Police Aviation News

©Police Aviation Research Issue 361 May 2026

FLEET RENEWAL

PAVCON POLICE AVIATION CONFERENCE EUROPE
MALAGA SPAIN
27 - 29 May 2026

NORPRESS

EDITORIAL

As I wrote last month, a little over 30 years in, a little over 30 years out, he latter encompassing 30 years of *Police Aviation News,* the latter of course seen *as* journalism and widely seen as the enemy! From time to time the most senior police in the land declare they, and their subordinates, will 'engage with journalists' but I think we all know it is far from the truth.

Anyway, although I have been around a while now, the opinion is that I know nothing of modern policing in the United Kingdom. It seems I am not alone.

Strange things are happening in modern UK policing and it is clear that a large contingent of police personnel are not hanging around to put up with it. That inevitably reflects on the numbers of air police and it also resonates with the recent reports of some police services not being whole hearted about keeping officers seconded to NPAS - or even sending them there.

In the wider police community, the most recent reports are that the London Metropolitan Police are spying on their own already disaffected staff using AI and dismissing them for a range of otherwise unseen offences. The *Police Federation*, an organisation that has its own troubles, are on the case and actually defending officers in a manner expected of them.

Either way the thinning out of significant numbers of staff can only further cripple effective policing in the Capital City. In addition to reducing the numbers of working officers it will further degrade their self confidence in providing an effective law enforcement service. A disastrous outcome somewhat worsened by that previously reported lack of confidence in the supposed friends of the officer on the street, the *Police Federation.* It is comforting to have support but it may be less so when it is the *Police Federation*!

It is clear that so far the same stringent probing is not directed at senior ranks - people who have already exhibited a disproportionate tendency to be found wanting in trustworthiness. They are all too often portrayed as the pigs of Orwell's 1984. They are far too close to politicians and rarely exhibit true independence. Why else would they experiment with spying by AI? It gives the old fashioned term of 'Rubber Heelers' a whole new meaning.

If it were to continue in the present flow, the already ineffective law enforcing in the United Kingdom would worsen and result in a police service where the chiefs have no officers to direct towards enforcing the law of the land and an inability to effectively stand in their place thanks to their own inexperience in real world policing. When police were set up in 1829 it was decided that enforcement should be embodied in the person of the sworn officer on the street but it is no longer so. There is far too much wokery and political interference in what has always been a pretty brutal career path of not seeking promotion (the choice of the majority).

Those that seek very senior positions in order to avoid the day-to-day pressures of policing are unlikely to understand front line policing with all of its physical challenges and perceived threat to life. It is a life skill that eludes them – by their own choice.

Bryn Elliott

FRONT COVER: The police air support in England and Wales is provided by the National Police Air Service (NPAS). This Airbus H135H helicopter G-NPAS will support essential programme activity, including training for NPAS Training Captains, preparing the addition of the newer type to the Approved Training Organisation (ATO), and supporting work to bring the new fleet onto the Police Air Operator Certificate (PAOC) by 2027. [image by Alan Norris/NORPRESS]

Police Aviation News is published monthly by **POLICE AVIATION RESEARCH,**
7 Windmill Close, Honey Lane, Waltham Abbey, Essex EN9 3BQ UK.
Contacts: **Cell:** +44 7778 296650 Main web site: www.policeaviationnews.com
E-mail: editor@policeaviationnews.com and policeaviation@hotmail.com

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Police Aviation Research Airborne Public Safety Association Member since 1994
Police Aviation News has been published since April 1996 and is wholly supported by advertising

LAW ENFORCEMENT

INTERNATIONAL

PAvCon EUROPE POLICE AVIATION CONFERENCE: Later this month will see the PAvCon Europe Police Aviation Conference being held on a private airfield close to Malaga, Spain from 27-29 May 2026.

The event opens with Tactical Training Sessions for crews led by Harald Brink (Netherlands Police) on May 27. This training is still open to new attendees – check out the details on the website.

The full event opens at 0900 on the morning of May 28 with welcoming speeches and introductions to the event and the region. A full programme of technical and operational experience follows over the following two days – all fully backed up with the customary interesting and informative exhibition of equipment and aircraft from event supporting vendors and promoters.

As is usual the PAvCon Europe event offers a great atmosphere, an opportunity to network with fellows in the industry and food, refreshments and entertainment over the three days. It is the winning formula that has been on offer, initially from the Shephard Group, then PAR and now Dynamic Range since 2006.

Among the exhibitors will be *FlySight*, based in Italy. In a promotion for their participation in PAvCon Europe 2026 they declare that this event continues to stand out as a key reference point for our industry year after year.

FlySight have been supporting this event for many years, recognising its value not only as a meeting point for professionals, but also as a platform for growth, innovation, and the exchange of ideas. For this year's edition, FlySight are pleased to confirm the renewal of their sponsorship, reinforcing a commitment that goes beyond presence alone: they strongly believe in PAvCon's mission and its role in driving excellence and progress.

This year also marks an exciting collaboration with Police Aviation News, further strengthening their connection with the law enforcement aviation community and enhancing their contribution to industry dialogue. Learn more

Participating in PAvCon 2026 represents an important opportunity for *FlySight* to showcase their avionics solutions, including the latest capabilities integrated into the OPENSIGHT Mission Console, designed to support advanced Decision Support Systems. In a rapidly evolving operational environment, tools like OPENSIGHT enable more effective mission planning, real-time awareness, and informed decision-making.

Events like PAvCon are essential to building strong relationships and addressing tomorrow's challenges together. Our continued support reflects our dedication to investing in the professional community we are part of, where collaboration and knowledge sharing drive meaningful and lasting value.

FlySight once again stand alongside PAvCon Europe and all its participants, ready to share insights, experiences, and new perspectives. We look forward to seeing you there and to making this edition another inspiring and impactful experience together.

Book your OPENSIGHT Mission Console demonstration in Malaga now.

POLAND

POLICJA: Some interesting images posted on line last month showing the remains of the 'old warriors' of police aviation in Poland.

rom days when Russian designs held sway in the Polish police fleet, three former police PZL Swidnik built Mil Mi-2 Hoplites including SN-04XP, SN-05XP and SN-06XP, and a PZL-Swidnik W-3A Sokol SN-32XP are stored at Szczecin. Their future is uncertain, a new life in a museum may be possible

The current police fleet includes examples of the Sikorsky S-70i Blackhawk, Bell 407GXi and a pair of pretty old Bell 206B3 JetRanger's. [Johannes Herrmann Social Media]

SPAIN

SEVILLE: West from the site of this years PAvCon Europe conference the Spanish law enforcement agencies including elements of the Guardia Civile are battling drug gangs importing drugs from Morrocco.

The Guadalquivir river that winds its way towards Seville has become a hotspot for gangs shifting drugs from Morocco. The river has become a haven for cocaine smugglers. Its western bank abuts the Doñana National Park, one of Europe's biggest wetlands. Its other bank is bordered by remote farmland traversed by endless tracks and dotted with warehouses ideal for hiding contraband and speedboats. Nonetheless Spanish police are managing to turn the tide operating with helicopters, boats and drones.

The river bank is littered with the wrecks of the high-speed vessels used by criminal gangs — that have crashed while being pursued by the police, hundreds of discarded fuel cans used by smugglers and fences newly erected across canal mouths to prevent their escape. One of the wrecks marks the spot where a smugglers vessel being pursued by the police slammed into the bank killing one of those on board.


GC

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The Guadalquivir, in southern Spain, is one of Europe's busiest drugs corridors — a "narco-highway" used to move cocaine from across the Strait of Gibraltar from Morocco. Most of the drugs entering Spain via routes like the Guadalquivir do not stay there. They are quickly redistributed across mainland Europe and to Britain.

In a two year period the police were accused of holding back in their investigations - two of their number were killed when smugglers rammed their vessel but that situation has now turned about and more resources have been added to the battle against the gangs across southern Spain. Smuggling on the river has declined markedly in recent months, estimates claim an 80% fall.

The situation remains fragile though. In an operation three months ago a waiting Guardia Civil vessel ended up in a firefight when the smugglers were spooked by a unit arriving by helicopter. Guardia Civil officers fired warning shots to repel the attack. No officers were injured but it was a difficult situation.

Some of the smugglers were detained but others escaped on foot across the countryside no doubt assisted by local people working with the criminals. There were no drugs found on the vessel on that occasion, highlighting the problems facing the authorities. On another occasion the pursuit lasted around seven hours and led to the detention of seven people and the recovery of 600 kg of contraband. Since 2022, the authorities have seized 11,500kg of cocaine and more than 42 tonnes of hashish on the river. In approximate market terms hashish is around €2,000 per kilo, while cocaine — though prices have recently fallen due to oversupply — has typically been about €30,000 per kilo. There have been about 400 arrests linked to Guadalquivir operations in the past two years, along with the seizure of 140,000 litres of fuel.

With multi-million Euro rewards, the criminals can access more advanced technology than the police. They use surveillance systems, cameras, drones to detect police presence, and encrypt communications. Many local people are drawn in to monitor police movements and ferry fuel out to the drug carrying fast boats in 'innocent' looking fishing boats. [The Times/extract]

Airbus/NPAS

UNITED KINGDOM

NATIONAL: With seemingly little else to promote the team at NPAS moved their new aircraft operation to Airbus Helicopters UK at Oxford on April 14 to repeat their airframe acceptance of the first two aircraft – albeit on different soil.

As reported last month, the National Police Air Service (NPAS) has reached a major milestone in its National Fleet Replacement Programme (FRP) with the arrival of the first two H135 T3H aircraft at Airbus Helicopters UK in Oxford. The aircraft, G-NPAA and G-NPAS, mark the start of the programme's familiarisation and development phase, supporting preparations for the introduction of seven new helicopters that will replace ageing aircraft across the NPAS fleet.

As previously reported G-NPAS will support essential programme activity, including training for NPAS Training Captains, preparing the addition of the H135 T3H to the Approved Training Organisation (ATO), and supporting work to bring the new fleet onto the Police Air Operator Certificate (PAOC). It will then enter the modification programme in early 2027.

The main effort of flight training will take place at Redhill in Surrey where NPAS already has a based aircraft. The airframe will be focussing training on the Helionix system which the majority of NPAS pilots will not be familiar with. Although wearing an external police colour scheme the only visible role equipment will be the skid arrangement and the Sky shout speakers fitted at delivery. The actual pilot training programme has been in planning for some time and can expect to be modified in use.

G-NPAA will proceed directly into a long period of modification, where Airbus will fit the specialist mission equipment required to convert the baseline aircraft into an operational police helicopter ready for service in mid-2027. Although the broad range of equipment is known the exact positioning of the role fit and the ergonomics of the panels and switches can be expected to extend the task out to most of the next year. Subsequent role fits on the later airframes can be expected to take 4-5 months.

Four of the initial airframes will replace the current EC145s in service G-MPSA (9065), G-MPSB (9068) and G-MPSC (9075). That is three bought by the Metropolitan Police in 2007 and one slightly different example originally operated by Devon & Cornwall Police in Exeter from 2010 as G-DCPB. In recent weeks these four have been noted flying less often from their Lippitts Hill base. At the launch event all four were present, three being in the maintenance hangar and G-MPSB on the flight line (and assumed flightworthy from recent reports).

