

Police Aviation News

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Issue 364 August 2026

PAR



EUROPE ON FIRE

Multiple heatwaves bring forward the wildfires in the northern hemisphere



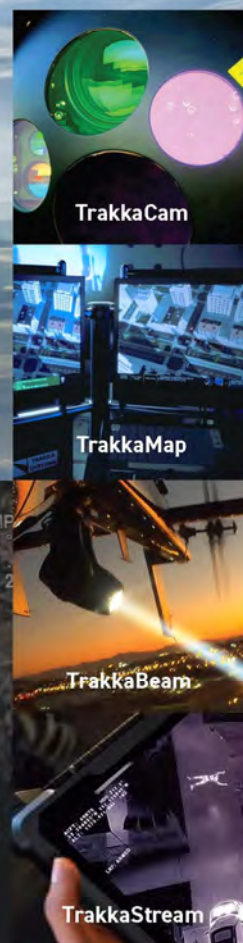
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Police Aviation News is published monthly by **POLICE AVIATION RESEARCH**,
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LAW ENFORCEMENT AUSTRALIA

QUEENSLAND: Townsville POLAIR has welcomed Sergeant Dean Hanrahan (below) as the first full time team leader for the region since the unit became fully operational in April.

POLAIR was first established in Townsville in September 2024, the unit only became fully operational on April 1, 2026, bringing it in line with the rest of the state, with an identical aircraft and mission role equipment as the existing POLAIR aircraft in South East Queensland.



QPS

COVER IMAGE: OFTEN DENOUNCED, BUT IT IS GLOBAL WARMING: Fires are springing up everywhere and some are prepared—many are not. The main fires were in western France, inland Spain and Sicily, Italy. France was more prepared than many with a standing fleet of scooper water bomber CL415s and other resources under Security Civile but Spain soon ran out of home based fire attack aircraft. As ever there are aircraft from across the world drafted in to assist.

Canada was suffering its own fires and the smoke from them led to friction between the and the USA as the latter tried to run an international soccer competition in often thick smokey conditions. The current favoured water bomber, the Canadian CL415, this is a prototype C-GQBA displaying a water drop (other water bombers are available).

POLAIR Townsville provides operational support on a full range of policing jobs including drug investigations, traffic matters, stolen car incidents, major and organised crime, public orders, missing persons and search and rescues.

Sergeant Hanrahan has been part of the team since September 2024 and keen to support the Townsville community with stronger than ever air support.

GERMANY

BERLIN: Last month PAN ran a picture story on the 'Final delivery' of an H145 to a police unit near Berlin. It only appeared in early editions before editing. The editor mixed up the names between two adjoining states, Sachsen (Saxony) and Sachsen Anhalt, and incorrectly ascribed the story to the latter. It was actually the delivery of the third H145 to Sachsen based in Dresden that completed the fleet renewal. Both units now fly H145 helicopters, and the Dresden based unit now has D-HSNF (21278), D-HSNG (21388) and D-HSNH (21406) in service in place of their original fleet of three EC135 helicopters.



Michael Mau

Another recent appearance on the test pad at the Airbus factory has been an H145 D3 helicopter believed to be c/n 21401 for the Polizei Mecklenburg-Vorpommern this is probably D-HMVA, but it currently wears the Airbus test marks D-HBTU. In the summer of 2023, the interior ministries of Lower Saxony and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania ordered four Airbus Helicopters H145 for their helicopter squadrons as part of a joint procurement.

ON-LINE NEWS

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UNITED KINGDOM

NPAS: Last month the operator in England and Wales published its latest performance figures for June and followed them immediately with the latest **Annual Report for 2025/26**.

Although the annual report tends to overshadow the monthly figures for June, it is worth giving them a mention. Aircraft were available for deployment 72.0% of the time, a slight decrease compared with May. As always, it is important to note that due to routine maintenance, engineering requirements and the demands of operating an aviation fleet, achieving 100% availability is not possible. Engineering-related unavailability increased to 17.5%, reflecting routine maintenance cycles and ongoing fleet requirements.

Response times

Crews continued to respond to incidents where air support can provide critical assistance:

Priority 1 (urgent) incidents: Average response time was 11 minutes and 13 seconds.

Priority 2 incidents: Average response time was 20 minutes and 30 seconds.

These times reflect the average from when the call is received to arrival on scene.

Operational impact. In June, NPAS received 3,726 calls for service, remaining above the levels seen during the same period last year despite a reduction compared with May. 42.0% of calls were attended, while the decline rate increased to 16.3%, reflecting reduced availability during the period and sustained operational demand.

Across the year to date, a high proportion of NPAS taskings continue to result in a positive outcome*, supporting forces in achieving operational objectives efficiently and effectively. This includes activities such as searching defined areas, supporting pursuits, and providing real-time aerial intelligence. Positive outcomes were achieved in 89.2% of attended calls during June.

Flying hours so far

Since the start of the financial year (April 2026):

Rotary aircraft have flown 3,454 hours on behalf of forces.

Fixed-Wing aircraft have flown 273 hours, supported 28 police forces and contributed to patrol and tasking activity.

On July 9 NPAS published its 39-page Annual Report for 2025/26, showcasing a year of strong operational delivery, and progress towards the future of police aviation in England and Wales. The report highlights how NPAS continued to provide critical air support to every police force in England and Wales, helping to protect vulnerable people, locate suspects, disrupt criminality and support major policing operations.



During 2025/26, NPAS recorded 10,580 flying hours, with 9,833 of those dedicated directly to policing operations. Demand remained consistently high, with 39,906 calls for service received throughout the year – an average of 109 calls every day.

One of the report's standout achievements is the service's 89 per cent positive outcome rate for incidents attended by NPAS crews.

Across the year, 4,382 tasks resulted in vulnerable people, suspects or vehicles being located, with many incidents directly contributing to the saving of lives.

The report focusses on the new future fleet of H135 helicopters and an ongoing commitment to innovation. During 2025/26, NPAS completed the first-ever UK policing trials of Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) large uncrewed aircraft systems, delivering more than 130 flying hours and testing how emerging technologies could complement existing air support capabilities in the future. www.npas.police.uk
Editor: The NPAS website continues to host the news, 36 items so far this year, but to date no National Strategic Board minutes for 2026 have been posted. Based on the 2025 schedule there would have been three meetings held by now. Current minutes are just a shadow of the ones published (and heavily redacted) in the past. Of six pages in the December edition three listed the abundant number of voting members (19), other persons involved with that meeting (25) and apologies (7). There was not much room for anything else and no clear need to redact what was said. In contrast the actual content of Annual Report is something of a breath of very informative fresh air.



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In the wake of a report from the UK Air Prox Board newspapers treated the events of November 2024 in different ways. The actual report laid out the experience of an NPAS EC135 pilot who was flying over the USAF operated RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk chasing what he thought were drones but, the report concludes, it was an F-15 fighter that was not showing up on the TCAS and navigation lights were equally not showing up on the EO/IR camera. Part of this was put down to a lack of experience of Lakenheath approach controller in working with police aviation in operational interaction. No one foresaw a need for training for a scenario that had not previously happened. Suffolk is one of those areas where there has always been little NPAS activity and it is doubtful that the USAF would necessarily welcome the local police buzzing around their 'American' airspace anyway.



The Closest Point of Approach observed on the Lakenheath radar recording was 1900ft vertical separation when within 1NM horizontally. [The pilot of the F15] had reported visual contact with the police helicopter and there was no risk of collision observed.

Once the report was sucked into the newsrooms of Fleet Street it underwent a metamorphosis into another being. Although the AirProx report publication was the prime reason for the news reports it did not contain the words Russian, tanker or Hull. Around the same time the newspaper staff, also encountered a new July 2 report from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) that assessed that between August 2024 and February 2026, drones were flown in the airspace of a dozen NATO member states and Ireland, forcing repeated alerts. There had been interaction between UK military aircraft and Russian Tu-polev Bear recce bombers, the Russian shadow tanker fleet, and drones.

Now the near miss story was of a police helicopter pilot who feared he might crash and die during the hunt for drones believed to be controlled by Russia above a sensitive US military base in Suffolk. The will o' the wisp drones were deemed to be absent in the report but reinserted by newsrooms who appear to have thought their readers would prefer a version where Russian drones caused the police pilot to undertake "a dramatic dive in the night sky" to avoid them. Somehow all this linked the AirProx to a Russian shadow oil fleet tanker docked in (Kingston-upon-) Hull.

Exciting times. I read the 'much better story than the original' in the Times of London but there were variations in almost all of the UK press, the good and the bad. So which newspaper mixed the two stories together? We may never know (or care).

At the Farnborough International Air Show last month it was reported that two additional H135 helicopters had been ordered. Although this news was reported widely at the time the specific story is that the contract for the two airframes announced in May was confirmed as signed at Farnborough. The current order remains at nine airframes.



NPAS currently operates 16 H135 and four H145 helicopters from 14 locations on behalf of the 43 police forces in England and Wales. Airbus Helicopters in the UK additionally provides maintenance and support for the NPAS fleet which includes the most intensively used police helicopters in the world. In addition, four fixed wing aircraft are operated.

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UNITED STATES

ARIZONA: The Maricopa Sheriff's Office is looking to expand its capabilities with another purchase – the current favourite type is the Subaru Bell 412EX.

Sheriff Jerry Sheridan, along with members of his executive command staff, observed a live demonstration of the Bell 412 helicopter and its advanced capabilities last month. Maricopa is one of Arizona's premier rescue aviation units, responding to more lifesaving rescue missions than any other agency in the state. Sheridan believes that it's critical that their aviation fleet can safely meet those challenges. Arizona's extreme heat can significantly impact the performance and lifting capability of the current aircraft, limiting or in some cases preventing rescues in the most critical situations. That's why MCSO is evaluating aircraft such as the Bell 412, which offers increased power, greater lifting capability, and enhanced operational performance in Arizona's demanding environment.

The unit operates a 2024 Bell 407GX and a 2020 Bell 429 and a fixed wing single. The 407 has been in maintenance for six months and will soon return to service while the 429 is scheduled to go into a period of maintenance. [MCSO/Christian Shepherd/PAR]

Also, in Arizona the Phoenix Police Department have ordered an Airbus Helicopters H145. They currently operate H125 AStar helicopters on patrol duties and an Agusta 109 is utilised mainly for search and rescue duties. A Pilatus PC-12 fixed wing undertakes surveillance and transport duties.

The Phoenix Police Department Air Support Unit was first established in 1973 flying two Hughes 300C helicopters, and one Cessna 172 airplane. The current fleet comprises an Agusta A109E, five AStar's, three Cessna light singles and a Pilatus PC12NG, purchased in 2009. The unit currently flies about 8,000 hours a year.



FEDERAL: Airbus has finalised a contract for the purchase of ten (additional) H125 helicopters by U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations (CBP AMO). These aircraft will be operated by Air and Marine Operations to support critical law enforcement, border security, and public safety missions across the United States.

"The expansion of this H125 fleet underscores the long-standing collaboration between Airbus and U.S. Customs and Border Protection," said Bart Reijnen, Head of the North America Region for Airbus Helicopters. "This selection highlights the trust placed in the H125 to perform critical public safety missions under demanding conditions. Airbus remains committed to supporting the agency with reliable aircraft and comprehensive services to ensure continuous mission readiness."

The H125 light enforcement helicopter is seen as a vital asset for airborne law enforcement operations throughout North America. Configured to operate efficiently in extreme environments, the aircraft delivers the versatility and reliability required for rigorous multi-role homeland security operations.

Manufactured at Airbus' manufacturing facility in Columbus, Mississippi, the H125 offers excellent visibility with multi-mission flexibility to conduct patrol surveillance and tactical operations at low operating costs. The H125 incorporates advanced safety features with the dual-channel full authority digital engine control (FADEC), engine data recorder, and dual hydraulic flight control system as standard equipment. These integrated systems reduce pilot workload and enhance operational safety during complex tactical flights.

