TAKES CENTER STAGE AT LATIN AMERICA'S AEROSPACE SHOWCASE

By María Jesús Ardura Fuentes | Helicopter Pilot and South America Correspondent, Rotor Pro Magazine

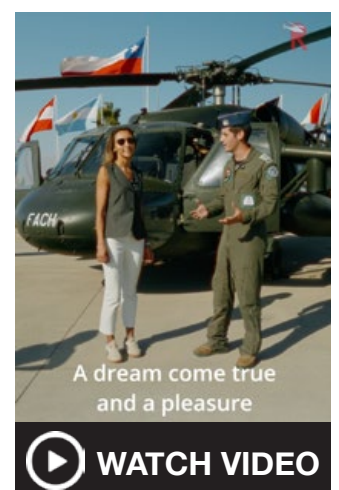




PHOTO: Opening ceremony with President Kast and military authorities

Santiago, Chile, was once again the epicenter of global aviation. The 24th edition of the International Air and Space Fair, FIDAE 2026, was officially inaugurated by President José Antonio Kast, accompanied by First Lady María Pia Adriasola, Minister of Defense Fernando Barros, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean air force, General Hugo Rodríguez González. The event ran from April 7–12 at Pudahuel Air Base, bringing together 35 exhibiting countries, more than 440 companies, 112 official delegations, and over 100 aircraft on static and dynamic display. With more than 150,000 visitors expected between industry professionals and the general public, the fair reaffirmed its standing as the region's premier aerospace platform.

With 46 years of history, FIDAE stands as Latin America's most prominent aerospace, defense and security exhibition. The first four days were reserved exclusively for industry: high-level meetings, commercial agreements, technical presentations, and a networking ecosystem few fairs in the world can match. Over the weekend, the gates opened to the general public with aerial shows that left spectators speechless. FIDAE's reach also extended beyond its own program: several international aerospace fairs used the event as a platform to promote their upcoming editions, a testament to the fair's standing as a hub for the global industry calendar. Among them was FAMEX — Feria Aeroespacial México, whose next full edition is scheduled for April 20–24, 2027, organized by the Mexican air force under the slogan "Connecting the Future."



WATCH VIDEO

PHOTO: Bell 429 at Bell stand



VERTICAL LIFT: THE UNDISPUTED STAR

For those working in the helicopter and advanced air mobility industry, this edition of FIDAE marked a turning point. For the first time in its history, the fair incorporated programming dedicated exclusively to vertical flight, with four panel sessions focused on the future of the sector. The participation of Vertical Aviation International (VAI) as a panelist confirmed what many had already sensed: vertical lift has moved from a secondary segment at major aerospace forums to a central conversation about the future of transportation and defense.

BELL AND ROBINSON: 90 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP, FRONT AND CENTER

One of the most significant presences in the vertical-lift segment was Bell Textron — arriving at FIDAE 2026 celebrating its 90th anniversary, a milestone the company made sure to honor. With nearly 2,000 military and commercial operators throughout Latin America, Bell showcased a complete lineup of vertical-lift solutions at its dedicated chalet, including the Bell 505, Bell 407GX, and Bell 429.

The most resonant announcement came on opening day: Bell Textron revealed that the Bell 505 recorded its highest number of orders in Latin America during 2025, cementing its position as the dominant

platform in the light single-engine turbine segment across the region. The Southern Cone — particularly Argentina and Chile — holds the highest density of Bell 505s in all of Latin America, which has driven the expansion of authorized maintenance centers and technical support networks in the area. Globally, the Bell 505 fleet now exceeds 600 aircraft operating in more than 66 countries across six continents, having accumulated over 300,000 total fleet flight hours.

Also drawing considerable attention at the Bell chalet was the **Bell 429** — a light twin-engine helicopter that has earned a strong reputation across Latin America for its versatility and mission readiness. With capacity for up to seven occupants,



PHOTO: Eagle Copters South America stand with Bell 505, Robinson R66 and R44



advanced BasixPro avionics optimized for IFR operations, a cargo hook rated at 1,361 kilograms, and two Pratt & Whitney Canada PW-207D engines delivering a cruise speed of up to 287 km/h and a range of 761 kilometers, the 429 is designed for the most demanding missions — from search and rescue in remote terrain to medical evacuations and corporate transport. The platform is already in active service with military and government operators across the region.

Robinson Helicopter Company was represented through its official dealer in Chile, Eagle Copters South America, which is also an authorized maintenance center for both brands. Eagle Copters showcased the Robinson R66, a single-engine helicopter with seating for five and an independent cargo compartment, alongside the Robinson R44, which is recognized for its low operating costs and accessible maintenance. The stand was rounded out by a flight simulator for both Bell and Robinson helicopters, delivering a complete proposition that spans acquisition, training, and technical support under one roof.