Current EC145s in service include G-MPSA G-MPSB and G-MPSC. bought by the Metropolitan Police and the former Devon & Cornwall G-DCPB. Here the latter is seen with MPSA lifting off from Lippitts Hill, Epping Forest last summer. [PAR]

The seven new Safran Arrius 2B2plus powered H135 T3H helicopters entering service from 2027 will feature full Night Vision Imaging System (NVIS) capability and a range of advanced technologies to enhance operational effectiveness. These include upgraded daylight, low light and infrared imaging systems offering improved detection, tracking and evidential recording.

Crews will also benefit from three-dimensional (3D) spatial audio to improve situational awareness and reduce cognitive load, as well as enhanced video architecture enabling the integration of more sophisticated sensors. Fourth and fifth generation (4G/5G) connectivity will provide faster, more reliable data sharing between aircraft and ground units.

The aircraft's open architecture design will allow future integration of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI)assisted detection. Additional enhancements include weather radar, collision avoidance systems, High Definition (HD) air-to-ground and air-to-air data links, Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) capability and ergonomic workstation layouts to support crew performance during extended missions. For the majority of the flight staff there will be several new technology skills to learn.

Ch Supt Fiona Gaffney, NPAS Accountable Manager, said:

"The arrival of these first aircraft marks a significant moment in our Fleet Replacement Programme and represents the beginning of the transition to a modern, more capable aviation service. The existing fleet is approximately 20 years old and therefore this investment will see a dramatic increase in aircraft availability along with major advancements in technology, enabling NPAS to continue to work alongside other aviation assets.

"Preparing our crews through early familiarisation and training is essential as we move towards introducing the new H135 T3H fleet. This programme of investment ensures we can continue to deliver a safe, resilient and effective air support service for policing across England and Wales."

Richard Atack, Managing Director, Airbus Helicopters UK, said:

"Equipped with an advanced sensor suite and cutting-edge avionics, delivery of this extremely complex aircraft demonstrates Airbus Helicopters' engineering and integration excellence, a critical factor in helping NPAS meet today and tomorrow's policing air support needs. Airbus Helicopters has been at the heart of UK police helicopter operations for nearly half a century and today supports a mixed fleet of 20 NPAS

H135 and H145 aircraft."

Richard Atack has a history of interaction with UK police aviation and the H135. Back in November 1998 when, as a young project manager, he delivered the first EC135T1 for UK police to the Central Counties consortium for West Mercia and Staffordshire Police at Halfpenny Green Airfield, Stourbridge he knew little about the subject, but over 27-years and some 300 aircraft deliveries later he is in charge and found himself handing over the first H135 for a renewing fleet that seeks to bring in a type that has thirty years of further development built in.

Airbus/NPAS

Also in the after event chatter it would appear that there are eyes open for a twin (or at least multi-engine with redundancy) drone solution to meet the longer term over city police surveillance need. As discussed here in the past, it may be a difficult ask and liable to be expensive. As the recent war news has shown us, the best drones are cheap and cheerful fire and forget solutions – there may be a reticence in industry to be diverted towards that sort of niche product. Long exposure to public safety has long led to a super safe line of thinking by the UK CAA but it remains to be seen whether this produces similar thought processes across the wider world.

IN PARLIAMENT

Dr Andrew Murrison the Conservative MP for South West Wiltshire addressed a series of nine interconnected questions to the Secretary of State for the Home Department relating to the NPAS operation and drones. Not all were answered.

He asked about the merits of drones versus police helicopters, their comparable cost effectiveness, the difference in tasking between the two and what training each required. The question of how many police missions were carried out by drones and crewed aircraft in each of the last 10 years was potentially an impossible admin task but the proportion of drones registered by the CAA operated by the police and what operating procedures exist to prevent drones colliding with police helicopters was probably answerable. There was even a question about what security risk assessment had been arrived at for the use of Chinese drones by UK police.

On costs there were questions asking for the annual budget of NPAS in each year and how much the NPAS "Eurocopter programme" cost. Many questions were swerved, they were probably unanswerable.

On April 13 the answers were given on behalf of the Home Secretary (The Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP) by Sarah Jones the MP for Croydon West and Minister of State for the Home Office

The Home Office provided £10.6M to NPAS in FY2025/26. In addition, the Home Office has committed £34.5M to NPAS to support the replacement of 7 helicopters. For further information on annual grant information for NPAS, the Government via the Cabinet Office is committed to publish grant data on an annual basis for schemes and programmes that are funded by the Government, including the NPAS Capital Grant. This can be accessed on the Cabinet Office website under 'Government grant data and statistics'.

The procurement, operational deployment and recording of data on police use of drones and crewed aircraft are operational matters for police forces, who are best placed to assess their own operational needs while ensuring they have the tools necessary to protect the public. The Home Office does not hold information on the proportion of drones registered by the CAA.

The Home Office is currently funding and supporting the work of the National Police Chiefs' Council's (NPCC) Drones Programme, who were allocated £2.3M in FY2025/26. The programme is responsible for standardising and professionalising the use of drones across UK police forces. This includes developing a bespoke training and accreditation pathway for police drone operators as well as working with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to provide the necessary oversight on the safety aspects of police drone operations.

Drones and helicopters are complimentary to one another, not interchangeable. Drones are valuable for close range, localised tasks, but may not always replace the speed, persistence, capacity and safety assurance of a helicopter. However, this is subject to ongoing research and analysis, continuously evolving as technology advances.

The Home Office is currently working with NPAS and the NPCC Drones Programme to assess, compare and evaluate the benefits and cost-effectiveness of crewed and uncrewed technologies for operational policing and how this will support development of a future blended fleet model for police aviation, in line with the NPCC Aviation Strategy (2025-2035). [Edited]

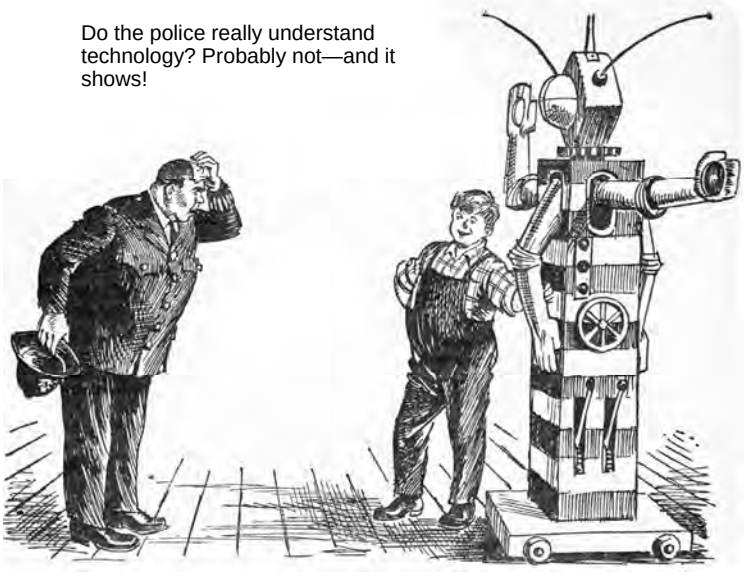
Editor: In line with earlier rumours I had been waiting for NPAS to retire the four Eurocopter EC145s in service at Lippitts Hill. The earlier plan was to discard them and bring in EC135s from the regions to replace them. When it was leaked it seemed like a major event that would severely disadvantage the counties. Removing four airframes from a much denuded fleet was not to be done lightly.

In the event, so far, the move does not seem to have been made and the 145s remain flying around London into early April although audible and visual cues from this office suggest that they are not flying as often.

There has been a noticeable increase Vulcanair P68R flying far from their Midlands base in southern counties. A while back it was understood that the P68s were not intended for general use over London. On April 7 one of the aircraft was circling PAN HQ in Waltham Abbey, a rare occurrence, but perhaps a move to relieve the pressure on the ageing 145 fleet (and perhaps) keep the editorial staff cowering in the bunker at Windmill Towers!

Still bubbling away in the background as another illustration of abject failure is the Emergency Service Network (ESN), a communications scheme that has been promising to replace and boost the service provided by the ageing digital Airwave system for way too long.

The latest news does not appear too promising. It's a technology project that is more than £3 billion over-budget and at least ten years late, it should have been introduced nine years ago and completed its replacement process six years ago. It is doubtful it will make the grade on the first part of the process next year either. One of the primary aims of the new system was to set aside no signal areas, and yet it is clear that although much improved there remain many areas where the 4G system still struggles.



Do the police really understand technology? Probably not—and it shows!

If a company had launched this, it would deservedly have gone bust a long time ago – although Fujitsu seem to be weathering a similar disaster around at the Post Office. If a CEO was behind it, he or she would have been fired. It has survived because it was being run by a government department (the Home Office), where responsibility is spread between numerous ministers and officials over many years, no one is held to account and not much gets done.

The latest is that delays are now besetting the delays. It is a scandal: a wildly ambitious project, to set up a new communications system for Britain's blue light services based on 4G, that has been ill thought through and dreadfully managed. At times I seems that we all knew someone who was involved in it for a while before they threw their arms up in despair and resigned.

The latest development in this overlong saga, suggests that it is not going anywhere soon. That alone will cause unnecessary head scratching in NPAS and Airbus – they will have to plan for a dual communication system in the new H135 aircraft. Meanwhile the world has moved on to embrace 5G backed up by satellite technology to overcome the no signal areas.

UNITED STATES

CALIFORNIA: Bell Textron Inc., are selling two Bell 505 helicopters to the Pasadena Police Department Air Operations Section, in the city located northeast of downtown Los Angeles. The acquisition of the role equipped helicopters is to cost $12.6M.

With a population of nearly 139,000 at the 2020 census Pasadena PD has operated helicopters since the 1970s and has been a Bell customer for over 30 years. Currently mainly operating DoD surplus Bell OH-58 helicopters, backing up a MD500E the Pasadena Police Department has chosen the Bell 505 as the product of choice to undertake future missions.

The Pasadena Police Department Air Operations Section provides air support to Pasadena, California and numerous other cities throughout the San Gabriel Valley. The newly purchased Bell 505s will join the department's Bell 206Bs already in operation.

CNC Technologies is serving as the prime contractor for the introduction of the new airframes, leading the overall mission suite design and support. The mission suite includes Wescam MX-10 electro-optical/infrared imaging systems, tactical mapping capability, NVG-compatible cockpit upgrades, high-intensity searchlight capability, and resilient real-time video transmission, delivering a mission-ready capability aligned with the department's future operational needs.


Alternative

Alternative

The California Highway Patrol are replacing their fleet of ten-year old Gippsaero GA-8 light singles with new Textron Cessna 208 Caravan aircraft. The Lycoming TIO-540 powered GA-8 is pretty roomy but the Caravan takes space to another level and adds the ever dependable PWC PT-6 turbine engine into the package.

Featured as for sale on social media last month is one of the early disposals N148HP c/n 229 a 2016 build aircraft currently configured for the law enforcement role. It is now registered to Alternative Travel based in Loveland, Colorado. The new owners are waiting to see whether there is an agency that wats to buy it as a ready made patrol craft or whether it is going to be stripped of its role equipment and civilian-ised.

Alternative

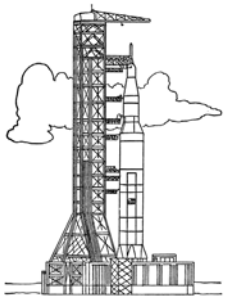
The Bell 505 was introduced in 2014 and certified by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in 2017. There are now more than 600 Bell 505s operating in more than 66 countries on six continents, surpassing 300,000 total fleet flight hours. With a speed of 125 knots (232 km/h) and a useful load of 1,500 pounds (680 kg).