Editor: Very little chance of this operator giving up on the H125 in the near term. It may not be perfect, but it does the job. Those in the industry long term will recall the furore when the Border Patrol first sought to order the AS350 AStar – then manufactured in France and the imposition of the wholly unsuitable MD600 as the new fleet. The stick that was used to beat the then Eurocopter was alleged impropriety that proved baseless. Meanwhile the Border Patrol was saddled with a political solution helicopter that presented several safety issues for the operator. The creation of a US manufacturing plant completely turned around the fortunes of the AStar in both the law enforcement industry and utility market and marginalised the MD product



NEW YORK: During the recent FIFA World Cup in the United States the New York Police Department reported that they had seized over 100 drones being used illegally and close to events

TEXAS: In a recent issue PAN commented on the arrival of a Bell 407 in the fleet rather than a string of AStar's. There has still been no answer to the question why but time to dig out this image of the first US built AStar AS350B2 for the US market and destined for use by the Texas DPS as N207DX (3951) at the HAI Heli-Expo in Dallas 20 years ago. The AStar was on the lawn of the Hilton Anatole in Dallas on February 26 (2006). The new helicopter was equipped with an SX-16 searchlight and an L3 Wescam EO/IR camera system. It served the DPS until 2024 and has now migrated to a civil operator in Rio de Janeiro.
[PAR/Airbus/Helis]



UTAH: The Utah County Sheriff's Office in Spanish Fork, Utah has just ordered a Diamond DA-62MPP aircraft for 2027 delivery.

Diamond Aircraft and AirMax Patrol announced the signing of the acquisition agreement for the special mission aircraft by Sheriff's Office, further expanding the operational footprint of the DA62 MPP within the United States law enforcement aviation community.

The Sheriff's new DA62 MPP will be outfitted with an advanced, long-range imaging system that combines high-definition colour and thermal infrared sensors in a single stabilized package — enabling deputies to identify and track subjects, coordinate ground response, and maintain continuous situational awareness across the county, day or night, all from altitudes that make the aircraft effectively inaudible from the ground.

Also included in the design is an airborne emergency location and communications system that can be deployed across one of the most geographically demanding counties in the American West — from the 11,751-foot summit of Mt. Timpanogos to the open waters of Utah Lake — where Utah County Search and Rescue respond to more than 100 missions annually. The new DA62 MPP will be capable of detecting and establishing two-way contact with mobile phones in these remote areas that are beyond cellular network coverage — allowing deputies to quickly locate lost or injured persons and communicate with

them by voice or text as they direct ground teams to the rescue site.

According to former police pilot John Nielsen, CEO, AirMax Patrol, this announcement underscores the lengthy efforts of the marketing team to increase the operational visibility of the Diamond twin in the California law enforcement community. Some of the most sophisticated airborne law enforcement operations in the USA are now studying this platform as a complement to their existing air operations.

Mission equipment for the Utah County aircraft will be installed by Rapid Imaging Solutions (RIS), a veteran-owned special mission integrator headquartered in American Fork, Utah. RIS is one of a select group of integrators that AirMax partners with to ensure customers receive excellent, certified integration solutions that take full advantage of the airframe.

After the demise of the original representative (Air Bear Tactical) AirMax Patrol is the exclusive U.S. distributor for the Diamond DA62 MPP special mission aircraft platform, specialising in advanced airborne public safety and special mission aviation solutions for law enforcement and regional public safety agencies throughout the United States. For more information, visit airmaxpatrol.com.



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In the wake of the recent APSCON 2026 in Florida, Teledyne FLIR Defense announced the winners of this years Thermal Imaging awards. The event recognises police aviation crews across America for use of thermal imaging systems in search and rescue, high-speed pursuit, and other lifesaving missions; This year the winning agencies were from California, Florida, and Oklahoma.

The winners of the 31st Annual 'Teledyne FLIR Vision Awards' are presented to members of the airborne law enforcement community who have best demonstrated use of thermal imaging systems in carrying out their missions, whether conducting search and rescue efforts, pursuing suspects, or saving lives in other ways. The awards are divided into four categories, including the FANG Award for operations involving a K-9 support team.

Vision Award: First Place

Tulsa Police Air Support Unit, Oklahoma
Officer Michael Richert; Officer Isaac Wall

Vision Award: Second Place

San Diego County Sheriff's Office, California
Deputy Sheriff Tom Hopman; Deputy Sheriff Cody Green

Vision Award: Third Place

Broward County Sheriff's Office, Florida
Pilot Steven Hungler; Deputy TFO Jason Petrucci

Life Saver Award

Indian River County Sheriff's Office, Florida
Deputy Pilot Chase Gomez; Deputy Pilot Jonathan Lozada

Pursuit Award

San Diego Police Department, California
Sergeant Matthew Zdunich; Officer Erik Skyhar

FANG Award

Tulsa Police Air Support Unit, Oklahoma
Officer Jayson Smith; Officer Todd Hanson; K-9: Knox



For more than 30 years, FLIR (now Teledyne FLIR Defense) have recognised the dedication and professionalism of the men and women in law enforcement who work tirelessly to keep communities safe. The Teledyne FLIR Vision Awards celebrate the remarkable achievements of police aviation crews that use thermal imaging technology to carry out critical missions and realise successful outcomes.

A panel of judges nominate finalists and choose the winners based on several criteria, including:

- Crew Coordination – how well did the aircrew communicate and manage the incident, both inside the cockpit and with ground officers?
- Technical Competence – skill-level shown around search techniques, anticipating suspect behavior, focus under pressure, and operating imaging systems.
- The "FLIR Factor" – how instrumental were Teledyne FLIR thermal cameras in completing the mission?

Editor: Other sensors are available. Despite many attempts over the years we have yet to see a true industry wide EO/IR competition. As for international entries they are just another pipe dream.

NEW MEXICO: A new Airbus Helicopters H125 has been delivered. The airframe N604SP (9868) is painted but still awaits its role equipment. It is expected to enter service later this year after role completion. [Jon Goldin]



AIR AMBULANCE

MADAGASCAR

Mercy Ships and Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) have renewed their partnership to help bring life-changing surgical care to isolated communities across Africa. Launched in Madagascar, this partnership enables teams to access hard-to-reach areas and transport patients in need of critical surgical interventions.



Traveling by road in Madagascar can be incredibly challenging due to the rough terrain and poor infrastructure, and they travel on MAF aircraft for field consultation to assess patients. Flying not only saves time for the selection team but also ensures the team can travel to evaluate and select patients from the most isolated areas for surgery on ship at a later date.

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A 2016 study of Madagascar revealed that only 20% of the population can access surgical services within a two-hour timeframe, and up to 95% would face financial ruin if they required surgery. With a scarcity of surgeons — approximately 1 for every 100,000 people — the prospect of receiving necessary surgical treatment seems unattainable for many.

Bernard van den Bosch, who has worked for both MAF and Mercy Ships, and is currently the Director of the Africa Services Centre at Mercy Ships he works directly with Bastiaan de Waal, Africa Regional Director of MAF in arranging transport for the medical teams and patients to *provide help, hope and healing to residents with the surgical care they desperately need.*

The two organisations previously partnered from 2014 to 2016 in Madagascar and have worked together in Liberia.

MAF has operated in Madagascar since 1989, serving remote communities through aviation. They serve local partners including, churches, hospitals, missionaries, NGOs, and development and relief agencies who are working to provide access to healthcare.

Mercy Ships' hospital ship, the *Africa Mercy*, has been docked in Toamasina since February and is delivering surgery and training. The ship is actively collaborating with Madagascar's Ministry of Health to identify the most pressing needs and strengthen the country's surgical systems through its education, training, and advocacy programme.

Since 1978, Mercy Ships has had one to three ships in service. Currently, they operate two hospital ships. The *Africa Mercy* and the *Global Mercy* with the latter being the largest charity-run hospital ship in the world. The 174-metre, 37,000-ton ship has six operating rooms and houses over 600 volunteers from around the globe representing many disciplines including surgeons, maritime crew, cooks, teachers, electricians, the host staff and more. [Mercy Ships]

NIGERIA

LAGOS: Airbus Helicopters and Kasi Healthcare have signed an agreement for the procurement of up to two Airbus H135 helicopters for emergency medical services. This agreement, which was announced during the 3rd Nigeria Airlift 2026 Forum, marks a significant milestone in the development of advanced emergency medical aviation services in Nigeria.

With this agreement, Kasi Healthcare becomes the first customer for the HEMS-configured Airbus H135 helicopter in Nigeria, introducing a purpose-built aircraft solution designed specifically to support critical medical missions, emergency response, patient transfers, and life-saving aeromedical operations.

Beyond aircraft acquisition, the partnership includes comprehensive support from Airbus Helicopters to build local capacity, focusing on HEMS flight crew training and pilot development as well as aircraft engineer training and technical capability building. Airbus will also assist with maintenance support infrastructure as well as operational support to ensure international standards of safety and reliability.

The partnership between Kasi Healthcare and Airbus Helicopters represents a major step towards positioning Nigeria as a regional leader in air medical services across the energy and public safety sectors, improving access to emergency medical care, and supporting national healthcare transformation objectives.



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UNITED KINGDOM

LINCOLNSHIRE & NOTTINGHAMSHIRE: The Lincs and Notts Air Ambulance (LNAA) charity operates a base from nearby RAF Waddington on the Newark to Lincoln road. In addition, they had a secondary base, at Tollerton Airfield which has been sold off for development by owner Brian Wells.

Wells offered the charity a different site as a free gift and the charity applied for planning permission to create a new site on a field south of the A52 in Ruddington in November. Rushcliffe Borough Council published its approval of the plan last month.

Tollerton Airfield closed in the summer of 2025 after the Vistry Group - which bought the site to build on - served notice on the operators. The air ambulance was being permitted to use "part of the former site" in Tollerton but that its time was "limited".



The new base will be located on land south of the A52 and A606 roundabout near Edwalton, off Flawforth Lane. Two artist's impression show how the new air ambulance base will look from opposite viewpoints.

LNAA added the need for the new base was "urgent" and "essential" as it plans to add a second helicopter to its fleet in 2027. The new site will include a single-storey building with a kitchen, IT room, and training facilities, as well as an aircraft hangar large enough to store one aircraft and a helipad with refuelling infrastructure. It is estimated the project will cost about £3.8M, with £2M contributed by the HELP Appeal charity, which offers funding for NHS hospitals and air ambulance bases.

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FIRE FIRE FIRE FIRE FIRE

The Northern Hemisphere wildfire season has started with a vengeance and in a matter days a handful of aircraft (including three Canadair water bombers) were in trouble. It looks to get worse as the season is indeed young. The intensity of the new fire season has led to increased activity in forward planning as doubts are expressed on whether there are enough resources locally and whether they are correct resources to meet the need of the future. The Canadair twin is seen as a primary resource but is there a greater need for light singles to undertake initial attack. In past years there was a mass migration of fire attack aircraft from the Southern Hemisphere to the north to deal with seasonal variations in need but with apparent global warming the temperature gaps are becoming less evident. The result may be a need to increase fleet sizes.

During the recent FIFA World Cup smoke emissions from out-of-control wildfires in Canada drifted south and drew the attention of their neighbours in the United States. The often-thick smoke was a major distraction from the game at hand and even drew criticism from the President of the USA.

US President Donald Trump told Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney during the World Cup Final to get control of wildfires burning across Canada whose smoke has been "poisoning our air" in the US. At the time more than 900 wildfires were raging across Canada, forcing thousands of people to evacuate, destroying homes and burning some 28,000 sq. km (11,000 sq. m) of land. If only it was that simple.

EUROPE

Wildfires are a global problem and now is the season for the northern hemisphere to suffer. There are usually bad fires in the Americas, but Europe generally finds that fatality loaded fires are a rare feature. This year has started out differently and can only improve. The normally temperate areas of northern Europe are already ablaze, and people are dying in relatively small fires (compared with the lowly populated Americas). Losing a dozen people in a single out of control fire in southern Spain may seem a small incident but it underscores the lack of resources available in a region where such major fires were previously rare.

France is seemingly well equipped to deal with wildfires, with a significant fleet of water bombers, scoopers and helicopters operated by Securite Civil for over 50 years but they too are struggling to control fires in areas normally not severely affected.