PHOTO: Airbus stand at FIDAE 2026 / Flexrotor demonstration

AIRBUS: CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY ON DISPLAY

The Airbus stand was one of the most visited at the fair. On the rotary side, the company displayed its H125, H135, and the modern H160. All these aircraft are actively operating across Latin America in missions ranging from offshore work to medical emergencies in high-altitude mountain terrain.

The standout moment was the live demonstration of the **Flexrotor**, Airbus

Defence & Space's VTOL unmanned aerial system. It takes off vertically and transitions mid-air to fixed-wing horizontal flight for long-endurance surveillance missions, with endurance exceeding 12 hours and a cruise speed of 140 km/h. Its applications range from maritime surveillance to wildfire prevention — a growing priority across the region. Also on display were the **Aliaca**, a new electric VTOL for tactical reconnaissance, and the **SIRTAP**, a high-performance UAS built for all-weather surveillance.

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For more information call (301) 631-2406 or visit www.publicsafetyaviation.org

PHOTO: Airbus at FIDAE 2026



PHOTO: Loft Dynamics simulator at FIDAE





LOFT DYNAMICS: THE FUTURE OF FLIGHT SIMULATION, IN CHILE FOR THE FIRST TIME

One of the most talked-about experiences was the arrival of the Loft Dynamics' virtual reality flight simulator — making its Chile debut. Loft Dynamics simulators combine VR technology with a full-scale cockpit

replica and a six-degrees-of-freedom motion platform, faithfully reproducing control loading forces and supporting training in emergency procedures across environments anywhere in the world.

Access was by invitation only and reserved for selected pilots. Those who flew it were unanimous: the platform allows users to

simulate in-flight emergencies, change weather conditions, and fly in environments as varied as the Swiss Alps or New York City airspace — all with a fidelity that blurs the line between simulation and actual flight. For the helicopter pilot community in Chile and Latin America, its arrival at FIDAE did not go unnoticed.

PHOTO: Halcones de Chile in flight / Black Hawk FACH





HELICOPTER INDUSTRY GATHERS IN SANTIAGO

Beyond the major manufacturers, the vertical lift services ecosystem showed exceptional strength. **Aerocardal**, **Platinum Helicopters**, **Explorair**, **Helisul-Ecocopter**, and the **Chilean Pilots' Association**, among others, demonstrated that the local industry has genuine depth. **Leonardo** and **MD Helicopters** rounded out the international manufacturer lineup.

AIR SHOWS: WHEN THE SANTIAGO SKY BECOMES A STAGE

Every day of FIDAE 2026 was marked by aerial exhibitions combining spectacle, precision, and frontier technology. The **U.S. Air Force F-35A Demo Team** flew every single day. The **FACH F-16 B50s** demonstrated Chile's military aviation readiness, while the **A-29B Super Tucano** and the **DHC-6 Twin Otter** of the Boinas Azules Parachute Squadron completed the close air support and special operations program.

On the rotary side, the **MH-60M Black Hawk** from FACH's Aviation Group No. 9 delivered one of the most impactful demonstrations of the event — a joint close air support and combat search and rescue operation alongside two A-29 Super Tucanos that showcased, before delegations from over 35 countries, the tactical coordination and training level of Chile's crews.

The **Halcones de Chile** aerobatic team drew one of the loudest ovations of the fair. Chilean athlete **Sebastián "Ardilla" Álvarez**, of the Red Bull Aerobatic Team and former FACH F-16 combat pilot, added a radically different dimension with his wingsuit jump — the most extreme discipline in modern parachuting, reaching speeds above 200 km/h in a suit with membranes between the arms and legs.





THE VOICE OF FIDAE: A CONVERSATION WITH GENERAL MIGUEL STANGE MUÑOZ

To understand the true scope of what happens every two years at Pudahuel Air Base, *Rotor Pro* sat down with Aviation General Miguel Stange Muñoz, president of FIDAE 2026.

Asked what it means for the Chilean air force to host the region's most important aerospace event, he said, "It represents a great responsibility and, at the same time, a source of institutional pride, because it reflects the pioneering role that Chile has played in the aeronautical and space development of the region." For Munoz,

FIDAE is far more than an exhibition. "The FACH doesn't just organize a fair — it leads a strategic platform that connects innovation, international cooperation, and technology transfer." He points to the participation of more than 450 exhibitors from 35 countries and over 110 delegations as evidence that FIDAE has become "the gateway to the aerospace, defense, and security industry market in Latin America."

On why Chile — and not another country in the region — managed to claim this position of leadership, the general offers this clear strategic reply, "Since its founding in 1980, FIDAE has evolved at the pace of global change, incorporating new areas such as space, cybersecurity,

technological innovation, and human talent development." What sets FIDAE apart, he adds, is having transcended the traditional exhibition format to become "a comprehensive platform for business, knowledge, and international cooperation."