Last month was the always welcoming annual meeting of the airborne emergency services at the Rose Bowl Stadium in Pasadena. The event on April 9 attracted nearly two dozen emergency services related helicopters. The event is hosted annually by the Pasadena Police Department's Air Support Unit to promote familiarity with the Rose Bowl Grounds. The Rose Bowl is designated as a staging area for a large disaster or mass casualty situation.

What was there to see? Well this list of airframes probably includes all of them….

Bell OH-58 Kiowa Pasadena P.D. N239PS
Bell 505 JetRanger X N108LG Bell Demo
Robinson R66 Turbine N4060W Robinson Demo
Airbus H125 Burbank / Glendale P.D. N818PD
Bell 505 JetRanger X N306FD Los Angeles Fire
Bell 205A-1 N205CE Southern California Edison
Airbus H125 / AS350 N50NT Ontario P.D.
Eurocopter AS350B2 N956LA Los Angeles County Sheriff.
Airbus H125 N30NT Ontario P.D.
Airbus H125 N911RP Riverside P.D.
Eurocopter AS350B3 N979HP California Highway Patrol
Eurocopter AS350B2 N956LA Los Angeles County Sheriff
Bell UH-1V Huey N181SD Orange County Sheriff
AgustaWestland AW139 N301FD Los Angeles Fire Air Ops
Bell 206 OH-58A Kiowa N1850W Santa Barbara Sheriff
MD Helicopters MD530F N683HB Huntington Beach P.D.
Eurocopter AS350B2 N954LA Los Angeles County Sheriff
Eurocopter AS350B2 N955LA Los Angeles County Sheriff
Eurocopter AS350B2 N956LA Los Angeles County Sheriff
Sikorsky S-70 Firehawk N190LA Los Angeles County Fire
Eurocopter AS350B3 N883SD San Diego P.D.
Eurocopter AS350B2 N226PD Anaheim P.D.
MD Helicopters MD500E N108PP Pomona P.D.
Eurocopter AS350B3 N224LA Los Angeles P.D.

Meeker



As Canadian Cal Meeker subsequently commented on social media “Nice day at the Rose bowl for the annual Pasadena PD Air Unit Fly in. 24 helicopters, 20 with our gear. Good odds.”

He subsequently moved on to Palomar Airport and bumped into the NASA operated Cessna 208 Caravan, part of the fleet set to track the NASA moon flight and Artemis re entry. Such is the man and his world renowned engineering even that aircraft was equipped with a few pieces of Meeker gear.

May still be time enough to get Meeker gear on the next moon lander design!

TEXAS: Bell Textron Inc., are to supply a Bell 407GXi helicopter to the Texas Department of Public Safety.

The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Aircraft Operations Division provides statewide air patrol, criminal surveillance and rescue support for the state of Texas. In addition to their new Bell 407GXi, the department also utilizes a Bell 412EP. Texas DPS and Bell have a long-standing relationship that began in 1948 when the department established their fleet with two Bell 47s. In recent years the operator has tended to select the USA manufactured Airbus AStar as its new fleet option but this new addition of the Bell 407GXi reflects the renewal of the department's continued trust in Bell.

The statements from the customer are interesting in that they endorse the Bell product but do not give up a clue as to why they are 'suddenly' buying a Bell single after many years of buying and operating the AStar as the helicopter of choice.

"(adding this Bell) aircraft to our fleet represents a significant investment in our operational reliability and public safety missions," said Stacy Holland, chief pilot, TDPS Aircraft Operations Division. "Greater reliability translates directly into faster response times, added support for our partners on the ground, and provides an even higher level of service to the communities we are proud to protect. The Bell 407GXi's advanced capabilities, range, and payload capacity allows us to effectively execute our missions and enhance our ability to respond to potential threats while safeguarding communities across Texas."

Editor: Are Texas experiencing poor service or maintenance issues?

According to Parapex Media the current Texas DPS fleet is one EC145 bought new in 2008, and 14 AS350/H125 AStar's dates back to 2004 with one still being completed at Metro Aviation at Shreveport LA. Clearly, they still have an active interest in this model but the purchase of the 407 reverses an apparent AStar positive policy in place since the early 1990s. It may of course simply be for a specific mission.

The odd one out in the otherwise Airbus fleet is a Bell 412EP N412F. Although it is still registered to the City of Houston from when they bought it in 1996 it transferred to the Texas DPS late last year and now flies in their colours.

AIR AMBULANCE

AUSTRALIA

WESTERN AUSTRALIA: Last month RAC Rescue helicopter announced that they have responded to 11,000 missions, rescuing people in urgent and often life-threatening situations since commencing operations in 2003.

The RAC Rescue helicopters have become a vital part of the Western Australia's emergency response network, working alongside other emergency services including St John WA, WA Police, DFES personnel and volunteers.

Behind every one of the 11,000 missions is a highly skilled crew, including pilots, critical care paramedics, aircrew officers, engineers and administration staff who work together to ensure RAC Rescue is there when it matters.

The crews operate in unpredictable conditions and in challenging environments to save lives and be there for Western Australians when we are the right service to respond. While 11,000 missions mark a significant milestone for RAC Rescue, they also represent people supported in some of their most difficult moments. [RAC]

GHANA

ZIPLINE DRONE DELIVERY: Ghana has implemented a healthcare initiative that utilises drones to deliver blood, vaccines, and life-saving medications to medical facilities across the country. The Ghana Drone Delivery Service was launched on 24 April 2019 (6 years ago), to deliver medical supplies within designated areas in Ghana with drones. The aerial logistics network allows remote clinics to receive urgent supplies in a matter of minutes, bypassing the significant delays typically caused by traditional road transport.

Last year Ghanaian sources were pointing out that 'England' was following their lead with similar trials in remote areas and cities, a reference to the overwater trials in Scotland and over the Solent..

The full implementation of this system marks a major breakthrough for healthcare delivery in hard-to-reach regions where distance and poor logistics pose life-threatening challenges. Local clinics now transmit digital requests and have the necessary supplies flown directly to their location. This shift from reactive to proactive supply chain management has significantly reduced instances stock running out of essential items like antivenom and emergency blood units.

JAPAN

DOCTOR-HELICOPTERS: Ten doctor helicopters covering ten prefectures were forced to temporarily suspend operations during fiscal 2025 due to a lack of available mechanics required for the onboard service, an Asahi Shimbun investigation found.

The aircraft were intermittently grounded for 40 to 54 days each, culminating in 487 suspension days. In more than 250 emergency cases, doctor helicopters could not be dispatched, and alternatives were required to treat the patients.

The suspensions of the doctor helicopters occurred in six prefectures in the Kansai region as well as Tokyo and Tottori, Tokushima and Nagasaki prefectures.

According to the health ministry and the Union of Kansai Governments, the suspensions began intermittently in July 2025 and continued until the end of March 2026. In March, each helicopter was out of service for 14 to 18 days.

Fifty-seven doctor helicopters are deployed nationwide. Under national operating standards, doctor helicopters are required to carry a mechanic on board to support the pilot.

Mechanics could not be secured because a number of them changed jobs, reached retirement age or took leave due to family circumstances," [The Asahi Shimbun]

LUXEMBURG

LAR: The Luxembourg Air Rescue Airbus H145 LX-HLP which was damaged on May 23 last year whilst taking off from a road traffic accident scene has been repaired at Airbus in Augsburg, Germany and was delivered back to LAR April 1.

In the accident the helicopter attended the incident between Nothum and Bavigne, Lac de la Haute-Sûreat and on leaving reversed back into nearby trees damaging its main rotor and lost control. It suffered a hard landing back on the roadway collapsing its skids and the underside of the Fenestron cowling.. [Parapex]

NEW ZEALAND

A new partnership involving a local private jet company and Air Force veterans should be able to quickly get help to people sick or injured overseas.

NZ Jet directors John and Sofia Ambler have teamed up with Russell Clarke and Mat Griffin's Orion Aeromedical. Orion Aeromedical is a New Zealand-based aeromedical company delivering safe, reliable, and patient-focused repatriation services worldwide. Founded by experienced clinicians and healthcare leaders with more than 60 years of combined experience, the company brings together extensive clinical, aviation, and operational expertise to ensure exceptional care on every mission.

Through partnerships with trusted aviation providers, Orion Aeromedical coordinates both private air ambulance and commercial repatriation flights across the globe. Flight teams consist of doctors, nurses, and paramedics who are all trained and experienced in aeromedical operations, ensuring the highest level of clinical expertise and patient care throughout each journey.

Based In Albany, New Zealand, NZJET offers private jet travel through New Zealand as well as destinations on the Australian East Coast and to Fiji. [Herald]

NORWAY

MILITARY: SAS and the Norwegian Armed Forces have renewed their long-standing Medevac partnership into 2027, strengthening a civil–military collaboration that has become a vital part of Europe's medical evacuation capacity. The extension approved by the Norwegian Government, ensures continued access to a highly specialised airborne medical service that has supported the transport of thousands of wounded and critically ill patients from the war in Ukraine.

NAFMS

The renewed agreement with Norwegian Defence Materiel Agency formalises SAS' continued role in providing dedicated Medevac capability for international missions coordinated by Norwegian and European authorities. The operation relies on cooperation between SAS flight crews trained for complex medical evacuations and specially trained medical personnel from the Norwegian Armed Forces Medical Services (NAFMS).

NAFMS

A specially configured Boeing 737-700 equipped with beds, intensive care capacity and specialized medical infrastructure is at the core of the operation.

The service has played a central role in transporting thousands of wounded and critically ill Ukrainian patients from Poland to hospitals across Europe as part of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

Editor: The airborne medical evacuation system in that Boeing 737 was designed by Marshall Aerospace and they separately announced that it will continue to remain in service with the Norwegian Armed Forces through 2027.

Designed and delivered jointly with Nodin Aviation AS, the system converts the Boeing 737 into an airborne medical platform. When testing concluded in 2010, the system became the first certified role change modification of its kind to be operated by a commercial airline.

See below for some more news from Marshall's in Cambridge.

TANZANIA

The Airbus H135 Disaster Management Kit (DMK) represents Bucher Leichtbau's commitment to delivering innovative, mission-critical helicopter equipment solutions. The system is designed to support multiple emergency scenarios, including search and rescue operations, aerial firefighting, and disaster response missions in challenging environments.

Bucher Leichtbau's helicopter interior solutions feature several distinctive advantages:

Flexible and Modular Design: Equipment certified under one STC (Supplemental Type Certificate) roof, ensuring regulatory compliance and operational reliability.

Multiple Configurations: Various options available for different mission types, from emergency medical services to specialized rescue operations.

Medical Certification Excellence: Full medical certification with CE labelling for highest safety standards.

Ergonomic Design: Functional and hygiene-conscious concept ensuring optimal working conditions for crew members.

Customizable Solutions: Modular equipment that adapts to different rescue operations and specific operator requirements.

The project included extensive training for Tanzania Fire and Rescue Force personnel, ensuring optimal utilization of the advanced equipment. Bucher Leichtbau's experienced technical team provided hands-on instruction covering system operation, maintenance protocols, and emergency procedures.

The successful completion of this project was facilitated through strategic partnerships with Jetstream Avia and NAFFCO, both recognized leaders in their respective fields. This collaboration demonstrates the importance of industry partnerships in delivering complex, mission-critical solutions to end users.