It is reported that history was made when Securite Civil Canadair aircraft were scooping water from the River Seine to deal with a fire not far from Paris. They had trained for the scooping so close to the capital for a theoretical future need, this was the first live operation. The future draws near. In a normal year wildfires in France occur in the hot south of France. This year all of France is unusually hot and very dry and at risk from fires that might quickly extend across large swathes of the European Union.

As this edition went to press there were stories of over 250,000 people being evacuated from particularly severe fires in the Bordeaux (France) and Madrid (Spain) areas. The numbers of fatalities appear gratifyingly low, but no-one dare say they are zero.

Many nations are drawn together and using both civil and military facilities to support the variety of aircraft drawn in the fight against the wildfires. A fixed wing water bomber from Australia and a helicopter from France sit alongside each other on an Armee de l'air base in France. Every one of the EU nations has transferred aerial resources to France, Italy and Spain.

In another social media post questions were asked about how large the French Canadair fleet should be by 2030 and how to size the initial attack system to adapt to the new areas at risk.

Social Media



France is well served by local water drop resources and has maintained a fleet for decades. The most recent arrival is the Airbus A400. The manufacturers have just moved into a marketing effort to promote the demonstrator airframe of this military freighter in the water drop role when, in late July it was undertaking its first mission dousing the wildfires with 20 tonnes of fire preventing material to help stop the fires in Gironde.

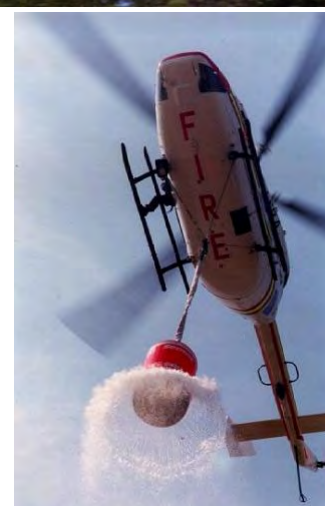
Other images include the fleet of Securite Civile scooper Canadair CL415s and the DHC-8-400 (F-ZBML) converted from an airliner design.

UNITED KINGDOM

SCOTLAND: From the perspective of the British Isles at this time of year Europe is hot and tends to suffer from extremes in weather – be that hot and with its wildlands blazing or beset by flash floods – but similar problems in the “islands off Europe” do not happen. Well, not yet!

Despite the global warming negatives harboured by the population, the situation is changing rapidly, year on year. A few decades ago, McAlpine Helicopters (now Airbus) were pushing helicopters for the fire brigade for all they were worth. Even they were simply talking about transporting equipment and crews not actual water or foam. No-one with the money was listening and it did not happen; it was simply too early. Global warming had not then been ‘invented’ so there was no pressing need.

Thirty years ago at Oxford





Still a relatively rare sight, the scorched earth in Cairngorms, Scotland. The region received rain in the period but the 'extreme' temperature tipped the balance to set wildfires.

Years ago, helicopters popped up from time to time with small Bambi buckets attached to damp down a small grass or gorse fire in Scotland or Wales, bi-annual displays like Helitech might show water drops for dramatic effect but water bombing was then what others do. Wildfires were just small burns that affected a British field or area of gorse bushes every year or so. Now that situation has changed and fires are more regular and more widespread. Houses are being destroyed on the edges of town and people are now paying attention.

The BBC recently discussed the growing problem of the size of wildfires in Scotland; we are no longer talking of a few isolated acres. A devastating wildfire burning in the Cairngorms has entered its seventh day, (nothing much in world terms of course) and helicopters have finally entered the battle to stop the spread of the flames. Attended by fire tenders on the ground and 100 firefighters, as well as local game-keepers, estate workers and volunteers the flames were allowed to scorch the landscape for nearly two days before the water bombers arrived on the scene. Now the two 'specialist helicopters' have been described as invaluable for waterbombing hard-to-reach areas, the Cairngorms National Park Authority says.

There has been vocal frustration from some local people, who believe the wildfire might have been brought under control if air support had been called in sooner. Availability is a problem. Last year a large fire on Dava Moor burned across more than 11,000 hectares (27,000 acres) at Carrbridge and Dava. This led to the Scottish government recording an "issue" after it found that the firefighting helicopters were already employed in commercial filming work. Compared to calling in a helicopter for what are currently occasional fires, setting up a dedicated 24/7/365 unit will be very expensive even if it is a national resource. There have been discussions about NPAS training up a firefighting role but, like the largely defunct winch and abseil roles, they are very much on the back burner.

The problem stems from the low number of historic fires that helicopters are needed for. Because the cost of even two single engine helicopters is a major factor the various agencies, private owners and insurers find themselves discussing the implications at length as the horizon burns. All relatively easy and safe to do now but not if the burns turn into the maelstroms that other nations are already facing as global warming creeps north. The English Channel does not pose a barrier to Global Warming.

A handful of commercial helicopter operators like PDG based in Glasgow and Skyhook, based out of Fife Airport in Glenrothes are the main suppliers of Bambi bucket water bombers. The latter have been providing the man response to the Cairngorms wildfire. Their pilots remain on "high alert for the danger of wildfires" and are ready to respond quickly. Many private pilots look out for unusual smoke or fire as they criss-cross the crowded skies of the British Isles, but it remains a rare occurrence.

It appears that for the time being there will be no UK new air resources focussed on firefighting. The time will be filled with discussions until something really attention grabbing occurs. In recent years the same extended discussions took place in the USA and Europe but now they are well and truly in the hot seat and pouring massive resources into the problem.

UNITED STATES

TEXAS: One of the lead wildfire and forest management organisations in the state, Texas A&M Forest Service has ordered two Subaru Bell 42EPX helicopters. These two are the first helicopters the company has acquired and part of a contract with options to purchase more similar airframes.

The first aircraft is expected to be delivered in December 2027, with the second anticipated to follow three to six months later.

In 2025, Texas A&M Forest Service and local fire departments responded to 6,304 wildfires that burned 132,366 acres across the state. During those responses, wildfire suppression aircraft flew 1,589 hours and made 1,345 drops, delivering more than 1 million gallons of water and fire retardant.

For decades, Texas has relied on federal resource-sharing agreements and a partnership with the Texas Military Department for aerial wildfire suppression. Those partnerships will continue as Texas builds a dedicated, state-managed fleet that provides dependable aviation resources and greater operational flexibility during periods of high wildfire activity.

The 89th Texas Legislature appropriated \$257M to Texas A&M Forest Service for the purchase, operation and maintenance of wildfire suppression aircraft. The helicopter purchase represents the first phase of a planned expansion over the next two years that includes additional aircraft, including multi-mission fixed-wing aircraft and large airtankers.



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FLIR.COM/380X

SEARCH AND RESCUE

ITALY

GUARDIA COSTIERA: Now entering service is the fourth Leonardo ATR-42 fixed wing search aircraft. Its arrival will enhance the overall operational capabilities of the Coast Guard in Italy in both SAR and maritime surveillance, protection of the marine environment and control of spaces.



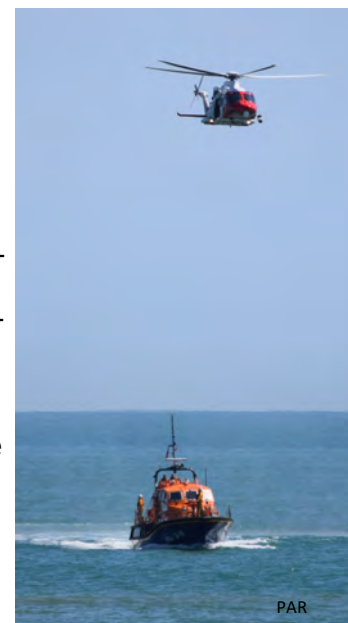
Leonardo signed the contract for the additional aircraft with the General Command of the Port Authorities - Coast Guard for the supply of an ATR42-600 Maritime Patrol (MP) aircraft in November 2024. The new aircraft joins an existing fleet that is equipped with an MPMS (Maritime Patrol Mission System) which, through three consoles managed by two flight operators, can display on very high-resolution colour monitors the images provided by the search sensors as well as navigation data.

In addition to a range of electronic sensors the aircraft are equipped with two bubble windows, two large windows in the rear part of the fuselage that offer excellent external visibility, and a rear door that opens in flight, to allow the launch of self-inflating rafts and parachuting material for the rescue of people in distress.

UNITED KINGDOM

POLITICS: In a month that saw a change in Prime minister confusion continued to rein in the halls of power in Westminster. There were plans put in place not to pay the volunteer Coast Guard coast watchers and others that are a vital part of the safety at sea system. Even before the detail of the cuts became known that was quickly reversed in a manner quite typical of the Starmer governmental style. They will continue to be paid after all.

As one Prime Minister packed his bags a story broke that revealed that states the Royal National Lifeboat Institute (RNLI) Charity that saves life at sea around Britain and Ireland pays the Crown Estates more than £60,000 a year to launch its lifeboats in rescue missions. The Estate which owns more than half the foreshore and sea bed around the coast of Britain is charging rent for 43 lifeboat and other facilities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This includes £31,000 for the lifeboat station downstream from Waterloo Bridge - the charities busiest site. Shock horror storyline but the rent for most of those sites amounts to an average under £300 each so not really as horrific as it is made out to be. The King is the patron of the RNLI, and he also receives 12% of Crown Estate profits. Of more significance might be the answer of whether the RNLI has to pay the Port of Dover to send boats out to rescue Migrants?



Channel Report

The number of illegal migrants, those leaving the beaches of northern France before being landed at the Port of Dover by the UK's Border Security Command, have come down, from a total of 5,454 migrants landed in 20 days in July 2025 to just 2,214 migrants landed at Dover in the same month in 2026. These migrants were landed at Dover on 9 good weather days, up to and including Wednesday, 29 July. According to the Home Office (Department of the Interior), on the 29 July there was a surge of 9 boats carrying 752 migrants. These boats crossed the English Channel from France, from beaches between Dunkirk in the north to Dieppe in the south, an average of 84 migrants per boat. Sadly, 4 migrants lost their lives in French waters overnight, 29-30 July.

How many passengers can an inflatable boat carry?

Although the total number of illegal migrants landed in the UK from inflatable boats may have come down in July 2026, the numbers are still remarkable. On Friday, 10 July, 225 illegal migrants were landed from just 3 boats, with one boat carrying 128 migrants; a new record. Then, on Thursday, 23 July, 366 illegal migrants were landed from, again, just 3 boats, with one, very large inflatable boat carrying 165 migrants, smashing the earlier record with an additional 37 migrants on board!



One of the seven UK Border Security Command search and rescue vessels, BSC Enterprise, recovers the very large, 13 metre (42 ft) inflatable boat which was intercepted mid-Channel with 165 migrants in board on Thursday, 23 July 2026.

PA Media

Fortunately, the UK Home Office, supported by the security services in Belgium, France and Germany, has also reported some success in disrupting the supply of inflatable boats, together with their outboard engines, before they reach northern France. For example, in July, 25 inflatable boats, together with 25 outboard engines, were seized from a ship at Felixstowe in the UK, bound for Hamburg in Germany, by the National Crime Agency (NCA). Nevertheless, the prevailing weather in the English Channel is still a significant deterrent.

In July, the UK National Crime Agency seized 25 large, 'flat packed' inflatable boats, in a shipping container, plus 25 outboard engines, from a ship at the port of Felixstowe, en-route to Hamburg in Germany.



Facebook

Since 2020 the inflatable boats have become bigger, underpowered, grossly overloaded and, consequently, they place their occupants in danger of being crushed to death, of being drowned, or dying from hypothermia. At the same time, the average number of occupants has risen from less than 20 in 2020 to over 70 in 2026, with over 100 migrants in one boat becoming the new norm.

Could the French do more - to stop the boats?