The message Chile wants to project to the world is equally ambitious. "The future of aerospace development is built on collaboration, innovation, and the generation of knowledge," Munoz states that Chile presents itself not merely as a host but as a genuine actor: "a country capable of leading international gathering spaces where industry, academia, defense, and technology converge to address global challenges."



FIDAE 2026: A PLATFORM WITH PURPOSE

For the global vertical lift community, what Santiago demonstrated in April 2026 is no longer an aspiration — it is a concrete reality. In a region where geography imposes extreme distances, inaccessible mountains, and endless coastlines, helicopters, eVTOLs, and VTOL systems are not niche technologies. They are critical infrastructure.

FIDAE 2026 understood that. And with this edition, it made sure the world did too.



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By Matt Johnson

MISNOMER?

What could I possibly be talking about this month with a title like that? Well, simply put, a misnomer is a name or term that is, or has become, inaccurate or misleading, even though it continues to be widely used. Let me show my age with a couple of examples: When was the last time you “dialed” a phone number? Or, better yet, how many times a day do you “cc” (carbon copy) someone on an email? Back in the day, yes, we actually dialed on a rotary dial phone, and long before email, carbon copies were made with carbon paper.

Enough about my age! Something that is a misnomer, yet familiar with the younger generation, is the infamous FAA “written” exam. While you may get some scratch paper to write on for the test, there is nothing “written” about what is more formally known as the FAA Airman Knowledge Exam.

This test inherited this long-standing name because it used to be written on paper. The tests were on paper pre-1990s and administered at FAA offices or designated locations. By the mid-'90s, the FAA began introducing computer-based testing through authorized testing centers, and the rest is history.

Regardless of the format, the knowledge test is a requirement for certificates and ratings (with the exception of some add-ons). My focus this month is not on mundane history nor on semantics, but on the knowledge test itself and why you should take it seriously and strive for a good score.

I recently found myself at an aviation-related event in a mixed crowd of certificate holders with varying experience levels. There were student pilots, private applicants going for instrument and commercial,

and a few CFI applicants mixed in. Granted, these folks were of the fixed-wing cut and didn't know that I was an examiner, but at the end of the day, practical exams are—and should be—conducted the same, in accordance with the Airman Certification Standards, whether it is in a helicopter or an airplane. The conversations were rather entertaining when the discussion of the “FAA Written” came up. It was all over the place! One CFI was adamant that “you shouldn't strive for a perfect score as the examiner will think you are a know-it-all and it will make your oral portion really long.” (I just had to chuckle.) I couldn't disagree more! The young CFI's rationale was to aim for “85% or so.” (Nonsense!) While I am just one person, I know that many of my examiner colleagues agree with me on this: You should strive to do your absolute best on your knowledge exam!

Here is something that applicants should know. Once you have completed your knowledge exam, any missed questions must be reviewed by you and your recommending instructor. It is one of the endorsements we look for on checkride day. Section 61.39 (6)(iii) states: “Has demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject areas in which the applicant was deficient on

the airman knowledge test.” Additionally, on checkride day, your examiner **MUST** ensure that the plan of action covers each and every one of those missed questions during the practical exam. So, if you squeaked by with 70%, you passed, but there are A LOT of codes that must be looked up and incorporated into the plan of action for your practical exam. So, it's not about making it easier on your examiner; a higher score can result in a more streamlined plan of action for you on checkride day!

How do you stack up on your knowledge score? Are you curious about averages? Wonder no more. The FAA recently released statistics on all the knowledge exams completed in 2025. Looking at the chart, you can see that 939 people took the Private Pilot Helo exam, with a near-90 % pass rate on the first attempt and an average score of just under 82%. The next highest volume is the commercial exam with 715 test-takers who had a near 99% pass rate on their first attempt and an average score of just under 87%.

The advice here is to strive for the highest score that you can achieve on the ole “written” exam. Your examiner will appreciate it!

Knowledge Test	Volume	Pass Rate	Avg Score
ATP Helo (135)	303	98.35%	92.97%
Commercial Helo	715	98.74%	88.65%
Flight Instructor Helo	520	98.27%	90.01%
Flight Instructor Helo (Added Rating)	30	93.33%	89.60%
Flight Instructor Instrument Helo	397	99.50%	91.92%
Flight Instructor Instrument Helo (Added Rating)	24	95.83%	89.38%
Instrument Rating Helo	597	94.14%	84.47%
Private Pilot Helo	939	89.88%	81.57%



Matt Johnson has been an FAA designated pilot examiner for over a decade, conducting exams ranging from Private to ATP and CFI. Additionally, he is a single-pilot IFR air medical captain, Part 135 instructor, and check airman. He can be reached at HelicopterDPE@gmail.com and via Twitter @HelicopterDPE



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