UNITED KINGDOM

EAST ANGLIA: With the Marshall Aerospace owned Cambridge airport still due to close by 2030 the East Anglia Air Ambulance is pursuing its plan to relocate its airport based HEMS operation to a green field site. The charity funded air ambulance flies from Cambridge and Norwich, enabling its two H145 helicopters to reach anywhere in the region within 25 minutes.

South Cambridgeshire District Council has now approved the EAAA application for a new purpose built air ambulance facility at New Shardelowes Farm on Balsham Road, Fulbourn to the east of Cambridge

To find a site that offered similar response times to the current base, EAAA carried out extensive research and assessed dozens of potential locations across Cambridgeshire, including airfields. The Fulbourn site ranked highest against our specialist aviation, clinical and rapid response criteria, all of which are essential for reaching patients in life threatening emergencies as quickly and safely as possible.


EAAA

The approved site is located 2km southeast of Fulbourn village and extends to approximately 10.35 acres. Alongside helipads and a hangar, plans include a garage area for the critical care cars, crew facilities, a medical store, a training and educational area, overnight accommodation and resting facilities for nightshift and visiting crew, as well as office space for ground staff. The main base located at Norwich Airport offers similar facilities. It was the subject of a major enhancement some years ago where the original hangar base was refurbished. The Cambridge base is a complete new build.

The total cost of securing the land and creating the new Cambridge Air Base is £14M**.** Some of the funding is in place but now a new public fundraising effort is underway to raise £8.2M to make the new base a reality.

Editor: The Marshall Group well known internationally for its work on such as the Lockheed C-130 aircraft as well as other engineering and automotive business announced plans to move to Cranfield Airport in Bedfordshire in 2019. Currently the airport provides a massive green buffer on the east of the city but the 462-acre airport is destined to see the building of many homes as Cambridge East. The numbers have been variously reported as 7,000 and 12,000.

Although the Cranfield plan was halted last year a move is still planned to an, as yet undisclosed, site. Many of Marshall's existing businesses will remain in their current buildings by the airport.

Some of the subsequent reporting on this request for support have expressed the situation in terms of a make or break scenario but the charity is not facing any imminent financial problems. Like most UK charity operations they started with a basic aircraft, a helipad and a portable crew building and built up from there as their fund raising expertise grew. This is not the first base build associated with the Cambridge operation, the last being ten years ago and that was based on portable buildings in the knowledge that the airport was facing closure at some time in the future.

ISLE OF MAN: At the end of March this year Manx Care secured the Isle of Man's emergency air bridge to provide patient transfer services for the next five years, following the completion of a comprehensive Air Tender process.

The tender reviewed and awarded a range of critical services that support urgent and life saving transfers between the Island and specialist centres in the United Kingdom.

As a result of the tender process:

Interhospital Transfer and Repatriation Service (Fixed Wing Air Ambulance) has been awarded to incumbent provider IAS Medical Ltd

Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) has been awarded to the Great North Air Ambulance Service (GNAAS)

UK Road Ambulance Provision, supporting onward transfers from UK airports to receiving hospitals, has been awarded to Spark UK Medical Ltd

All contracts have been awarded for an initial five year term, with the option to extend for a further two years, supporting continuity across the Island's emergency and patient transfer services.

The Isle of Man's emergency air bridge plays a vital role in ensuring patients who are seriously ill or who have suffered major trauma can be transferred quickly to specialist centres in the UK for life saving treatment. Working alongside the Isle of Man Ambulance Service (IMAS), air ambulance clinicians provide advanced pre hospital care and enable direct transfers to centres of excellence, including major trauma and specialist cardiac hospitals.

Since March 2022, the Great North Air Ambulance Service (GNAAS) has worked in partnership with Manx Care to respond to the most critically ill and injured people on the Isle of Man with its pre-hospital emergency medical care specialists. The initiative had been funded by the Transformation Fund initially and latterly by Manx Care, and throughout this time GNAAS have been working hard to raise funds on the Island to secure the future of their service.

GNAAS responds to the Isle of Man on average 20 times a year, usually activating the helicopter based in Cumbria, which is currently a Dauphin N3 helicopter. If they are busy the helicopter based in the North East which is a Dauphin N3+ helicopter will respond.

Last year Manx Care and GNAAS agreed to a new contract that would see continuation of the service for a further 12 months, commencing from April 2025. Manx Care will fund the service based on a per mission costing and GNAAS commit to strengthening its fundraising activities on the Island.

Editor: For those not knowing the location of the Isle of Man, it is a self-governing British Crown Dependency located in the Irish Sea between Great Britain and Ireland. It is not part of the UK, nor the EU, but a distinct nation with its own parliament (Tynwald), laws, and King Charles III as Head of State. Known for the Isle of Man TT motorcycle race and a favourable tax regime. It has a population of about 84,000.

UNITED STATES

FLORIDA: HCA Florida Healthcare, the state's leading emergency healthcare provider, in partnership with Air Methods, announced the launch of a new air ambulance service that will serve communities along the Nature Coast and inland in western North Central Florida. This medical helicopter fleet, HCA Florida Air Life, provides the specialised response and speed necessary to stabilise trauma, stroke and other seriously injured or ill patients before they reach the hospital, significantly improving outcomes. They are based at Chiefland, west of Gainesville, Florida.

The fully equipped "flying ICUs" have a range of 379 miles and cruise speeds of 153 miles per hour. The helicopters carry flight nurses and paramedics trained to provide critical care to patients suffering from trauma due to accidents, cardiac and stroke events, pregnancy emergencies and other major health concerns.

In 2025, Air Methods transported more than 2,800 critical care patients to 83 different HCA Florida Healthcare facilities statewide. HCA Florida Healthcare and Air Methods look forward to continuing to work closely with emergency medical services providers serving communities across Florida.

IDAHO: Global Medical Response are teaming up with Portneuf Medical Center to expand access to critical care across southeastern Idaho as part of Portneuf Air Rescue. This program brings together existing air services Guardian Flight and Med Trans Corporation. and introduces a new Airbus H130 helicopter N999GR to enhance emergency response, helping connect rural communities to lifesaving care when every second counts. [GMR]

NEW MEXICO: The Socorro County Board of County Commissioners have approved the air medical agreement with PHI Cares, a division of PHI Air Medical, a leading U.S. helicopter-based medical transport provider. Residents requiring authorised emergency air medical transport from Socorro County, will benefit from no out-of-pocket expenses when utilizing PHI Air Medical thanks to the agreement.

The municipal agreement, effective from February 1, 2026, through January 31, 2027, includes residents who are not enrolled in Medicaid, do not have existing medical insurance coverage, or lack a responsible third-party for their medical transport. In all other cases, PHI Air Medical coordinates with the resident's insurer to resolve claims for medically necessary transports, ensuring members have no out-of-pocket costs and can focus on what matters most, their recovery.

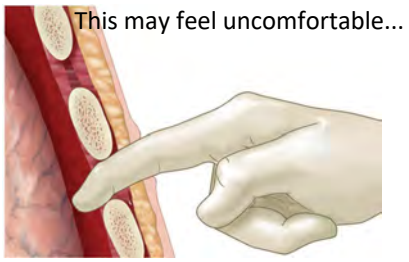
In addition, residents qualify for a Full National Household Membership Upgrade Option at $40 per year per household. This optional upgrade extends coverage outside the County Service Area to include any current PHI Cares service areas, applying only to transports aboard a PHI aircraft.

OREGON: Life Flight Network has expanded its services in Oregon. Complete with a helicopter, airplane and enough crew members to fill them both, the agency's newest airbase at the Hillsboro airport is ready to serve patients in need.

Life Flight, a not-for-profit organisation specialising in emergency medical transport, already has airbases throughout Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and Hawaii. Each aircraft is equipped with a mobile ICU and staffed with crew members that can perform life-saving care and prepared to respond to just about anything. [KPTV].

SOUTH DAKOTA: Flight nurses with emergency air medical provider Black Hills Life Flight, located in Rapid City and Hot Springs, now have another option when treating patients suffering from a collapsed lung due to excess air or blood trapped in the chest cavity. If their traditional procedure, a needle thoracostomy, does not result in the lung reinflating, nurses are now trained to perform an open thoracostomy (also known as a finger thoracostomy). While more intrusive, this procedure is considered a more reliable method of addressing this life-threatening condition in a pre-hospital setting.

The addition of the finger thoracostomy allows crews to rapidly relieve life-threatening tension pneumothoraces (excessive pressure from air trapped in the chest). The procedure can significantly improve oxygenation, blood pressure, and overall patient outcomes, especially for critical trauma patients in rural areas where time is a limiting factor.



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Black Hills Life Flight is part of Air Methods, the USA's leading air medical provider. With both rotor and fixed wing aircraft, Black Hills Life Flight serves not only the people of South Dakota, but eastern Wyoming and Montana, and western Nebraska as well. Their clinicians have at least three years of experience in an emergency or intensive care setting before joining a flight crew, and they receive ongoing advanced training. Their aircraft are equipped as flying ICUs, carrying the medical equipment and medications needed to provide lifesaving care for trauma, cardiac, stroke, pediatric, neonatal, high-risk obstetrics, and other critical patients. They also carry a Zoll AutoPulse CPR device for in-flight mechanical CPR, as well as whole blood that can be administered in-flight for patients suffering from severe blood loss. The ability to perform open thoracostomies is another tool in their nurses' belts to provide the highest level of care when every minute counts. [Air Methods]

FIRE FIRE FIRE FIRE FIRE FIRE

CANADA

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR: All of Newfoundland and Labrador's five water bombers will be in service for the upcoming 2026-27 wildfire season according to the provincial government.

A year ago the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure announced a $17M contract award to aircraft manufacturer De Havilland Aircraft of Canada to repair the province's fifth CL-415 water bomber. The water bomber, 288 (C-FOFI), has been out of service since 2018, when it hit a rock in a lake on the Burin Peninsula, causing significant structural damage. It had been parked up for seven years. PAL Aerospace, a subcontractor for De Havilland, were to repair the aircraft in the province.

The latest reports suggest that the CL415 was undertaking flight testing in early April. The Government utilises the "Super Scooper" aircraft, operated by the Air Services Division, for wildfire suppression. These amphibious aircraft are critical for fighting forest fires, with the ability to scoop 6,000 litres of water in 12 seconds to provide rapid, repeated aerial firefighting support.

The InSight Flight Display System in the CL-415 has received Supplemental Type Certificate (STC) approval for operation in the De Havilland Canada amphibious firefighting aircraft. The certification, issued by Transport Canada Civil Aviation (TCCA), provides a retrofit path for aerial waterbombers currently in service to replace legacy equipment dating back decades with the Universal InSight upgrade.

Universal's aerial firefighting flight deck solution features five glass displays with dual touchscreen controllers, dual flight management systems, and KAPTURE voice and flight data recorders meeting the 25-hour recording of voice and datalink. The system integrates with the UniLink CMU (Communications Management Unit) and UA FlightPartner cloud apps, enabling digital communications and data automation.

The InSight flight display system brings numerous benefits to the CL-415, including:

Enhanced Reliability: Legacy instrumentation is replaced with modern digital displays, resolving obsolescence and extending the airframe's operational longevity for continued years of service.

Situational Awareness: Intuitive high-resolution LCDs present comprehensive flight information, terrain awareness through Synthetic Vision System (SVS), engine indication and crew warning and alerting messages, providing pilots with a clear understanding of their surroundings.

Improved Safety: Advanced navigation, and terrain cautions and warnings from the hosted TAWS depicted on the SVS and digital maps help pilots avoid obstacles and make informed decisions during critical operations.