A prediction of illegal migrants arriving in the UK by boat, after beginning their journey in northern France, a prediction based entirely on wind speed and sea state and graded, low, medium, or high, has, in July, proved to be remarkably accurate. (Migrant Tracker UK). In July 2026, in 9 days 2,214 illegal migrants were landed in the UK from 31 boats. At the same time, in the first 19 days of July, the French prevented 282 migrants from crossing the English Channel in 4 inflatable boats. The number of boats stopped by the French is based on the average of 70 migrants per boat, as there are no figures published for those boats

which are destroyed before, or after being launched from a beach in France! In the same period, 1 to 19 July, the UK Border Security Command landed 555 illegal migrants from 8 boats.

These figures indicate that the security of the French northern coast is still in question. Nevertheless, there are reports that the increase in police activity in the vicinity of Calais and Dunkirk has resulted in boats, those carrying illegal migrants, now being launched from beaches close to Dieppe, 100 miles south-west of Calais. With funding from the UK, the UK government has paid the French government £662million in 2026, with over £1.3billion transferred to France since 2018, could the French redouble their efforts to stop the boats? However, although the French may not have stopped the boats, neither has the UK's Border Security Command!

Threat Level

Although the numbers, illegal migrants entering the UK after setting sail from France in an inflatable boat may have gone down, the third highest number, by nationality come from Iran. In the year ending March 2026, 4,712 illegal migrants, 12% of the total of 39,271, those arriving in the UK by boat, were from the Islamic Republic, with reports that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has now infiltrated the people smuggling networks across Europe.

Previously, in October 2025, the Director-General of the UK's domestic security service, MI5, Ken McCallum, reported that security agencies had tracked "more than 20 potentially lethal Iran-backed plots" in the previous year. This information, coupled with the threat to attack RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire, an airbase which hosts aircraft belonging to the US Air Force, now described by the government in Tehran as a "legitimate target", adds a new, a more urgent dimension to 'stopping the boats' and 'smashing the gangs'. On a scale of 1 to 5, with LOW at the bottom and CRITICAL at the top, the current threat level in the UK from all forms of terrorism is currently at level 4, SEVERE, which means an attack is highly likely. In these circumstances controlling the national borders is fundamental. Fortunately, if the decision were to be made, to 'stop the boats' then the wherewithal, the hardware, is already in place, on both sides of the English Channel.

Aircraft and Rescue Vessels

In addition to seven search and rescue vessels, re-purposed crew transfer vessels, plus a smaller number of fast, rigid-hull inflatable boats, the UK Border Security Command has, on contract, two deHavilland Dash 8 maritime patrol aircraft, together with a Tekever AR5 Evolution fixed-wing drone. Additional aircraft, including patrol aircraft, helicopters and drones are readily available, on standby, from His Majesty's Coastguard. The Belgian's and the French also have aeroplanes, helicopters, drones and warships. Nevertheless, the fact that the UK Border Security Command currently transports undocumented migrants from mid-Channel to the Port of Dover when a terrorist attack on the UK is highly likely, and the government then accommodates the same migrants in hotels, simply beggars belief!

The UK Border Security Command has two deHavilland Dash 8 maritime patrol aircraft, plus a Tekever AR5 Evolution fixed-wing drone, on contract, and can request additional air support from HM Coastguard.



A New Initiative

In the past it was recommended, in *'Police Aviation News'*, that when a boat carrying illegal migrants is intercepted, those boats entering the UK waters via an irregular route, then the first action must be to photograph the person in charge of the boat, the person with their hand on the wheel, or on the tiller. This person, on arrival in the UK, must then be arrested and charged with bringing people into the UK without permission. This is now happening and there have been several successful prosecutions. Most recently, in the incident described as the "mega dinghy", the boat carrying 165 migrants, the person in charge, a Sudanese migrant, Chan Mathok Atak, aged 19 years, was subsequently arrested and charged with endangering another person during a journey at sea.

In response to these more recent events, a reaction to the large, grossly overloaded inflatable boats, each carrying over 100 migrants, a disaster in the making, then, unless the UK Home Office, together with Border Security Command, has a better plan, the governments of Belgium, France and the UK now have a choice. First, they could establish an English Channel search and rescue region (SRR) and rescue migrants as soon as their boats enter deep water and before they face the danger of crossing the world's busiest shipping lane, the Dover Strait; then land the rescued migrants at the nearest place of safety, in France.

Alternatively, in view of the clear, the unambiguous threat to the security of the UK, from Iran, the UK government could invoke Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty and, together with NATO partners, stop all small boats from using the English Channel as an irregular route into the UK. At the same time, preventing an attack on a target, or targets, in the UK by those Iranian sympathisers who may enter the UK without permission, those who cross the English Channel in a small boat.

Conclusion

After 8 years, since 2018, when the first 299 migrants crossed the English Channel in small boats, the total is now close to 206,000 and the British public, as well as the citizens of Belgium and France may be forgiven for saying, enough is enough! In the last 2 years alone, since July 2024, when the UK elected a new, Labour government, some 79,000 illegal migrants have entered the UK, many of them without documents, after crossing the English Channel, an irregular route; at an estimated cost, to the British tax payer, of over £3 billion.

A very large, "mega-dinghy", an underpowered and grossly overloaded inflatable boat, described by the NCA as a death-trap, takes advantage of a light breeze and a calm sea to leave a beach in northern France. In just 2 years, since July 2024, some 79,000 illegal migrants have entered the UK after sailing to the middle of the English Channel in an inflatable boat, before being landed at the Port of Dover by the UK's Border Security Command.



French Society Nationale de Sauvetage (SNSM) lifeboat service

There are now just two options. The 'soft' option would be to establish an English Channel search and rescue region (SRR) and rescue all migrants as soon as their boats reach deep water and then return the migrants to France. The second 'hard' option would be to invoke Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty, to counter the threat to the UK's national security. This would be a response to the clear threat by the Iranian government to attack targets in the UK. All small boats, those carrying migrants, would be stopped from crossing the English Channel by all means available. In this respect the UK Border Security Command is well equipped with both ships and aircraft, with additional support, if required, from the Royal Navy, together with the Royal Marines. Belgium, together France, have both aircraft and warships too.

James A Cowan MBE

Note: The author completed a total of 41 years military service in the Royal Air Force. Whilst a member of the RAF Reserves, for 13 years, he was a police pilot and also flew, as a pilot, with the Scottish Air Ambulance Service

INDUSTRY

At this year's APSCON event in Fort Lauderdale, Florida (July 13-17) **Bell** were displaying an example of its popular 407GX helicopter.

The display aircraft was from the Volusia County Sheriff's Office all Bell fleet based some 250 miles north of the exhibition site at DeLand Municipal Airport. They have flown Bell helicopters (206, 206L and 407) since the 1990s on search and rescue, fire suppression, ambulance and policing Missions across Florida.

Also at the APSCON show **Smith Myers Communications Ltd.**, the world's first fully airborne-qualified Mobile Phone Detection and Location System (MPDLS) provider, were there announcing plans to offer its ARTEMIS airborne cellular detection and geolocation system in a Modular Payload compliant configuration, enabling seamless plug-and-play integration with compatible Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and other unmanned systems.

The new configuration is designed to align with the Modular Payload standard developed by the U.S. Department of Defense to promote interoperability, flexibility, and rapid technology integration across defence systems. The capability will enable ARTEMIS to be deployed on a wider range of compatible platforms with minimal integration effort.

This enhancement will significantly expand deployment options for defence, security, emergency response, and search-and-rescue organizations seeking to leverage proven cellular detection and geolocation capabilities helping operators extend operational reach, improve situational awareness, and reduce risk to personnel operating in hazardous, remote, or otherwise inaccessible environments.

HAT.tec, (Human Autonomy Teaming Technologies) a leading software company for platform-independent mission management of military and security-related operations based in Neuberg near Munich, integrated its mission software SCALE into the new Airbus Helicopters H145 now operated by the Bavarian Police.

SCALE supports operations by consolidating information from various sensors and platforms onto a single user interface, thereby creating a single common operating picture. This reduces operators' workload, allowing them to concentrate on mission-critical decisions.

SCALE is in the new helicopters delivered to the Bavarian State Police in stages since 2023. SCALE has been integrated onto a 17-inch monitor directly in the cockpit. The final handover of a total of eight helicopters to the Bavarian Police took place on June 22 (see PAN last month).

HAT.tec was launched in 2018 as a spin-off from the University of the Bundeswehr Munich by two aerospace engineers. Initially financed exclusively through contracts, the company is now supported in its scaling by a well-known German investor.

Every so often some entity decides that they will reintroduce a design from yesteryear to serve the market – all hail the glass-fibre Spitfire and the turboprop DC-3 - and we all invariably know it is unlikely to see the light of day, although there are exceptions of course. As the Farnborough Air Show opened came news that **Pan American Airways System** (PAAS) has submitted a funded Letter of Intent (LOI) to Catalina Aircraft Trust, LLC (Catalina Aircraft) for the purchase of up to forty-six (46) new production amphibious flying boats. Equipped with spacious Art Déco passenger cabins, each Next Generation Amphibious Aircraft (NGAA) Catalina II will be powered by modern turboprop engines and certified as commercial airliners to the FAA's rigorous Transport Category standards.



Currently there is no news on a utility version of the reborn Consolidated Catalina/Canso etc but to make it viable it is likely to be nibbling at the heels of the new build Viking/Canadair CL415 market. Meanwhile the PAAS Catalina II amphibious "Clippers" will be configured to the specific needs of high-end passengers. To be deployed initially in Africa, the first multi-sector trunk route will operate the length of the continent, between Alexandria (Egypt) and Cape Town (South Africa). Thereafter, further such routes across the Mediterranean will follow, before prudent expansion into routes around the Caribbean, across South Asia and down the Eastern Seaboard of South America to Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. Headquartered in Hong Kong, Pan American Airways System is a unique air carrier, offering a luxury "Golden Age of Aviation" bespoke air travel experiences to premium mid-market and high-end travellers. They will conduct flying boat operations under a license agreement with Pan American World Airways LLC of Newport Beach, California.

Many years ago, there was a furore in the US industry when the Department of Defense released around 3,000 surplus helicopters onto the market, mainly to serve local law enforcement agencies. These were mainly Vietnam War era scout helicopters (MD OH-6 and the Bell OH-58) and an ideal size for manned, VFR air observation. They followed a less numerous streams of mainly fixed wing disposals that included Bird Dog and Beaver spotters and some light helicopters (Hiller and Hughes). All of these free airframes were clearly going to seriously damage future sales by US manufacturers.

That figure of 3,000 frightened the industry but they need not have worried over much as many of the helicopter's came with bullet holes and signs of the odd crash or two so the actual number, never to my knowledge released, was way less. As predicted by their supporters, the DoD arrivals effectively kick started a seemingly insatiable desire for manned air support in helicopters in US airborne law enforcement. It might take 2-3 of those damaged helicopters to produce a viable airframe with strictly limited capabilities but it led to growth in the medium and long term. In the event the greater threat was from the arrival of European manufacturers, particularly Eurocopter/Airbus and some pretty crass design errors by US manufacturers in the 1990s. Coming out the other side, thanks to their limited lives and spares, the majority of those DoD airframes have retired, and the units are now looking for affordable replacements. Prior to operating air support based on a free airframe and cheap spares most units would have brushed aside any desire to pay real money to set up a helicopter unit, but now most are faced with having to replace a vertical lift resource that they find invaluable. Drones are a cheaper option but, despite all the hype, they really cannot replace anything about helicopters that matters.



As the latest edition of APSCON in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA has shown there are some very small towns and cities that still make it their aim in life to buy into a new helicopter for their protection and security.

Across the USA, law enforcement agencies have grown increasingly interested in turning to aviation units to meet the evolving demands of public safety missions. Since accepting delivery of their new Bell 505 from **Hangar One Avionics** last year, California's Chino Police Department has integrated airborne support into daily operations, enabling their ability to respond to calls, coordinate resources, and protect the communities they serve. Chino has 150 employees and 50 volunteers to look after a population of under 100,000 living in an area of under 30 square miles.

The work being done by the Chino Police Department and similar operations across the country demonstrates the growing importance of aviation in law enforcement. These teams are not only responding to emergencies, but they are also proactively supporting patrols, assisting in search and rescue operations, and providing vital intelligence feedback during major events and disasters. Their efforts contribute to safer outcomes for officers and their communities.

Melbourne, Florida based **South East Aerospace Inc.**, (SEA), a leader in law enforcement aircraft modifications, delivered a mission ready Bell 505 to the Flagler County Sheriff Office (FCSO), a mid-sized law enforcement agency in Florida employing approximately 224 sworn officers and looking after an area 570 square miles and a population of 115,00 (plus the many holiday makers from across the world). The aircraft was not new, Flagler County Sheriff's Office based in Bunnell, is one of two counties on the Atlantic coast of Florida not to have a sheriff's helicopter. Now a prominent attorney has 'donated' his sev-

en years old Bell 505 to the department and it has been modified to include an expanded instrument panel with the MacroBlue MB15W NVIS/Touchscreen monitor, a Technisonic TDFM-9100 tactical radio, a three-place PS Engineering PAC-45 mission audio distribution system, and a Garmin GTX-345 ADS-B Out/In transponder. For ISR operations, SEA installed the Trakka mission suite to include the TC-300 EO/IR sensor, TC100 Mapping Computer, TLX Searchlight and TrakkaStream for Video Downlink capability. The full cockpit was also upgraded and certified for NVIS operations via existing STC, held by Aero Dynamix Inc. (ADI).

SEA also provisioned the Bell 505 for the MED-PAC EMS Lite system per an existing STC. As the name implies, this upgrade brings a lightweight EMS ability to the Bell 505 aircraft, replacing the copilot seat and the aft seats. When employed, with the EMS upgrade, the aircraft can carry a single patient. This additional tool will allow FCSO to provide additional support in emergency situations to airlift injured officers and civilians as needed.

SEA has modified over 50 aircraft for law enforcement agencies across the US. Some of these include Michigan, Connecticut, multiple agencies in Florida, and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). SEA has also recently added EASA and TCCA validation to many of its STCs while also adding a console STC for the Kodiak 100/200 aircraft.

Moving on from Florida to the wider world, at the Farnborough International Airshow Bell Textron Inc., were displaying several aircraft and also announced that it has delivered its **700th Bell 505** to a private VIP operator, highlighting the platforms' popularity in the corporate aircraft segment.

Since its introduction in 2017, the Bell 505 has accumulated more than 390,000 flight hours and operates in more than 55 countries across six continents. Based on the proven Bell 206L-4 rotor and drive system, the Bell 505 brings that familiar feel of its predecessor and elevates it with intuitive avionics and operational reliability supported by a global network of trusted specialists in their respective fields for MRO and simulator training.



A plane flying to Liverpool had to return to the Spanish tourist island of Tenerife after a 'huge' fight broke out between passengers onboard. Roughly 10 people were involved in the brawl on the easyJet airliner. The captain made the decision to return to Spain about 30 minutes after departure due to the danger the fight posed to the safety of the flight. Spanish police met an EasyJet flight EZY3352 an **Airbus A320-214 G-EZTG** when it touched down at Tenerife South airport after the aircraft returned there after abandoning a flight to Liverpool John Lennon Airport.

In June it was announced that a new UK government proposal could see passengers who disrupt flight banned from travelling with any airline, rather than just the one involved in the incident.

Officials at the Department for Transport and the Home Office are developing a scheme that would allow carriers to share information on unruly passengers.

Announced at the Farnborough Air Show were plans for **Teledyne FLIR Defense** to begin assembling its Star SAFIRE EO/IR surveillance systems in the UK after receiving approval to manufacture the systems locally for British defence customers.

Assembly will take place at the company's facility in West Malling, Kent, marking the first time these airborne surveillance systems will be assembled in the country.

Teledyne FLIR said the move follows more than two years of planning and aligns with the UK Ministry of Defence's push to expand domestic manufacturing and skilled jobs under its Defence Investment Plan. Star SAFIRE systems are turrets used on military aircraft and helicopters for intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, targeting, and search-and-rescue missions.

Craig Cooper, director and site lead at the West Malling facility, said local production reflects increasing demand to strengthen the country's industrial base while supporting broader European manufacturing efforts.

The company also said it is preparing to assemble surveillance systems for other European customers as part of the European Defence Industrial Strategy, which encourages regional production and supply chain resilience.

Editor: Strictly this should read 'the return of production capacity' to the site. FLIR took over the original occupants of the site over 30 years ago. Broadcast & Surveillance Systems (BSS) manufactured their own sensors on site and were those being used by most UK police units in the 1990s but over time this morphed into repair and support of the wider FLIR product lines. Although the original press release does not mention it, it would seem that the shift in manufacturing is mainly to circumvent the US ITAR regulations as they severely restrict free trade in EO/IR systems.



A BSS 500 sensor turret fitted to a BO105 of the Indonesian Police 'in the last century' - production is returning to West Malling.



Corvus Tactical Aircraft a private firm based in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, has acquired the global rights for a High-Performance Turboprop Utility Aircraft from Airbus Poland S.A., a subsidiary of Airbus Defence and Space. Corvus aims to become a manufacturer and global supplier of cost-effective aircraft and related solutions, mainly for Rapid Response Aerial Firefighting and Agricultural services, as well as other innovative applications and specialised markets.

The Canadian built airframe is called Raven, and it is based on the PZL-106 Turbo-KRUK single engine and Corvus are aiming at the fire suppression market. The aircraft dates back to 1998 and the Canadian project was first announced in November 2023.

It is not designed to replace the existing airtanker fleets; it is designed as an affordable complement to the larger Canadair and Air Tractor resources with an ability to undertake early water attacks on small fires before they develop.

Bromma Air Maintenance (BAM) and **Trakka Systems** have a four-year contract to upgrade the equipment on the three AW139 helicopters being operated by the Estonian Police and Border Guard.

The aircraft will be equipped with advanced mission systems that will significantly enhance their capabilities for border and maritime patrol, surveillance, and search and rescue operations. The upgrades will improve situational awareness, operational effectiveness, and mission response capability, enabling crews to perform their duties more safely and efficiently.

This project further strengthens the successful partnership between BAM and Trakka Systems in delivering advanced airborne mission solutions for public safety and government operators.

The Contract is financed by the EU Cohesion Fund project (2021-2027.2.03.23-0017), "Increasing Maritime Rescue Capability", and co-financed by the Estonian state budget.

Airbus Helicopters has launched a dedicated training academy in the UK to provide a one-stop-shop for rotary wing technical training, with more than 400 pilots, engineering technicians and aerospace leaders expected to go through the academy on an annual basis.



The launch directly addresses an urgent industry challenge by providing a resilient, highly skilled pipeline of aviation professionals at a time of critical global demand. Spanning nearly 12,000 square metres, the training academy brings together under a single offering all of Airbus Helicopters' advanced engineering type-training, pilot training, and executive leadership management modules.

In addition, the training academy is fully aligned with the UK Government's domestic Skills Agenda, and offers comprehensive, levy-funded Level 3, 4, 5 and 6 Apprenticeship pathways in Engineering and support functions. By bridging the gap between foundational education and highly complex, regulated aerospace careers, the academy provides direct regional socio-economic benefits while establishing long-term STEM pathways.



The high-tier technical instruction provided by the Academy seeks to directly support organisations vital to national resilience, including the UK Ministry of Defence's Military Flying Training System (MFTS) at RAF Shawbury and RAF Valley, the National Police Air Service (NPAS), and nearly two-thirds of the UK's air ambulance (HEMS) providers.

Operating under rigorous UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and EASA frameworks, the Academy holds the distinction of being the only organisation in the country to deliver a Part 147-approved Airbus Helicopters B2 type course, drawing civil and military students from both domestic markets and international fleets.

Airbus Helicopters and **The Helicopter Company** (THC), a Public Investment Fund (PIF) company and Saudi Arabia's leading commercial helicopter operator, have announced a firm order for eight additional Airbus H145 helicopters at Farnborough International Airshow.

The helicopters are scheduled for delivery between 2027 and 2028 and fall under the historic framework agreement signed between THC and Airbus at Verticon in 2024. The original framework agreement between THC and Airbus included up to 120 Airbus helicopters of various types set to be delivered over the next three to five years.

THC is at the forefront of developing commercial helicopter services in Saudi Arabia, having introduced the H145 into service for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and deployed the H145 in support of the Dakar Rally.



The French company **Positive Aviation** based at Toulouse Blagnac Airport, has a project to convert an ATR 72 twin prop airliner into a scooper aircraft for fighting fires. It features the addition of two amphibious floats beneath the standard twin prop airliner with an ability to carry a payload of 8,000 litres of water. It has reached a major step in the manufacture of its future scooper prototype, the FF-72-S, Multiplast has produced the first composite float. Flight tests of the prototype are scheduled for next year.

They also have a project to convert the same type into a tanker aircraft without the scooping ability. The FF72-S-X1 demonstrator is currently assembled, set for its first flight later this year.



ACCIDENTS & INCIDENTS

24 June 2026 Canadair CL-415 C-GQBE Firefighting aircraft of the Government of Quebec. Departed La Grande Rivière Airport, Quebec, with two crew aboard to work on a fire some 24 miles from the airport. Flying a visual flight rules (VFR) wildfire suppression mission, upon arriving at the lake used for water scooping, QUE243 and another CL-415 (QUE245) each completed two reconnaissance circuits to check for obstacles. Finding none, both aircraft commenced scooping operations. During the eighth water scoop, just as the aircraft was about to leave the water, it struck a submerged rock. After becoming airborne, the crew noticed that the water tanks were draining but observed no other abnormalities. Once the tanks had emptied, the crew flew two additional circuits over the lake and identified a rock that was very difficult to see because sunlight reflecting on the water gave it a reddish appearance, causing the rock to blend into the surroundings. QUE243 returned to CYGL without declaring an emergency. The aircraft was ferried to Québec City Airport (CYQB) under a flight permit for repairs. [ASN]

24 June 2026 Rockwell Aero Commander 690C Jetprop 840 C-FNRP Firefighting spotter aircraft operated by Buffalo Airways. The 1980 build aircraft callsign Bird Dog 104, departed Hay River Airport, Northern Territories, Canada with three persons to work on a fire identified as FS009 — a naturally-caused fire discovered June 24 in the Martin Hills area near Fort Simpson. After about two hours on station the aircraft crashed while coordinating firefighting operations 50km from Fort Simpson, NT. Initial information was that the left wing and tail section were not found with the main wreckage.

26 June 2026 Bell 407GXP N365AE Air ambulance operating for Air Evac Lifeteam. Departed Mother Frances Hospital Heliport, TX with the pilot only aboard. While on the approach to Tyler-Pounds Regional Airport, Tyler, Texas, USA suffered bird strike. Landed safely. A post-flight inspection revealed damage to the left lower chin bubble. [ASN]

26 June 2026 Honda HA-420 HondaJet JA333P. Air ambulance operated by Tokushukai Medical Group departed Tokyo-Narita Airport with three persons on-board. On landing at Osaka-Yao Airport the Honda-Jet overran Runway 27. The aircraft sustained substantial damage, but there was no fire or fuel leak, and all three occupants on board were uninjured. Weather reports at the time indicate it was raining at the time with a variable wind of 5-6 knots. [ASN]

2 July 2026 Thrush S2R-T660 Thrush 710P CN-AZV Royal Moroccan Gendarmerie for Moroccan Civil Protection. Aircraft departed Rabat-Sale Airport with one crew aboard for a firefighting mission near Temara, Morocco. The crash of the aircraft was captured on mobile phone video. The aircraft appeared to be undertaking a left turn but entered a steep left bank and appeared to enter a low altitude aerodynamic stall. It came down in a wooded area killing the pilot. [ASN/X]

5 July 2026 Canadair CL-215-6B11 I-DPCI Vigili del Fuoco, Italy. Departed Lamezia-Terre-S Eufemia Airport for Naples. On landing Naples-Capodichino International Airport the main landing gear collapsed causing substantial damage but remaining upright. The airport was disrupted for three hours. [ASN]

7 July 2026 Eurocopter AS350B AStar N225LA. Los Angeles Police Department. Aircraft departed LAPD-Jay Stephen Hooper Memorial Heliport, California to work on an eight-acre brush fire near the Encino Reservoir, in the 4500 block of North Encino Avenue, south of Ventura Boulevard. A drone hit the police helicopter, forcing an emergency landing at Van Nuys Airport. Damage found to the windshield. No injuries reported. [KABC Television/ASN]

10 July 2026 Eurocopter AS332L1 Super Puma OE-XJP and a **Canadair CL-415 I-DPCC** (27) operating on Fire Fighting over Sardinia collided but survived the impact to make safe emergency landings. The Austrian helicopter was operating for Sardegna Protezione Civile at Guspini, Medio Campidano, Sardinia and the Italian fixed wing was based with Vigili Del Fuoco in Olbia. As the Canadair passed beneath the Super Puma, the helicopter's 30-metre Bambi Bucket (the flexible water bag slung under the helicopter) cable became snagged on the Canadair's wing, causing the actual Bambi Bucket to detach and fall to the ground. No one was injured, and both aircraft made safe landings.