Increased Efficiency: In-flight interactions and comprehensive maintenance tracking through cloud data services and third-party providers streamline cockpit operations and reduce pilot workload.

The InSight Flight Deck retrofit for the CL-415 is available through De Havilland Canada. visit universalavionics.com.

UNIVERSAL AVIONICS SYSTEMS CORPORATION

CHINA

BEIJING: China is testing fire trucks that are equipped with drone technology. Current models include both single and multiple fan designs deployed from the roof of the truck.

High-rise buildings have always presented problems of access and visibility using ladders and hydraulic lifts and it is hoped that the systems under test will go some way towards remedying them and to additionally reduce instances where human firefighters are put into danger.

The units are expected to provide three main advantages:

- Reconnaissance drones mapping heat sources through smoke
- Active drones spraying retardant on upper floors
- Data drones guiding the crew on the ground

The systems include a multi ducted fan lift tethered unit that can take a fire/water hose above a building and multiple free flying units that carry loads of water or retardant. Each of the systems promises lower risks when fighting fires [Tech Gropse/Besa Gjinovci]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

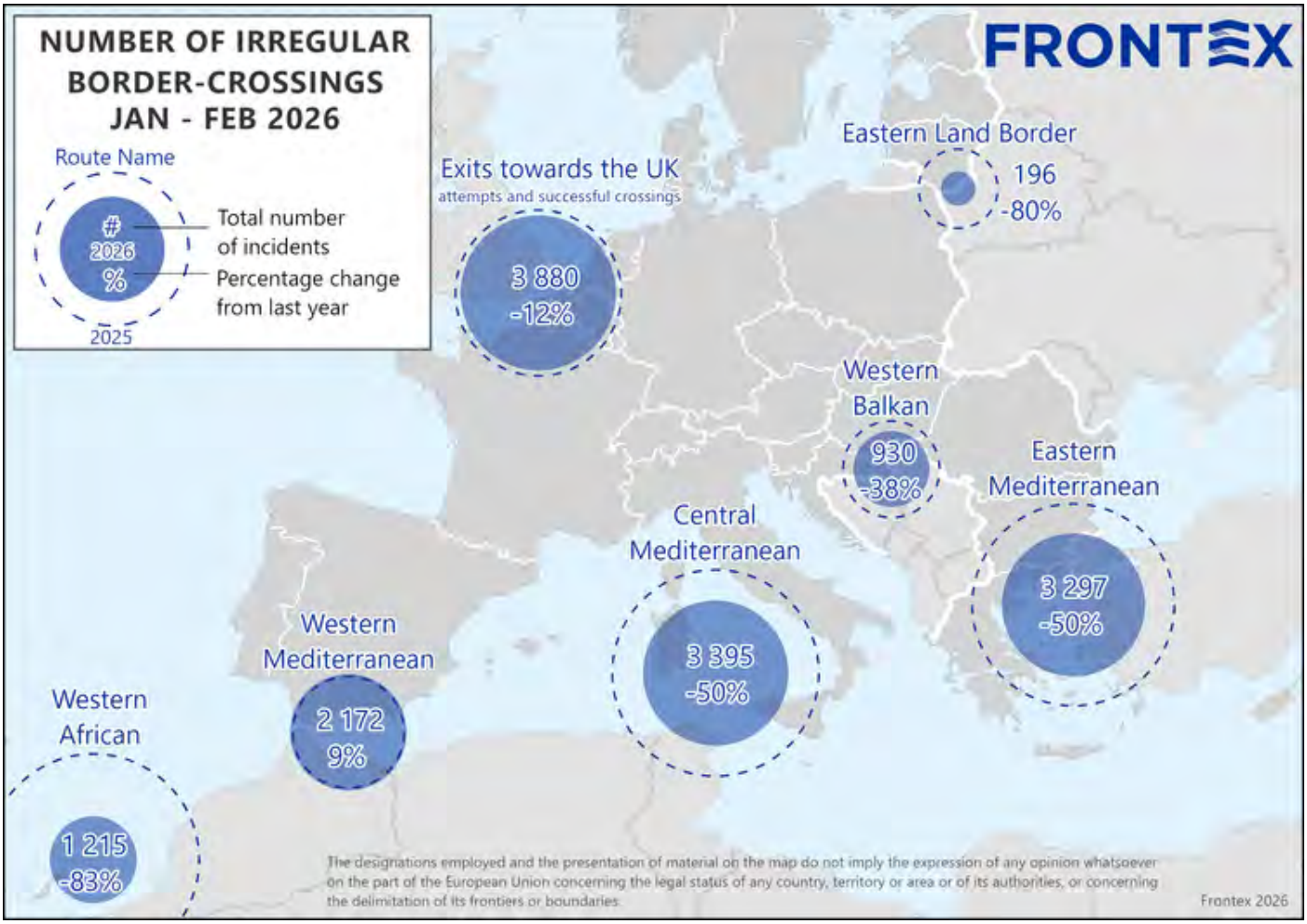
EUROPE: Although the flow of illegal migrant traffic from mainland Europe to the United Kingdom does not appear to unduly disrupted other than by poor weather at the start of 2026 Europol continues to interfere with the supply chains providing equipment for sailings across the English Channel.

Close cooperation between law enforcement from Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, with support from Eurojust is seeing results and arrests. A total of seventeen individuals associated with low-level logistical roles, four suspected organisers, Syrian nationals, were arrested on one day in March when 14 locations were searched (2 in Belgium and 12 in Germany), 4 High Value Targets arrested and seizures including: 11 boats, 1 engine, boxes of inner tubes, life vests, weapons, gold bars, over 30 electronic devices and almost EUR 60 000 in cash made.

This syndicate supplied networks that organised dangerous sea smugglings using small inflatable boats. The equipment was produced in Asia and imported from Turkey via sea and land borders, arriving in bulk in Germany where I was stored in warehouses.

Each smuggling package, worth over EUR 10 000 on the black market, included items such as an inflatable boat, engine, pumps, petrol jerry cans and tyre inner tubes. Criminal networks operating in Northern France purchased these kits in Germany or had them delivered to the French shores, often for an additional fee. They used the equipment to smuggle migrants across the English Channel using low-quality inflatable boats, many of whom originate from the Middle East and East Africa.

Migrant smuggling remains a key criminal threat for the EU, requiring coordinated action across the entire criminal chain – from recruitment and transit to the financial flows that support it. Europol supports investi-



gations through a data-driven approach, enhancing cases provided by national authorities with operational analysis and expertise. Europol also facilitates information exchange and coordinates joint operations to disrupt criminal networks.

To strengthen Europol's efforts to combat migrant smuggling, Regulation (EU) 2025/2611 was adopted in December 2025. This new EU legislation underscores the importance of addressing migrant smuggling at the EU level through enhanced cooperation, including the establishment of Europol's European Centre Against Migrant Smuggling (ECAMS) in March 2026.

ECAMS ensures better systematic exchange of information and coordination of efforts. This includes strengthening expertise in OSINT and financial investigations, as well as enhancing the operational impact of the network of liaison officers from Frontex, Eurojust, and the Member States. [Border Security]

Editor: FRONTEX will be giving a presentation to the PAvCon Europe Police Aviation Conference in Malaga later this month.

NORWAY

SAR: FlySight announces a major milestone in its ongoing collaboration supporting Search and Rescue (SAR) operations in Norway, marking a significant step forward in bringing advanced technologies into real-world operational environments.

The company has successfully completed the first integration tests of its **OPENSIGHT Mission Console** and **Automatic Target Recognition (ATR)** solutions, combined with neural models developed and trained by Norwegian authorities. The system was deployed aboard the AW101 helicopter, a key asset in SAR missions.

Fly Sight's system architecture enables real-time, onboard processing of electro-optical sensor data integrated with geospatial information. This approach significantly enhances operators' situational awareness and supports faster, more informed decision-making during time-critical missions.

Designed for high-complexity scenarios—including mountainous terrain and maritime environments—the

solution:

improves detection reliability
reduces false positives
optimizes SAR asset allocation
increases the probability of locating missing persons

This pilot initiative represents a crucial step in transitioning advanced technologies from the laboratory to operational deployment. The goal is to equip SAR operators with tools capable of delivering **fast, reliable, and actionable insights** in scenarios where every second counts.

Last week, the FlySight team was deployed at Sola Naval Air Station for initial onboard helicopter integration trials. Activities will continue through August, with ongoing testing and refinement to ensure full alignment with operational requirements gathered in the field. In parallel, the program supports the development of a **structured SAR data framework for Norway**, designed to enable scalable deployment across a broader fleet and enhance long-term mission effectiveness through data-driven capabilities.

A word from FlySight

Mattia Carpin, Head of Engineering at FlySight, commented:

I just returned after spending three days alongside the professionals who dedicate their lives to saving others in Norway, onboard one of these extraordinary helicopters.
Their missions span an exceptional range of scenarios: deep forests, vertical rock faces, and open-sea rescues. Wherever there is a life to save, they go.
The sky is not the limit—it is their workspace.
What struck me most is their relentless commitment to excellence. Every detail matters. Every decision counts.
Contributing to this mission with our technology carries both responsibility and accountability. It is a challenge we fully embrace

Editor: In the wake of the Norwegian trip Mattia was on an aircraft and landing in San Francisco en-route for Ottawa and meetings related to the incorporation of the OPENSIGHT suite into the AW101/CH-149 SAR "Cormorant" helicopter modernisation programme. Last week he was overseeing a training course for operators who prepare tactical maps used within Leonardo's mission system onboard the Cormorant.

UKRAINE

In April the Ukraine took delivery of another Westland Sea King from HeliOperations in Portland, Dorset. The latest delivery is a former West German Mark 41.

Germany operated a fleet of 22 Sea King Mk41 helicopters, all delivered by 1974 and used for decades by the German Navy. They were retired in 2024. Berlin announced plans to transfer several of the decommissioned helicopters to Ukraine, along with spare parts and training for Ukrainian crews.

Ukraine already operates Sea King helicopters previously flown by the United Kingdom and also prepared for service at Portland. These are rescue and search helicopters with limited offensive capabilities, they are equipped with 12.7 mm machine guns but there has been talk of fitting them with missiles. [PortlandHOS/Ben Richards/United24]

UNITED KINGDOM

COASTGUARD: There are now two seasonal bases assigned to the UK Department of Transport MCA SAR. Both are in the north west of the main island. Oban in Scotland and a new location in Carlisle, Cumbria.

The Oban team pictured here - equipped with a specialist AW189 helicopter - stand ready to respond to emergencies on behalf of the MCA. .

They got their very first tasking just hours after go-live, helping locate a walker in a remote area.

Meanwhile, 400 miles away, the Bristow team at the Caernarfon base, Wales, went live with the final helicopter in the UK's new SAR-configured AW139 fleet taking to the skies.

New aircraft, new bases and a growing lifesaving capability. Both milestones are key parts in the delivery of SAR2G, the major national programme delivering next-generation SAR for the UK.

PARLIAMENT: Last month there was a parliamentary debate in Westminster Hall on Mountain Rescue. The debate includes various other rescue groups including Lowland Rescue, cave rescue, mine rescue and lifeguards. As part of the many words expressed there were calls for additional resources (including drones) and for central government funding. The majority of these rescue groups are funded as charities and gain their monies from local people, but they do not attract the levels of cash that other charities including air ambulances do.