12 July 2026 Kaman K-1200 K-Max N40HX Firefighting helicopter operated by Helicopter Express LLC. The aircraft crashed during fire-fighting operations at the Gold Mountain Fire after crashing into the Silver Jack Reservoir, in the southwest part of Gunnison County Colorado, USA. Silver Jack Reservoir is about 12 miles northeast of Ridgway and 15 miles northeast of Ouray. The lake covers nearly 300 acres. The pilot, Nicholas Dale, 56, of Sooke, British Columbia, Canada, died in the crash and the helicopter was destroyed. [ASN/Gunnison County Sheriff's Office]

15 July 2026 Canadair CL-415 F-**** Firefighting aircraft of Securite Civile. The aircraft sustained minor damage to a wingtip during scooping water while fighting fires in Fontainebleau, France. Aircraft has since returned to service. [franceinfo]

16 July 2026 Canadair CL-215 EC-GBT Firefighting aircraft on lease to the Portuguese Government from Avincis. Was involved in a serious incident during water scooping operations on the Tagus River near Portas de Rodao in Portugal. While attempting to collect water the aircraft deviated from its line and came to rest on the river bank. Severe damage to the front of the fuselage, other damage to propellers and left wing and float, the rear section partially submerged. The crew evacuated the 1977 build aircraft safely, [Savvas Kotrides/Mavio/ASN]

20 July 2026 Bell 407 N519SF Air ambulance of Survival Flight. The helicopter made a precautionary landing in a field near Little Rock, Arkansas due to an engine chip warning light. Three occupants were unhurt and no damage reported. [ASN]

UNMANNED MYANMAR

The Ram Union team, a civilian rescue team from east China's Zhejiang Province has been active in the last couple of months trialling large quad rotor drones to undertake the rescue of flood victims in several Asian countries.

The drones have been lifting rescuers to locations where victims are waiting and sending them to either dry land or nearby boats. The drone has a long line attached.

In other areas of flood affected Asia, China has been launching floating bridge sections from carrier vehicles to enable them to be taken to alongside buildings isolated by flood waters to allow large numbers of victims to be ferried to dry land and safety.

UNITED KINGDOM

LONDON: The Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley declared a wish to greatly expand the use of drones as first responders and to embrace a wide range of other technologies.

It is intended that in future drones will be part of some 999 call responses across London as part of a major expansion in technology use by the Metropolitan Police. The project is an expansion of the existing pilot scheme in the London Borough of Islington which has been featured in the pages of PAN in the past. As part of the Islington pilot, drones have been launched only as a response to a 999-emergency call and have been piloted by trained operators remotely from the force control room.

The technology allows officers to send drones directly to incidents, providing immediate live aerial footage, track suspects and supplying critical intelligence before officers arrive.

The Met is now operating three drone bases across London, with nine drones attending around 200 incidents each week. This should be set against the sheer size of the Metropolitan Police District which covers an area of approximately 609 to 620 square miles (1,578 sq. km), serves a population of over 9 million people across 32 London boroughs, but does not include the 1.1 square mile City of London, which has its own independent police force. According to official statistics (AI) there are over 15,000 crimes reported each week and thousands of other more routine calls, so the 200 incidents currently quoted for existing DFR barely addresses the situation or even endorses the effectiveness of what is now operational.

The claim is that drones are transforming how they respond to incidents - getting visuals from the scene in minutes, giving officers critical intelligence and thereby enabling them to act faster and more safely. This project is said to be moving towards the creation of a city-wide drone network, but no projections have been made public on the cost of undertaking this level of service.



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Police Aviation News includes materials produced for it by Ian J Commin of Insight Design of North Burnham, Slough SL1 6DS. This includes the banner titles and the PAvCon logo. In addition from time to times images specifically altered by Insight Design and others but originally produced for McAlpine Helicopters [now Airbus Helicopters UK], Oxford, will appear with permission of the original owner. In some cases it may not be possible to indicate the source of this material directly associated with the images used, or such information may have been lost. Such images may be marked 'File' or 'PAR Collection'.

Not everyone is enthusiastic, Jake Hurfurt from Big Brother Watch said drones may have a role in providing quicker updates to evolving emergencies - but the drones must not be used as constant flying surveillance cameras. A similar comment might be made about the widespread existing CCTV network which does provide 24/7/365 coverage across the force area.

Big Brother Watch have complained that the Metropolitan Police have refused to disclose to the public any documents outlining how, why or when it uses these drones. A similar situation applies to *Police Aviation News* and those in industry who might gain from information on the project and might also be able to feed-back useful information to those operating it. The human rights organisation Liberty said the force should pause its use of drones and other intrusive technology until a legal framework is put in place to govern their use.

It is noteworthy that the London DFR project makes use of Chinese manufactured and supported DJI drones. Many express disquiet at the security concerns relating to that – the USA has banned Chinese drones from large swathes of the public services based on security fears. Even if they are being overly cautious there may be a 'cause for concern' out there.

The force said that the new drones were quicker, quieter, cheaper and more environmentally friendly than police helicopters, while delivering **the same operational results** but that is not yet a proven fact and it seems the senior officers are closing their eyes to this being a very small trial with aspirations. How many drones will it take to cover London? Forty, four hundred, four thousand? Four H135 helicopters. To be operated by NPAS, are on order for manned flights that will cover all of London and beyond. The drones are able to fly lower than the helicopters with their more advanced camera systems, but I would expect some difficulties to arise with getting signals and visuals low down when faced with high rise buildings and the signal sapping street canyons.

There is the small matter that when these craft start getting to be a real nuisance someone will raise the security questions and of certification of a potentially life-threatening flying object. Helicopters are expensive because they are certified to very strict aeronautical standards and that is a costly process. Even a small part, costs the earth when compared with an apparently similar item from a hardware store that have hitherto been accepted in the building of many drones. I am not aware of a CAA certified DJI drone. What would that cost? It should not be a problem if no-one asks the question. Will the question ever be asked when there is a dead pedestrian?

Meanwhile, on hearing of the announcement Taryn Evans the Strategic Lead for UK Policing's BVLOS Pathway Programme posted on Linked-In

"Exciting news from London! The Metropolitan Police has committed to rolling out Drone as First Responder across London within the next year. Not only will this deliver the benefits of drone technology to Met officers and staff and the public they serve, it will also be used to support our partners in wider emergency response and public safety.

"This is the culmination of years of hard work by police drone experts up and down the country, who have painstakingly tailored this technology to policing requirements and have built a framework for operations that is safe and scalable."

I will pass the defence of manned police flight to Tony Cowan who has picked up another attack on manned helicopters that stems from the same story....

THE UTILITY OF DRONES

The report that the Metropolitan Police is to deploy drones across all 32 London Boroughs should not be a surprise, according to Professor Fraser Sampson at the Centre of Excellence in Terrorism, Resilience, Intelligence and Organised Crime Research (CENTRIC) at Sheffield Hallam University.

Professor Sampson also highlights the inadequacy of the National Police Air Service (NPAS) in England and Wales, with just 15 bases, not all of which operate 24/7. According to Sampson, this has led to a culture, within the police service, at street level, of not requesting air support as it's unlikely to turn up in time or not turn up at all! Gone are the halcyon days when, with 30 regional air support units, you could rely on a police aircraft, an aeroplane or helicopter, being above an incident within 20 minutes, or less.

So far, so good, although Sampson's assertion that the police helicopter is no more than a flying camera platform is way off the mark. Moreover, he also expresses surprise that the police have taken so long to adopt cheaper, adaptive technology that has proved itself in so many other fields. However, a recent media report, from the BBC, highlights the value, or not, of live facial recognition (LFR) at the recent annual

Appleby Horse Fair, a four-day event in June which attracts thousands of members of the 'travelling community'. After scanning over 55,000 faces using LFR, it led to only 3 persons being matched and one person being arrested from a 'people of interest' watchlist. Cumbria Police have suggested that LFR may have acted as a deterrent to others on the watchlist who'd hoped to attend this event; there were over 1,800 faces on the custom-made watchlist. Cumbria Police is one of only 13 of the 43 police forces in England and Wales to use LFR. Other media reports highlight the fact that artificial intelligence (AI) has proved to be a potential threat to both information security and national security too.

At the same time, Sampson ignores completely the value of the airborne observer, despite the fact that one of the world's most sophisticated, most expensive aircraft, the Boeing P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, has crew positions dedicated to searching 'with eyes in the sky'. In my own experience, when flying the Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft, the RAF's predecessor to the Poseidon, I can recall that when covert, with radio silence and the radar at standby, we detected a submarine, by spotting its periscope, on at least 3 occasions!

The Boeing P-8 Poseidon, the world's most capable maritime patrol aircraft, packed full of above surface and underwater sensors, has two large windows, port and starboard, between the flight deck and the wing, for the crew to conduct a visual search.



MoD/RAF

There is no doubt that drones have in recent years changed aerial warfare in both Ukraine and in the Middle East. However, in public service operations, police, together with the fire & rescue service (FRS), drones and crewed aircraft, should be seen as complimentary rather than the drone being a cheap alternative to an aeroplane, or a helicopter. Moreover, the value of the airborne observer, particularly in the context of searching for a missing person, or the tracking, or the pursuit of a motor vehicle, should never be underrated. Whilst drones may excel in a static situation. For example, when fighting a fire in an urban environment, or when monitoring a large public gathering, those drones that are currently used by the police do not have the speed, the range, or the flight endurance of a crewed aircraft. Also, they have to be flown within sight of the operator on the ground, although it may soon be possible to operate some drones beyond visual line of sight.

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Keeping up with Emergency Services News



In 2016 a member of the local Civil Air Patrol, flying a drone, assists County Durham Fire & Rescue Service fight a very large fire at a tyre depot in County Durham. It was shortly after this fire that both the FRS and Durham Constabulary formed their own drone units.



Those advocates of drones flown by the police, those who promote drones as an alternative to an aeroplane, or a helicopter, each carrying a pilot and observers, together with an electro-optical camera turret which far exceeds the capability of those cameras carried by small drone, fail to appreciate, or even understand the unique attributes of an airborne observer. In my own experience, when flying for the police, flying an aeroplane with a pilot and 2 observers, it was the norm for the observer scanning the ground, or the pilot, both with peripheral vision, to see the target first and then direct the camera onto the target. At night this can be more difficult, although with night vision goggles and a laser pointer added to the camera turret it becomes much easier.

Furthermore, when flying with the North East Police Air Support Unit, before NPAS was formed, circa 2005, the aeroplane, a multi-role BN Islander based at Teesside Airport, was achieving the same results, sometimes better results, than the police helicopter based at Newcastle. To save money, but without loss of capability, the right aeroplane can be as effective as a helicopter in the police role. In the day, all the urban areas, between the River Tees and the River Tyne were within 20 minutes of the police aircraft based at Newcastle and at Teesside. Moreover, the aeroplane, a BN2B-20 Islander could remain on task for up to 4 hours. With additional wing tip tanks, this could be increased to 6 hours. This flight endurance is well in excess of any drone and most helicopters too. I flew the same aircraft, the BN Islander, with the Scottish Air Ambulance Service, often landing at the island of Barra, on the beach, 'Cockle Strand', at night!