According to the latest annual review, in 2024 mountain rescue teams responded to almost 4,000 call-outs, resulting in over 3,000 deployments—a 24% increase on 2019. It was also the first year in which teams went zero days without a single call-out. Every single day of the year, somewhere in England or Wales a mountain rescue team was called upon.

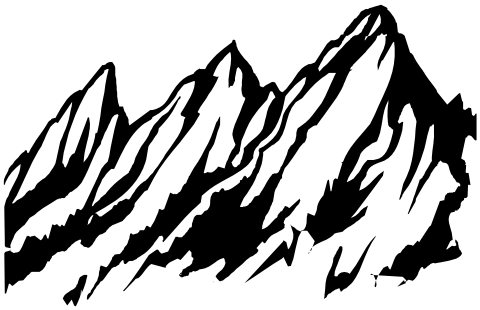
Behind those rescues are over 3,000 volunteers, who have given over 167,000 hours of their time in a sin-

gle year. Their work goes well beyond what many people imagine: volunteers rescue climbers and lost walkers, yes, but they also provide first aid, support ambulance trusts in major incidents, assist in flood responses and help police with searches for missing people on and off the hills.

Mountain rescue teams in England and Wales receive no direct Government funding. They rely entirely on donations, fundraising and legacies, and each team costs between £50,000 and £100,000 a year to run. In the year ending December 2024, Mountain Rescue England and Wales had total income of just over £1.2M, against expenditure of nearly £1.3M, so it is already running at a deficit while managing nearly 3,800 emergencies in a single year. Compare that with Scotland, where the Scottish Government provides £300,000 a year to be shared between 27 teams.

The Manchester Arena inquiry, which raised important concerns about the provision of healthcare at sporting and cultural events has added problems to the funding of these groups and the debate was partly to identify and rectify unintended consequences of 2017 Manchester Arena bombing. Twenty two people were killed and over 1,000 injured in an Islamic terrorist suicide bombing and the inquiry was set up to improve security and safety in the future.

Prior to 2017 mountain rescue teams freely offered support and safety cover for small public events but the inquiry recommendations fly in the face of their charitable activities. Under the new rules, providing that cover now requires CQC registration, and the regulations go further than many might assume. It is said that such registration could cost an estimated £10,000 to £20,000 in total, for each of those mountain rescue teams.



Additionally, mountain rescue teams across England and Wales are collectively spending around £450,000 a year on insurance covering public liability, employer's liability, vehicles, medical malpractice and trustees' responsibilities. On top of that, individual teams often have to pay individual costs locally for buildings, equipment and extra personnel. That is a huge amount to raise through charitable means, and it is hard to justify when these teams are in reality part of the emergency response framework.

Where police continue to shun volunteer support offered by private aviators they continue to accept it from such unpaid bodies from land based rescue teams, the RNLI and others. Some police services, including PSNI, react positively with supporting the volunteers but it is rare. Limited government funding is available but at present it is not available to overcome the additional drain posed by CQC registration. [Emma Lewell, Lisa Smart, Tim Farron, Jerome Mayhew, Lilian Greenwood]

INDUSTRY

Heliservices (Hong Kong) have taken delivery of two new Pratt & Whitney PW206B3 powered H135 helicopters from Airbus in Germany.

The pair were completed late 2025 and shipped from the production plant at Donauworth to Hong Kong around the start of the year. Initial flight testing and training is currently in progress, and the pair will replace two of the operator's four MD902 Explorers.

It is noted that each helicopter has "The Peninsular" titles in small letters below the pilots' window on the port side. This refers to the famous Hong Kong hotel with dual roof top helipads, a regular destination of Heliservices aircraft. The operator will hold an official launch ceremony for the H135s later this month. [Parapex Media]

Airborne Technologies based at Weiner Neustadt, Austria, has announced that they are supporting Airbus in the A400M military airlifter programme.

In the past the pages of Police Aviation News have commented on the 'inappropriate' use of Royal Air Force examples of the military transport role Airbus A400M Atlas in undertaking surveillance missions over the English Channel and the migrant boats. It appears this is about to change as Airborne Technologies is seeking to add ISR to one of the future roles of these large aircraft.

They have been selected as system integration partner by Airbus Defence & Space, supporting the A400M program.

This collaboration represents an important milestone in Airborne Technologies commitment to providing advanced airborne solutions. It represents a valuable opportunity to bring their expertise to the world's leading tactical military transport aircraft. [ABT]

Enstrom Helicopter Corporation's turbine-powered 480B helicopter has achieved full regulatory compliance with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), meaning Enstrom is ready to begin arranging delivery as of today. Aircraft 5261, pictured here, is the first new 480B built and signed off on for full airworthiness, and it is available to be sold anywhere in the world.

This announcement follows the late 2025 approval of Enstrom's crash resistant fuel system (CRFS), which was the final hurdle restricting sales. The new model is designed to minimize the risk of post-impact fuel fires during crashes.

The next step is to make the optional glass panel upgrade available for all factory-new 480B helicopters. The state-of-the-art upgrades include a Garmin G500H avionics display, GTN Digital Audio radios, ADSB In/Out Surveillance, and Howell engine indication.

Indian leasing group **Vman Aviation Services** has placed 10 conditional orders for the new Lyte Aviation SkyClinic aeromedical version of the SkyBus LA-44 hydrogen electric VTOL aircraft being developed by UK based Lyte Aviation. The medical variant is to carry six patients in its onboard surgical interior.

The companies announced the deal last month, reporting that it has a potential value of €500M ($589M) with Vman committed to paying a €10M deposit when the programme reaches two, as yet unspecified, milestones.

Lyte Aviation a start up has been developing the passenger carrying SkyBus LA-44 since 2023 – it is designed to carry between 19-40 passengers over a range of 1,000km (544nm). There is also a projected SkyTruck variant.

Lyte Aviation Ltd., has registered offices in Covent Garden, London and was incorporated in March 2023.

Editor: Many years ago when the latest thinking was to take the doctor to the patient rather than to simply snatch the patient and take them to hospital, I wrote that the way HEMS was developing and having to spend vast amounts to use up their charitable donations that they would be flying Boeing Chinooks in the HEMS role. Early days yet of course but here is an example that fits the mould. Why deliver the doctor to the patient when you can deliver the whole operating theatre to the scene of the disaster!

At the moment this is a multi-rotor paper aircraft with no visible funding so the actual Chinook storyline may have to wait a bit!

The Nederlands Instituut Publieke Veiligheid (NIPV) has chosen **SKYOPS.COM** as its aviation operations platform for the next four years, enabling UAS deployment across the national fire service.

Following a voluntary ex-ante transparency procedure under Directive 2014/24/EU, the contracting authority NIPV confirmed that only one platform (SKYOPS) currently meets the full technical, security, and interoperability requirements.

- One integrated aviation operations platform
- Secure data sharing with police and defence
- Real-time operational insight
- Structural compliance and audit readiness
- Support for unmanned and hybrid aviation

The market was assessed. Alternatives were explored. The conclusion was that SKYOPS met all requirements.

ACCIDENTS & INCIDENTS

24 March 2026 Sikorsky S61 South Korea helicopter crashed into water while filling slung bucket with water. Arrived over water with bucket lowered in water and appeared to have difficulty liftin the filled bucket clear of the water. Pilot apparently lost control and tail rotor authority hit water several times before crashing into water. Airframe ended up upside down in the water. From the video, it is as if they were trying to 'yank' the bucket free of the water. Fortunately it appears that the two pilots managed to escape the wreckage:

6 April 2026 Helicopter A suspected missing helicopter incident involving a contracted aircraft that (potentially ZS-OPK AS350) was supporting an anti-poaching operation in the Kruger National Park was found with all crew members safe.

The helicopter, carrying four crew members, was deployed to assist with a crime scene investigation following the discovery of rhino carcasses. These include two members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) Forensics, a SANParks Environmental Investigator, and the private pilot.

Preliminary reports indicated that the helicopter landed in a densely vegetated area to allow the investigation team to conduct on the ground assessments. During the course of the operation, the team reportedly became disoriented due to the thick bush. It is further understood that the GPS device ran out of battery power, resulting in the team being unable to relocate the helicopter.

Efforts to re-establish contact with the crew were successful after aerial and ground search teams were deployed, supported by advanced technology to assist in navigating the challenging terrain.

10 April 2026 Bell 407 N314JP law enforcement helicopter of Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, Florida. USA. While operating on a training flights from Jacksonville Executive at Craig Airport, FL on autorotation practice it made a forced landing on runway 5. The two persons aboard ere not reporting injuries. [ASN]

11 April 2026 April Eurocopter EC135 N Air ambulance of Lee County EMS Fort Myers. FL, USA, responding to a medical issue when a mechanical problem resulted in them making a precautionary landing on Useppa Island on the west coast of Florida. [Gulf Coast News].

13 April 2026 Cirrus SR22 G6 Perception N124SP Minnesota State Patrol. MN, USA. Aircraft undertaking a night time aerial traffic patrol of the Twin Cities area with two occupants departed St. Paul Downtown Airport (Holman Field) in Minnesota and on its return about 80 minutes later suffered a hard landing on runway 32 causing relatively minor damage to its undercarriage and propeller. [ASN]

18 April 2026 Bell 407 N113AM Air ambulance operated by Air Methods. While operating near the airport at Goodyear, Arizona, USA it made a precautionary landing 8 miles west of the airport. [ASN]

FLIGHT SAFETY

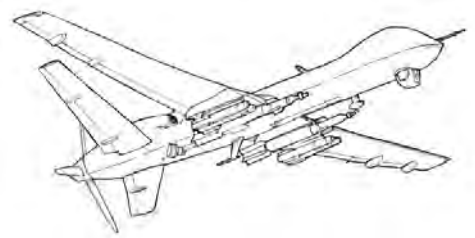
On April 15 Airbus Helicopters (AH); Airbus Helicopters Deutschland GmbH; Kawasaki Heavy Industries Ltd.; and Airbus Helicopters Inc. issued an emergency AD applicable to the MBB-BK117 D-3 and D-3m (H145) helicopters, all serial numbers (s/n).

Affected Part: Rotor hub-shaft, manufacturer part number (MP/N) D623M1501203 and MP/N D623M1501204 following an occurrence reported of a crack on the affected part of a helicopter, which was detected during the troubleshooting accomplished after that the crew reported increased vibration of the helicopter.

This condition, if not corrected, could lead to failure of the main rotor transmission, possibly resulting in loss of control of the helicopter. While the investigation is still on going, as a precautionary measure, to address this potential unsafe condition, AH issued the EASB, providing instructions for inspection of the affected part. For the reasons described above, this AD requires inspections of the affected parts, and, depending on findings, to contact AH for reporting and for applicable corrective action(s).

UNMANNED

The US/Israel/Iran conflict appears to have confirmed that the day of Drone Wars has arrived. The advent of such a concept is hardly new to the post war generations brought up on the output of many Sci-Fi writers. In fact most might well have been agitated wondering why the new age was taking so long to come along.



The modern robot aircraft does seem to have exhibited its flaws though. It was not many months ago that PAN was reporting on a tendency of the military and the emergency services to hanker after some real military hardware that was never affordable to most. I am talking of such as the AIA Hermes a real aeroplane in all but having operator seats.

Their performance is well advertised to enable easy sales but it seems that 'the enemy' can also read the brochures and this may well be why the USA received shock news that they had lost a lot of their very expensive and sophisticated drones as the war rolled out. In war it needs skilled operators to work out the altitude of the target and its speed so you can send a 'dumb' shell or a missile to intercept it. Not so difficult if the brochure tells you that the target is a stable flyer and flies at a known speed and altitude!

It turns out that the most sophisticated and expensive drone in the US arsenal the MQ-9 has been showing off its vulnerabilities. At least 12 of them had been knocked from the sky by the severely damaged Iranian defence set up – that to be added to a similar number lost to the Iran backed Houthis. It is only about 10% of the stock but at $30M each the money adds up.

Coptrz Ltd, a ten years old company based in Leeds, Yorkshire has announced that they are now the exclusive UK partner for the Avy drone and will be representing them to the Emergency Services and Defence sectors in the UK. The company states that this partnership marks a significant step forward in enabling long-endurance, Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) drone operations.

Through this collaboration, they will be expanding beyond multirotor platforms to introduce Avy's advanced fixed-wing systems, including the Avy Aera aircraft and its associated Avy Dock autonomous drone-in-a-box solution Together, these technologies form a fully integrated drone network designed for continuous, remote operations.

This means the drones can take off, land and recharge autonomously, be deployed without personnel on site, operate multiple assets from a single command centre and deliver response times of as little as 30 seconds.

The system combines long-range aircraft with remotely operated docking stations, powered by intelligent automation. It enables automated flight operations and AI-driven image processing of practical use to emergency response, medical and logistics delivery, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) for both the defence and public sector.

An added bonus is that the whole system is supplied without the potential blight of non-Chinese parts.

Coptrz hope that the system will enable them to offer a system that police forces in the UK will see as a viable option as a next generation in **scaling future BVLOS operations nationally**.

Coptrz are promoting Avy based on its performance and reputation for pioneering drone networks that successfully combine aircraft with a docking infrastructure and reliable software.

Editor: Avy have exhibited at the annual drone show at the ExCel Centre in London for some years. There have been stories of their fixed wing craft in past issues of PAN covering such as medical deliveries in the Netherlands in cooperation with ANWB the local air ambulance provider.

The typical craft undertakes vertical lift with four widely spaced rotors and is driven forward with a single propeller. Whether this is enough to meet the "multi-engine" expectation remains to be seen.

The staff at UAS Vision were somewhat nonplussed at a recent e-mail that landed in the in box of Business News, Loitering Munitions. They received an unsolicited offer of a killer drone from a manufacturer in China and UAS Vision pushed it out to their readers too…

The offer from a Shenzhen-based online retailer, XingkaiUAV was to provide turn-key drone solutions and one-stop services for UAV platforms – specifically the XK-F50 Target Drone - a tactical drone equipped with mobile vehicle-borne or ship-borne solid rocket boosted launch, capable of launching multiple aircraft simultaneously.

The shape is familiar in that it looks like an Iranian Shahed, the type that has been grabbing the headlines the last few weeks ruining the attraction of the sea and sun in each of the Middle East countries close to the Straits of Hormuz.

It is a long-range suicide drone used on the battlefield to strike fixed targets. The aircraft has a low altitude and high-speed capability of penetration. It flies very low and dives down to 100 meters before hitting the target for high-speed ground penetration.

This drone also has strong mobility and reliability and can be quickly deployed to the battlefield in a short period of time to improve operational efficiency and strike accuracy.

The advertising text from XingkaiUAV says:

Our drone platforms are highly versatile and widely used in various industries and commercial applications, such as surveillance, firefighting, search and rescue, patrolling, inspection, delivery, mapping, and surveying. They are expertly crafted from lightweight and rigid carbon fibre, which significantly enhances productivity while reducing costs and ensuring optimal safety measures.

The worrying aspects of this mail in include the casual manner in which it was presented as just another product for sale. An unsolicited marketing leaflet advertising a "long-range suicide drone" appearing in a civilian mailbox highlight how accessible advanced military-adjacent technology has become.

The drone's specifications—540 km range, 20 kg payload, high-speed low-altitude flight—place it well beyond hobbyist or benign commercial use. While the company attempts to balance this by listing civilian applications like firefighting or surveying, the explicit inclusion of offensive combat use undermines that positioning. This dual-use ambiguity is a core issue in modern defence technology: the same platform can serve both humanitarian and destructive purposes, depending on the operator.

A Shenzhen-based firm marketing directly to unknown recipients abroad suggests a worrying ease of access that may bypass traditional export controls or oversight mechanisms.

Coming to a street near you?

PEOPLE

Another change of the guard at Bell Helicopter with the latest Key Segment Manager Parapublic representative **Terry Miyauchi** now moving on from the post.

Terry has started up his own aviation consulting company – TM Consulting based in Arizona – with a primary focus on "new start aviation" units and other. The main push is that Terry can now sell the "mission"...and not just the "aircraft". He claims to still 'bleed' Bell after all the years closely associated with them, but he will have freedom of movement!

TM Consulting +1 (928) 279-2274 www.terrymiyauchi.com

Richard Turner, you may remember him as he has had several mentions in recent months. He took up a post as the commanding officer of the RAF cadets in Kent last year and just las month resigned from his 32 years at Adams Aviation.

The latest news on him is another Linked In post where he announces that he is now the Parts Sales EMEA at Air Power Europe, part of Air Power Inc, in Texas, USA. His first foray in the new role was at the recent Aero in Friedrichshafen last month (Right at the back).

Air Power, Inc., the world's largest distributor of Lycoming and Continental aircraft engines and a leading supplier of general aviation parts, announced the launch of Air Power Europe Limited, a UK-based company established to better serve a growing customer base across Europe, Africa, and Western and Central Asia.

Air Power Europe is now officially open for business, offering customers across the region access to factory engines, components, and upgrades with the same wholesale-direct pricing, expert product support, and exceptional customer service that has made Air Power, Inc. a trusted name in aviation for over 30 years.

The new entity will be led by industry veterans Adrian Wilson and Tanja Turner, who bring decades of aviation experience and extensive knowledge of the general aviation market in Europe and beyond. Richard joined them since the initial announcement in February.

Air Power, Inc. is a major distributor of Lycoming Engines and Parts and Continental Aerospace Technologies' only Preferred Distributor. Air Power is also the leading distributor for Superior Air Parts, Tempest Aero Group, Hartzell Engine Technologies, Weldon Pump, ACF-50, Whelen Aerospace Technologies, and many other top-tier aviation brands.

From their headquarters in Arlington, Texas, to a new European footprint, the mission remains the same: deliver value, support aircraft owners and operators, and help keep general aviation strong and growing. Sales Contact – Air Power Europe: europeanteam@airpowerinc.com +44 20 4620 0437

'Mad' **Mike Smith** has been remembered as a 'Titan of the Aviation world,' and a 'Colossus of kindness.' Aged 87, he died peacefully with his carer on one side, Hari the dog on the other and his children on the phone on March 17, 2026.

Leaving Mercers College in the mid-fifties, Mike's headmaster described him as a "plausible rogue." Expected to join his father and grandfather at law firm Herbert Smith, he lasted just two years before walking into the Admiralty one lunchtime and announcing, "I've come to join the Navy—I want to fly." Thus was a flying career launched.

He was an exceptional pilot, achieving Master Green standard—maintaining remarkable precision in speed, height, and bearing, and often exceeded Master Green tolerances by flying "needle's width". He later became deputy Examiner for Naval Helicopter Command Instrument Rating.

Eight years flying for the Royal Navy included being part of the first Search and Rescue unit at Culdrose, earning a Queen's Commendation for Bravery, that he always credited his crew for. Turning to civil flying he flew a conservative estimate 27,000 miles. Among his many remarkable achievements, he flew around the world in 13 days, 14 hours, and 40 minutes – a feat not acknowledged due to a brief log recording failure.

Mike Smith, right, flew some of the earliest contract flights for the Metropolitan Police in the early 1970s when Air Gregory had the contract flying Hughes 300 and 500 helicopters and an occasional Sud Alouette. Helicopters and their pilots were cheap in those days. One days flying a Hughes 300 for around six hours cost the police £243.54p.

Mike worked with the police and LBC as London's first "Eye in the Sky". He flew for films including, the first series of Doctor Who, The Avengers, Red Baron, Oh What a Lovely War, and most famously the final scene of The Italian Job. He won medal after medal in the British Helicopter Championships for his precision flying and represented Britain at the FAI World Helicopter Championships many times, continuing to win medals. Mike was also an instructor of instructors, an examiner of examiners, chairman of the Helicopter Instructor Examiner Panel until it was disbanded by the CAA.

In 2022 Mike was the 1st to be presented with Royal Aero Club Chairman's Award for his lifetime contribution to the world of civilian helicopter flight.

Mike built and sold several successful helicopter businesses, sold more helicopters in one year than any other company worldwide but his greatest commitment was to mentoring and investing in others.

Retiring in 2009 at 71, he settled in Cyprus with his beloved wife, Mary. He never truly recovered from losing her to dementia in 2024. His funeral was well attended by Cypriots and Expats who held him in great respect.

More Companies House updates on Air Ambulance Trustees etc.

Lincs Notts - Termination of appointment of Nigel Winkett as a director on 2026-03-18

Assoc Air Ambulances - Appointment of Mr Charles Oliver Maunsell Hackett as a director on 2026-03-31

Assoc Air Ambulances - Appointment of Mr Richard Corbettt as a director on 2026-03-31

Assoc Air Ambulances - Termination of appointment of Amanda Colette Mclean as a director on 2026-03-30

Scotland's Charity aa - Termination of appointment of Carol Anne Sinclair as a director on 2026-03-09

UNITED KINGDOM CHANNEL REPORT

With many days of adverse weather, with the wind above 10 knots and a moderate sea, the number of illegal migrants crossing the English Channel in April was, compared to earlier years, relatively low. Up to the 28 April, crossings took place on just 9 days out of 28. In total, 6,416 illegal migrants were landed in the UK by the Home Office, Border Force in the first 4 months of 2026. The total number for the first 4 months of 2025, to the 28 April, was 10,358. Year on year, 2025-2026 there has been a 38% reduction in the number of illegal migrants landed in the UK from small boats. Why?

The most important causal factor, for this reduction in numbers, has been the many days with adverse weather, weather conditions which are outside the limits for the new generation of very large, badly constructed, underpowered, unseaworthy inflatable boats, described as 'death traps'. However, credit must also be given to the police and security services across Europe and on the beaches of northern France. Those police officers who have frustrated the organised criminal groups by seizing their inflatable boats, together with their outboard engines.

A further development in 2026 has been the number of illegal migrants who have started their cross-Channel journey in Belgium. The number of migrants crossing the border from France, to launch their boats from the beaches in Belgium has increased from just 2 attempts in the whole of 2025, to 32 attempts in the first 4 months of 2026; only 5 of which were stopped before reaching the sea. Rather than risking the long sea crossing from Belgium to England many of these boats will travel south-west along the coast first and then begin their Channel crossing via the shortest sea route to England, in the vicinity of Calais. It's thought that this new long route from Belgium may be a response to the French police in Calais and Dunkirk taking a tougher stance in recent months.

In 8 years, since 2018, there have been far too many images of French police officers standing idly by whilst illegal migrants set sail from the beaches of northern France. Although, in recent months, the police in Calais and Dunkirk are believed to have taken a much tougher stance.

On Sunday, 26 April the French authorities rescued 106 migrants from a 'taxi boat' in French waters, an inflatable boat travelling close inshore near to the coastal town of Wimereux. One migrant, a woman, was airlifted to hospital by helicopter. The other migrants were landed at Calais. If the current operation, to stop illegal migrant from crossing the English Channel, were to be classed as search and rescue, rather than border security, then priority would be given to rescuing migrants at the earliest opportunity, in Belgian and French waters. Well before they face the danger of crossing the world's busiest shipping lane in the Pas de Calais, also called the Strait of Dover.