The BN2B-20 Islander belonging to the former regional North East Police Air Support Unit, based at Teesside Airport. The right aeroplane can be just as effective and more cost-effective than any helicopter in the police air support role. With police role equipment this aircraft could carry the pilot plus four police observers and remain airborne for up to 4 hours.



In summary, the drone is a relatively inexpensive way to provide air support with aerial imagery in a static situation, at fire, at a public gathering, or when involved in a road traffic accident investigation, for example. Indeed, there is a strong argument for every fire and rescue vehicle to carry a drone, together with a trained operator. In the future every police traffic vehicle may carry a drone too. However, for a protracted air search for a missing person, for a burglary in progress, or for a vehicle pursuit, it is the crewed aircraft, aeroplane or helicopter, which will remain the 'King' for the foreseeable future, but only in the right numbers and in the correct locations, ideally no more than 30 miles between police air support bases. The airfields at Newcastle and at Teesside are 33 nautical miles apart.

James A Cowan MBE

Note: The author completed 41 years military service in Royal Air Force. The latter 13 years were in the RAF Reserves when Cowan was also employed as a police pilot and as an air ambulance pilot.

PEOPLE

Retiring

Reputed to be the South African Police Service's longest serving pilot retired last month after a career that saw him undertaking flight operations from the mundane to the dangerous.

Lt-Col Jacobus Gideon "Div" de Villiers began his career with the police at Pretoria Central Police Station before gaining access to pilot training at his own expense and getting a fixed-wing commercial pilots' licence and progressing to a rotary wing licence and took additional flight training in the USA. He has been based Wonderboom Airwing at the airport in Pretoria, South Africa. And has flown all the aircraft types serving 37-years with the SAPS Air Wing since the early 1990s which includes the Airbus AS350, Beechcraft King Air C90, Cessna Sovereign, McDonnell-Douglas MD500D, Pilatus PC-6 and PC-12.

In all his flying career saw him accrue 16,900 hours in the skies supporting police colleagues in crime fighting, SAR and other missions.



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Award Winner

Jack Venables, from Great Sankey, Warrington, Cheshire, UK, works with the Northwest Regional Organised Crime Unit (NWROCU). After being selected as one of the 109 individuals across the UK to receive a 2026 Churchill Fellowship, he is to travel to Australia and Canada and work with experts overseas to research effective and ingenious mitigation for drone threats to critical national infrastructure.

Venables specialises in countering drones and has now been awarded a Churchill Fellowship that will take him to other countries to study how other countries protect critical national infrastructure from the threats of unmanned craft.



**the
CHURCHILL
fellowship**

He already works in the field as a tactical adviser and Bronze Commander for countering drones, roles that place him in the command structure police use to manage firearms and other high-risk operations, and the fellowship will let him build on that experience by drawing on the methods used by police forces, security agencies and industry overseas.

The subject he has chosen sits where policing and national defence increasingly overlap. Cheap, commercially available drones have become a persistent worry for the sites that keep a country running, among them airports, power stations, prisons and military bases.

Prisons have spent years trying to stop drones carrying contraband over their walls. On a far larger scale, the war in Ukraine has turned cheap drones into a weapon of mass effect, with both sides using them in huge numbers to reach targets that older air defences were never built to stop, a shift that has pushed counter-drone work up the agenda for militaries and police forces alike.

Countering the craft is a harder problem than it can appear. They are small, fly low and slow and are difficult to detect and track, and the responses range from jamming their radio and satellite links to physically bringing them down with nets, other drones or, increasingly, directed energy. Doing any of that over British soil raises legal questions about who is allowed to act and how.

The recent government Defence Investment Plan set aside more than £750M for short-range drone protection for the homeland and deployed forces over the next four years, alongside further investment in counter-drone systems for the field army and in low-cost ground-based effectors, and it committed separately to double the number of the Army's Sky Sabre air defence systems. Venables's work sits on the civil and homeland side of that effort, where the sites at risk are rarely defended by the military.



Venables is asking individuals and teams with effective or unusual methods of countering drones to contact him directly, with a view to including their work in his research tour. His choice of Canada and Australia takes him to two of Britain's closest intelligence and security partners, both of which have grappled with drone security around their own sites and borders. The Churchill Fellowship funds each recipient to spend between four- and eight-week's meeting experts in their field, in person or online, before turning what they learn into recommendations for policy and operations back in the UK.



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The Churchill Fellowship was set up in 1965 as a national memorial to Sir Winston Churchill and has since funded more than 4,000 people to research practical problems abroad and bring their findings home. This year's group is working on subjects that range from dementia care in rural communities to the harms of social media and greener school meals, drawing on contacts in countries from Greenland to Taiwan. Applications for the next round open on 1 September. [UKDJ]

Editor: As far as I have noticed there have been three UK police aviation related Churchill Fellowship fellows and another internationally. The first I recall was Inspector Norman Woollons who was the first Unit Executive Officer for the Humberside Police Air support unit. He used the Churchill funds to research police air support around the world, but I do not recall ever seeing the report in print. Humberside started working with the military and then took leased airframes to be based at the local RAF station. They acquired their own pre-used BO105DBS5 helicopter from a Norwegian HEMS operator, rebuilt it and eventually shifted up to an MD902 which was eventually discarded on the arrival of NPAS. He went on the write on aviation subjects.

In 1999 Tim Morgan, a Globetrotting Australian policeman from the State of Victoria, was both an officer and a pilot attached to the air unit. He spent five months on a Churchill Fellowship and visited a number of air units including some in Britain, Germany and the USA. The purpose of this Fellowship was to research the use of TI techniques in law enforcement world-wide. Australia has its own version of the Churchill Fellowship.

In the period Victoria Police had a Commercial Development Group [CDG] that enabled the department to develop and market projects and strategies of existing and technology with potential to overseas and domestic law enforcement agencies. On his return to Australia Tim was seconded to this CDG section of the Business Management Department of Victoria Police to implement a camera package and undertake downlink training for Victoria Police. Victoria State Police already recognised a need for this equipment, and they had been operating the LEO 400 EO/IR since 1998. Again, I do not recall seeing the subsequent report.

The Australian section of the Fellowship reminded me of Inspector David Scutchings, a Churchill Fellow from the South Australia Police in Adelaide who saw his travels as a major professional highlight and kept in touch with PAN for many years. His task was to examine airborne policing techniques to improve rural road safety and enforcement. He had over 12 years of experience in police aviation in South Australia Police utilising both rotary and fixed wing aircraft. His role extended to procurement and contractual aspects of police aviation in addition to instructing and managing within this specialised field.

Equipped with qualifications in Aviation Management and Search and Rescue he travelled throughout Australia and the world flying with police aviation units. His career in the police started in 1994, in 2005 he became a TFO and retired from the police as a Superintendent. Police flying and the Churchill Fellowship did not do him any harm, as reported in PAN recently he is now the CEO at Pilatus Australia.

Tony Cowan, who still writes reports of various aviation subjects for PAN and others was also a Churchill Fellow in 2009. His task was to study the US Civil Air Patrol and the USCG Auxiliary Air Service in the USA. This fed into the creation of the UK Civil Air Patrol although, as we know, the UK authorities still struggle to accept volunteer pilots, those with aircraft, supporting the police and the FRS. It might be said that drones at force level have made manned light aircraft unnecessary, but I suspect Tony might have different opinions on that. He has a background as a police officer, RAF flier for 41 years, police pilot, air ambulance pilot and police helicopter UEO. His 16-page paper, part of the Fellowship and published in 2021, may be found on the Winston Churchill Fellowship website. <https://www.churchillfellowship.org/ideas-experts/ideas-library/development-of-the-uk-civil-air-patrol/>

On checking back with the Churchill Fellowship, I have confirmed that there are several others associated with emergency services aviation/drones, some were missed by PAN. There are a group of Australian individuals who are more associated with researching air medical work – driven no doubt by the RFDS. Back in 1966, and therefore one of the first to take up with the Churchill Fellowship, Ronald J Clayton travelled to the USA to study Methods of Search and Rescue at sea. The most recent was Darryl Ashford-Smith of Scotland, a fireman and now drone operator for a mountain rescue team. He served for 21 years in the fire service and currently a mountain rescue drone pilot in the Search & Rescue Aerial Association - Scotland. He focusses on developing is the use of drones in the emergency and volunteer services sector.

Although drones have been used for search and rescue for a number of years, their use



is still in its infancy. Limited practices and procedures are commonly shared, with many teams working in isolation. To gather information globally would aid in enhancing the use of drones in the UK by learning from others that are further developed.

A similar aim was expressed by the late Toby Meridith; in 2023 he went to Canada to learn about the use of drones when working in a wildfire environment.

In 2012 Steve Cornish, a professional firefighter and fire officer for over 30 years, researched Air Support for the Fire & Rescue Services, the 51-page report on that was published in August 2021. [Cornish S Report 2012 Final.pdf](#)

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APPLICATIONS for the 2026 Churchill Fellowships open on 2 September 2025, offering UK and Australian citizens a unique opportunity to explore global solutions to pressing national challenges.

This year's launch introduces three brand new Fellowship programmes alongside the established themes, creating more ways for people with bold ideas to drive positive change in the UK.

Each year, the Churchill Fellowship funds over 100 people to spend four to eight weeks meeting experts around the world – either in person or online. Fellows return to the UK with fresh insights, international networks, and the support to put their ideas into action for the benefit of their communities and sectors.

Julia Weston, Chief Executive of the Churchill Fellowship, said:

"We are very excited to be launching our latest series of Fellowships, including three brand new programmes. I would encourage anyone with a passion to make a difference to find out more about how a Churchill Fellowship could help bring your idea for change to life. We welcome applications from any UK citizen with a vision for change in their community or sector."

This year also marks the 60th anniversary of the Churchill Fellowship, celebrating the amazing achievements of its community of over 4,000 changemakers who have worked across six decades to improve life in the UK.

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Supporting engagement in education

Promoting lifelong health

Tech for all

**the
CHURCHILL
fellowship**

In the UK applications to be a Churchill Fellow, to travel the world to seek out first-hand information on your pet subject subsidised by the Churchill Fellowship, will again open from 01 September to 20 October 2026. From the examples above it seems that even if you never enjoy yourself on the Fellowship it will provide you with a future in either aviation or writing! [Become a Fellow - The Churchill Fellowship](#)

By coincidence news has come in that Elfan Dyfed ap Rees (27/11/1941 to 25/7/2026) has died. Elfan was a Churchill Fellow, but he was best known for his creation of The Helicopter Museum the world's largest rotary wing collection in Weston-super-Mare, Somerset.

After working briefly for Westland Helicopters, he took up a Fellowship researching Russian helicopters in 1962 and set up Helicopter International and HeliData News magazines that facilitated the development of the museum collection. He held out against on-line publishing to the end.

A couple of years ago Elfan 'retired' and was appointed Life President and Founder of The Helicopter Museum having served as Chairman of the museum's board of trustees for over 40 years. I knew him well but only in journalistic terms and through his superb museum. <https://helimuseum.com/news.html>



The Home Secretary has (7 July 2026) confirmed Sir Andy Marsh QPM as the government's preferred candidate for the role of HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in England and Wales and Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue in England (HMCI).

Sir Andy Marsh has been Chief Executive of the College of Policing since September 2021.

Sir Andy has over 30 years' policing experience, having joined Avon and Somerset Police in 1987 and ris-

ing to senior leadership roles including Chief Constable of Hampshire Constabulary and Avon and Somerset Police.

Sir Andy has led significant reform across policing, including improvements in professional standards, leadership development, and the use of technology and evidence-based practice. He was awarded the Queen's Police Medal in 2018 and was knighted in 2024 for services to policing.

The recommendation follows a fair and open recruitment process, conducted in accordance with the Governance Code on Public Appointments.

MOVE ALONG THERE

Football is king! Even in Brazil of course!