Increase in number of rescue vessels

Two newsworthy changes in April 2026 were, first, an increase in the size of the fleet of 'rescue' vessels operated by the UK Border Force, now part of Border Security Command headed by the former senior British Army officer, Major General Duncan Capps CBE. The former vessels Hurricane and Typhoon have been 'retired'. Defender, Ranger and Volunteer, all 24 metre vessels, have been retained and joined by

the larger, 26 and 27 metre vessels, Contender, Courageous, Enterprise and Intrepid, an increase in fleet size of 40%, from 5 vessels to 7.

One of the 4 new Border Force rescue vessels, BSC Intrepid

This increase in numbers and size, with a commensurate increase in carrying capacity will, hopefully, remove operational pressure from the UK's national lifeboat service, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. By responding to requests from His Majesty's Coastguard, to 'save lives at sea' the RNLI, a registered charity, has become an unwilling participant in a criminal operation and is now in danger of suffering from significant reputational damage. This has led to a potential loss of charitable donations from those former supporters who now accuse the RNLI of running a 'taxi service', to bring illegal migrants to the UK!

A new Anglo-French Agreement

The second newsworthy event to take place in April was a 3 year extension to the Anglo-French Sandhurst Agreement which was first signed in 2018. The new agreement, signed by British Home Secretary, The Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP and her French counterpart Laurent Nunez has a number of key elements.

The British Home Secretary, Shabana Mahmood and the French Minister for the Interior, Laurent Nunez sign a new Anglo-French agreement to prevent illegal migrants from crossing the English Channel in small boats.

Objectives
* Prevent illegal migrants from crossing the English Channel.
* Remove illegal migrants from French beaches before deporting them to their home countries, or to another European country which they have passed through to get to France.

Context
* Improved command and control with a joint Anglo-French Information and Coordination Centre (JICC) in Calais.
* Increase in British funding with a further £662 million added to previous payments, but with a condition that up to 25% wiil be re-directed if targets are not met. The targets have not been specified.
* Increase in the number of officers in northern France, on the coast, by 53% to 1,400 by 2029, with 50 officers trained to tackle violent and hostile crowds of migrants.
* Improved technology with more drones, two new helicopters, a new vessel with 20 additional marine officers to combat the so called, 'taxi boats', more CCTV and an increase in the number of night vision goggles.

The British Home Secretary, Shabena Mahmood is shown a drone used by the French police to locate illegal migrants in northern France. Drones that are paid for by the British government, part of the Anglo-French agreement

Conclusion
The total funding transferred from the UK to France, to exercise control of that part of the France which borders the English Channel is, since 2018, reported to be £1.335 billion. In the same period far too many illegal migrants, over 199,000 have crossed the English Channel in small boats, to enter the UK without permission. At the same time, there have been far too many images of French police officers standing idly by, refusing to intervene, watching illegal migrants setting sail from the beaches of northern France to begin their illegal journey to the UK. A journey organised by criminal gangs with scant regard for law and order. Will the new agreement make any difference? The British public, together with the media, may be forgiven for being sceptical. Nevertheless, as always, time will tell. As the year progresses, as the weather improves, with more days with light winds and a calm sea, will the numbers of illegal migrants, those crossing the English Channel in small boats, follow the current trend and continue to go down?

James A Cowan MBE

Note: The author, former member of the Royal Air Force, flew maritime patrol aircraft. After retiring from the RAF he was employed as police pilot and as an air ambulance pilot. He is a Governor of the RNLI.

FEATURE *advertorial*

One of the most critical components in Search and Rescue (SAR) operations isn't the helicopter. It isn't the ground crews or the command centre. It isn't even the equipment. What really saves lives in an emergency is clear, precise, and accurate information. SAR communication is the lifeline of search and rescue operations.

Good communication enables time-critical decision-making and addresses multi-agency coordination challenges. In cases where people's lives really do depend on the accuracy of information exchanges, technology is helping make SAR data links and communication even more accurate.

In this article, we'll take an in-depth look at SAR data links as applied to helicopter search and rescue operations. We'll outline the role of data link technology in SAR missions and how it works with helicopter search-and-rescue operations across various environments. We'll look at the benefits for the crew and pilots, the type of data link technology particularly useful in aviation, and how it integrates with legacy systems and operational platforms. We'll also examine the role of systems such as FlySight' s OPENSIGHT Mission Console and how it can serve as a linkable, highly effective SAR communication tool for modern SAR teams.

What are SAR data links?

SAR data links are the channels through which essential information is relayed between teams. These specialised systems transmit crucial data, such as survivor locations, mission updates, and sensor imagery. All of this is essential for coordinating accurate rescue missions that not only prioritise the safety and well-being of survivors but also those of the rescue teams themselves.

SAR communication systems are designed to share this mission-critical data in real or near-real time. They use a number of processes to do this, including line-of-sight radio, satellite communications, digital links on VHF and UHF, and specialist protocols.

They relay position and tracking data, such as a vehicle's GPS position, enabling command centres to utilise their resources as efficiently and as effectively as possible. SAR data links can also assist in supporting managed search patterns and drift modelling for maritime rescues by collecting existing data, such as current charts.

The key takeaway from all of this is the absolute need for SAR systems to relay all relevant mission-critical information as quickly and, most importantly, as accurately as possible. Lives depend on its capability to achieve this on time, every time.

Sensor and imaging data – giving more visual input to a SAR mission

Helicopter units in a SAR context are the eyes of the rescue. Their position enables them to see far more than ground units and relay that information quickly and accurately so that on-the-ground teams can coordinate. Modern helicopters are equipped with a range of sensors and imaging equipment, providing information not just in the visible spectrum but also in the infrared and thermal bands. Night vision equipment punches through the dark, enabling the mission to continue after the light has faded, while 3D terrain visualisation using mapped and overlaid data can determine the land's layout, even if a major incident such as a fire or earthquake has visually altered it.

Coupled with equipment such as EO camera feeds, anti-haze software that gives a clearer visual of the scene through smoke or fog, and a raft of AIS overlays, the helicopter is one of the most important and useful tools available to a SAR operation. Add to the mix the crew's and pilot's experience and expertise, and you have a truly essential part of any rescue mission.

The benefits of data link technology for air crews

The benefits of effective SAR communication are multi-layered, affecting both airborne and ground-based units.

Data sharing – Sharing sensor, video, and audio data with ground crews is faster, easier, and more accurate. Integrated AI systems can also sift through 'big data' dumps and, with human oversight, help to reduce irrelevant background 'noise' to focus on essential data. This streamlines the data-sharing process, speeding up the deployment of new information that could make the difference between success and failure in a high-pressure SAR operation.

Collaboration between emergency assets – SAR data links keep emergency teams connected and coordinated, making the very best use of resources, leading to faster rescues and a more efficient use of personnel and equipment. The information highway flows both ways, with ground crews also contributing to the collective data source, which in turn can determine where a helicopter or other aerial unit is located for maximum efficiency.

Pairing air support teams with naval search crews – Maritime rescues present a whole new set of challenges, and once again, it's the helicopter that can provide that all-important link in the chain. Their 'birds-eye' view and sensory observation of the rescue give them a more directional overview. In a location with minimal visual features, this is crucial, as it can allow an aerial unit to direct a maritime rescue team to a specific location using GPS coordinates.

At night, the sensory data a helicopter can gather using IR and night-vision technology can turn a seemingly hopeless situation into one where lives are saved.

Types of data link technology in aviation

A full arsenal of technology exists to assist aerial units during SAR operations. These provide clear and reliable connectivity between airborne operators and other SAR teams. The reason for having so many layers of SAR data links is to ensure that no information is lost due to failures, signal issues, or uncontrollable factors such as weather (including fog and poor visibility).

Line-of-Sight – Line of sight data links, commonly referred to as LOS, are high bandwidth, low latency communication systems. These LOS systems communicate real-time data, such as video streams, telemetry, and other sensor data from on-board equipment, between units within the SAR operating team. This occurs as long as the antenna transmitting and receiving these data streams can effectively see each other.

Using direct radio-frequency paths in specific bandwidths, they are a key component thanks to their reliability and low latency. They are particularly effective in open or coastal environments, though terrain can limit performance in mountainous regions. LOS systems are further broken down into specialised SAR mission links, including EO/IR video data streams, AIS-integrated links for maritime operations, and digital microwave links for high-bandwidth video and sensor data transmission.

SATCOM – The network of satellites orbiting the planet is an invaluable source of information, especially in large-scale rescue scenarios such as natural disasters, earthquakes, or tsunamis, or when the search is complicated by the destruction of known visual markers in an urban environment. SAR data links include this essential stream of information, providing rescue teams, including aerial units, with a vital real-time data source. Satellite communications provide reliable data links, while GNSS systems (such as GPS) provide positioning data, even in otherwise extreme or harsh conditions that may affect the quality of ground-based data streams.

Tactical Data Links – Tactical Data Links (TDL) are standardised, secure digital communication systems that use military-grade protocols and, if necessary, encryption to convey mission data between airborne, ground, maritime, and command units. The fact that they use a standardised system means that cross-border rescue missions, where conflicting operating systems may otherwise result in a breakdown of communications, can take advantage of data streams delivered quickly and safely.

TDLs are particularly useful during complex rescues in hostile theatres. The secure nature of systems such as the NATO-standard Link 16 also helps reduce the risk of jamming or interception.

Integrating SAR data links

With the huge advances made in data technology, how can these obvious advantages be integrated into legacy systems? The reality is that it is increasingly achievable, thanks to mission consoles software such as FlySight's OPENSIGHT. Data link technology requires compatible interfaces and integration pathways; modern helicopters, ground command centres, and mobile ground units already have those in place. This can result in effective collaborations between both operators and hardware units, such as UAVs and drones.

The information gathered from a huge range of sensors, including thermal imaging systems, GPS and maps, maritime tracking systems, and weather data, can be transmitted via SAR data links. Additional overlays can then be added via Augmented Reality console bolt-ons, giving the users a far more comprehensive overview of the situation. SAR data links can easily integrate with legacy systems, opening a new level of communication between platforms.

FlySight' s OPENSIGHT Mission Console

Effective helicopter SAR operations require a reliable and wide-ranging platform. The innovative FlySight OPENSIGHT Mission Console delivers exactly that, bringing a collection of mission-critical systems into one platform and enabling other platforms to connect to its onboard ecosystem. Combining real-time Augmented Reality and highly advanced video acquisition and enhancement programs, it significantly improves situational awareness for everyone involved in a SAR operation.

AR integrates real-time data with 3D mapping layers, while tools such as fog suppression enhance visibility in poor or foggy conditions. False colour enhances the visibility of essential details, while Super Resolution enhances the visibility of small details that can make all the difference in a SAR operation that involves locating a survivor in a complex environment.

You can find out more about OPENSIGHT's Mission Console by browsing our Enhanced Reality System page or by reading our informative blog on Improving Helicopter Safety Through Advanced Avionics. You can also contact us directly to discuss your requirements and how OPENSIGHT can integrate with your existing paramete13-17 July 2026 APSCON 2026, the 55th annual conference & expo, to be held in the **convention Center,** Fort. Lauderdale, Florida, USA. [APSA] www.publicsafetyaviation.org