An important but small part of the ENAVSEG event mentioned in PAN last month was beset by the power of football. The Solemn Session Honouring the National Public Safety Aviation Day, scheduled for Monday, June 29, at 10:00 a.m., in the Chamber of Deputies, was cancelled due to the optional public holiday declared for that date (Ordinance No. 4, of 2026), because of the impacts on urban mobility during the Brazilian National Team's match in the FIFA competition.

From time-to-time PAN has carried stories or editorial that seek to criticise the activities of the senior management of the UK police – formerly ACPO and now hiding behind the initials of NPCC. They, the police chiefs, simply cannot be seen as doing a good job.

It seems it was not an invention of PAN to take a swipe at these people with over egged opinion of themselves or their fancy uniforms, now a set of politicians that includes a former home secretary, Lord Blunkett, have researched the subject over several months and come to a similar conclusion.



The independent police leadership commission, led by Lord Blunkett and Lord Herbert of South Downs, drew on evidence from thousands of officers

Unfortunately for the report the date chosen for its publication coincided with England beating Mexico in the FIFA World Cup (football again). The appearance of the report was consequently 'drowned' in the celebrations. The report remains though and it should make its mark as all the soccer noise settles down.

They concluded that the police service in England and Wales, 43 forces, is "not good enough" and its leadership needs an "ethical reset." There are weaknesses in leadership, morale and culture across the service.

The report, produced for the College of Policing, will recommend a "root and branch modernisation" of recruitment, development and monitoring within the service. With a background of the most experienced of figures in policing choosing to walk away it cannot come before time.

The greatest challenges facing policing is not funding, technology or legislation it is leadership – or the lack of it. It is concluded that too many senior officers are getting their jobs not on their capabilities but favouritism and cronyism. That and a lack of positive contact between the officers on the front line and the public leads to ever declining public confidence. If those that serve do not get job satisfaction they will walk into another profession and the result is that there are few if any experienced officers in important positions.

Faced with a plan to build up a workforce of 38,000 officers the reality is that in March 2023 the Metropolitan Police had 34,503 officers, a figure that subsequently fell again to 31,884 by October 2025. Those that are departing are those in the experienced core whose knowledge cannot be replaced by new recruits. Those figures show numbers dropping to a level that relate to the force in the latter part of the last century.

Lord Blunkett, the only blind home secretary the UK has ever had, highlights a large number of managers at senior level who have been or are under investigation. At the moment there are eight former or serving chief constables who are either under disciplinary action or awaiting the result. There is a scarcity of resources, excessive paperwork and officers being "demotivated" by negative and overly risk averse leadership cultures and arguably, people in the wrong place.

"It's gone from the [1999] Macpherson report about outright racism in the force, particularly the reflections in the Met, all the way through to people saying 'oh, it's woke'.

"We make it clear in the report that there's no room for culture wars or woke. It isn't the job of the police in our country to take sides of any sort. It's the job of the police to deliver."

Editor: This is going to be a difficult task to 'deliver.' For over 40 years now the police hierarchy have overseen and created a police model that has successfully removed officers from the street. No one now in service has experience of walking the streets alone and unsupported by instant communication with headquarters and therefore they do not, cannot possibly, understand that model and its trials, tribulations and potential element of danger. There is nothing more sobering than being on your own faced with a handful (or more) of people harbouring negative thoughts about you. For well over 100 years that was the lot of every policeman in the land – but they mostly survived the trauma thanks to their individual street awareness. Now individual self sufficiency is largely belittled by senior ranks.

For years politicians and others have called for a return of 'officers to the beat' but it was always a forlorn request for a generation that had warm homes, hot running water, plentiful food ordered by telephone and no longer bathed in a tin tub in the front room, suffered from food and fuel rationing and were accustomed to total radio silence.

There was a reason that the police of yesteryear needed to be tall and male and were given a tall hat to accentuate their height. All that was interfered with to meet political ends relating to gender and race and over time produced a generation of law enforcers that were, overall, no longer perceived as able to operate as individuals fully responsible for their own safety. The result is that today those in need will only rarely be served by a single officer – in many instance 2-3 will turn up to even the simplest of jobs. That factor halves the effectiveness of any police force. No wonder there is no one standing on the corner in uniform simply twiddling his/her thumbs thinking of something annoying to do to the passing motorists – even if that is only barking about seat belts, mobile phones or dodgy driving. Simply attaining the level of service extant in 1990 will need three times the number of individuals in the service. The modern generation has the capability, but the leaders will not unleash them because they do not understand the task. If they do not understand the task they hardly teach it.

Too many senior officers (and their university degrees in sculpting and woodwork) have barely experienced policing throughout their career. The way to UK policing today is a BSc in policing, this combined with every recent Government's commitment to raise the number of police officers, offers excellent employment opportunities after graduation. The trainers will include serving police and professors in criminology. Strange, I never encountered any professors when I was taking a kicking but fortunately it was a rare occurrence as I was well over 6 feet tall and I wore a tall hat.

I am aware, from experience, that only a relatively small number of police officers pass beyond the rank of constable so the whole focus of this report is about 'the elite' in UK police society, arguably the inexperienced few who seek to teach many.

Flawed ideology is clearly why the numbers of police continue to plummet. If you do not look after your own or seek train them to look after themselves when things get rough all is lost.

What is the answer to this lack of knowledge? Potentially the media. If senior officers were force fed the 432 episodes of Dixon of Dock Green [a 1955 BBC TV programme with the late Jack Warner as George Dixon, a character he played in 'The Blue Lamp' a terrific Ealing Studios movie from 1950] followed by the film itself some of them might just get the flavour. They are fiction of course, not perfect, but they suggest a way of policing that is now lost. Regardless of its relativity to today it is the type of policing that the politicians say they want to return (even if they are ultimately wrong).

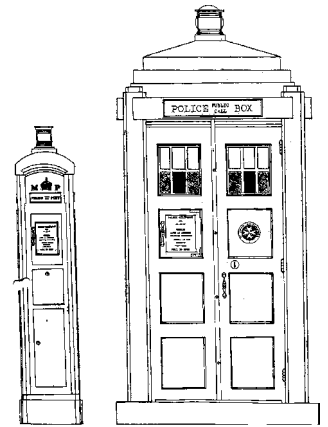
The flaw is that the storylines (and many other great media illustrations of the craft of policing by consent) are set in police stations. The twerps in the NPCC have allowed the treasury to all but destroy every station and barred the law-abiding public from even visiting the derisory number remaining, so getting the old way to work at all will be difficult. Dixon was set in the fictional London police station of Dock Green, which was inspired by the real-life Paddington Green Police Station all a far cry from the shuttered police places of today.

Where today is there a Place of Safety for those in need? Numerous times I have seen women in fear and the simply lost or dispossessed safely sleeping in a vacant cell (with the door open I might add) overnight. An easy to administer public service that the now shuttered doors halt.

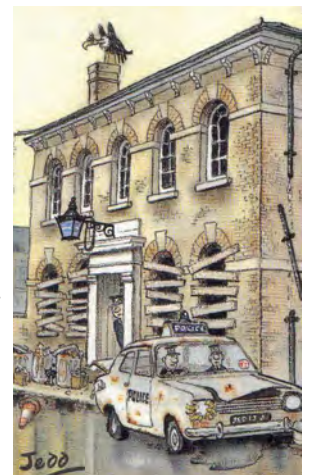
In past times the police assisted the media to produce positive police television programming but despite the utterances of a few in NPCC the organisation continues to be self-serving and rarely even speaks to the media.

All the media action surrounding "The Blue Lamp" movie was supported by a generation of senior and junior officers in touch with the people – in this case Sir Harold Scott GCV O KCB KBE the Commissioner of the day and his men. It does not happen anymore; there are no places to go to.

As we did used to say in monochrome ... "Evening all!"



Modern police are waiting for a new digital radio system (ESN) but they did not even have a dedicated personal communication system until the 1930s. The "Dr Who" Tardis police telephone boxes went in 1972 when radios were introduced.



John Edwards 'Jedd' 1932-2016

Last month Remo de Feo the boss at Vulcanair in Italy and not someone I always agree with, posted on social media:

"The veil is possibly being lifted, to explain why such high, apparently naïve, investments (are being injected into) GA eVTOLs, products based on imaginary markets, costs and markets which do not exist. Could it be that it was all along a masquerade to create, even possibly one-way flying objects for military applications? No pilots, no certification, big margins no product liability!"

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Times they are a changing sang Bob Dylan way back in 1964 and the same happens here in *Police Aviation News* in its 30th year of publication. 'Stuff' is being outsourced and that includes the PAvCon Europe Conference and Exhibition and now advertising.

New advertising customers are now being directed to a long-standing associate in Parapex Media, better known as Jeremy Parkin. We have worked together for a very long time, but he has an age advantage on The Editor.

As part of a plan to future proof the publication I have now outsourced the advertising and the website content therefore has been altered to reflect the new position.

The new Media Pack is on the primary www.policeaviationnews.com site in PDF form [in text on the www.policeaviationnews.info site]

Publication date for all issues is the first day of each month [National holidays excepted]. Advertising copy to be received by the 20th of the month prior to the scheduled publication date to guarantee appearance.

This will not change the arrangement for existing advertising currently dealt with directly by the editor.



When Alexander Grahame Bell the Scottish Canadian inventor and scientist who is credited with patenting the first practical telephone was working in Victorian times, he created a system that, whilst cutting edge technology in its day, was simple. For the customer, the telephone only needed a copper wire to carry the message for many miles. In those days, around 150 years ago, the power for the system was supplied by the telephone company. In those days the home customer was likely using candles and oil lamps, not electricity. True it had a tricky circular dial system but people can learn to love that...



Contrast that with my recent experience. BT, the main supplier of telephones and broadband in the UK have decided that the simplistic systems, reliant upon a single strand of copper wire, are 'old hat' and difficult to maintain and needed to go.

The move to digital has been made, to make it work the customer needs a broadband connection that arrives down a fibre optic connection which is boosted by a power supply, that has a router which is powered, that in turn has a signal booster that ensures that the signal reaches all parts of the building wirelessly. To make sure that it still works if the broadband 'goes down' there is a mobile phone booster.

Wait a minute we still do not have a working telephone. To get that you need to plug in another router to the router that sends the voice conversation telephone with a laughingly termed landline number (you know the one that served at the end of a piece of copper wire for centuries), both of those have independent power supplies. So now I have power supply plugs into at least six sockets just to make it work. Meanwhile the table lamp will have to stay switched off until we get another extension lead.

There is a flaw in this system of course. If there is a power cut none of this works. Many have pointed out that in a power failure scenario the elderly have no simple means of communication. With a little head shaking these worries have been set aside. Like Covid, it seems some are expendable. Perhaps the elderly and the infirm should be issued with red flags to wave out of their window at the first passing police foot patrol.

Perhaps more worrying in the sense of this magazine is that BT/EE are in charge of the introduction of the Emergency Services Network (ESN) in the United Kingdom. It is already late and based on 4G when 5G beckons, so it has arguably lost what lead it had on other systems such as Starlink and with flaky plans to perhaps fully introduce ESN finally in 2030, 13 years late.

In total there are now 20,840 new and upgraded sites to facilitate the coverage needed for ESN. This will include the current EE network of 19,795 existing sites as well as 1,045 new 4G masts which will ensure that those in the most rural areas of Great Britain can get in touch with the emergency services if they need to.

Meanwhile my personal mobile/cell phone uses 5G across Europe and most other countries in the world and even has a notional backup service from a satellite system. [ESN figures 7/2026]

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EVENTS

LAST MONTH 13-17 July 2026 APSCON 2026, the 55th annual conference & expo, held in **Broward County Convention Center**, Fort. Lauderdale, Florida, USA. [APSA] www.publicsafetyaviation.org



Always a great draw for those in airborne law enforcement, the mix of informative displays, training and networking continues to hold its audience even in these days of Zoom and internet learning. These images of the opening event are a few of those posted on social media in the aftermath of the event by the Broward County hosts led by Sheriff Gregory Tony..

