

Police Aviation News

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NEW REGA RESCUE FLEET
WILDFIRES ON THE AGENDA
DRONE EXPANSION

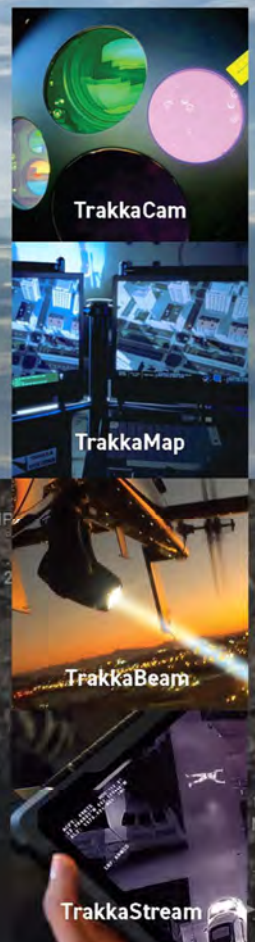


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LAW ENFORCEMENT

ANGOLA

POLICE: After operating mainly French helicopters in the past the police and military in Angola are switching to Italian models from Leonardo.

In a drawn-out process that commenced in 2021 the Leonardo helicopters were selected and initial deliveries commenced late last year. The National Police of Angola (Polícia Nacional de Angola) operates and is expanding its fleet with Leonardo AW119 light utility helicopters from Italy, following initial deliveries in late 2025 and an expanded acquisition of 14 aircraft authorised in 2026. Angola's President João Lourenço has approved a financing agreement worth €132.8M for the acquisition of 14 AW119 helicopters from Italy.

The funds will be used to acquire 12 AW119M helicopters and two AW119Kx helicopters from Leonardo for the Ministry of National Defence, as well as to "ensure the provision of training services, technical publications, the supply of spare parts, and technical assistance."

Angola's police (Policia Nacional de Angola) already operate the AW119Kx. In December 2025, it received two of the helicopters (I-RAIX and I-EASI) in a handover ceremony in Italy that formed part of the formal acceptance process.

This was preceded by the 22 October handover of an AW139 and an AW119Kx to the Angolan police by Leonardo at its headquarters in Vergiate, Italy. The two were the first part of an order for 19 new AW119Kx and AW139 aircraft placed in December 2021 by the Angolan Ministry of the Interior to modernise and expand the police air wing.

The police contract involves a support package including pilot and technician training, the supply of spares, and on-site support through TECNER, a company certified by Leonardo Helicopters and the Angolan National Civil Aviation Agency.

COVER IMAGE: REGA the rescue service in Switzerland is taking delivery of its new fleet of Airbus Helicopters H145 helicopters. This one is registered HB-TIK [REGA/Airbus image]

The Policia Nacional de Angola said the helicopters would be used for aerial surveillance, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, search and rescue, and other duties. [Defence Web/Parapex]
Ed: Several of the existing Airbus/Eurocopter helicopters have been retired and appear destined for Spain.

ARGENTINA

GENDARMERIA NACIONAL: According to a social media report the GN have retired at least one of their three Robinson R44s (GN-923) to Museo Nacional de Aeronáutica (National Aeronautics Museum) the helicopter is marked as Patrulla de Caminos (Road Patrol). The trio entered service over 25 years ago.

A second R44, GN-922, is photographed on a low loader road transport, suggesting that too may have been retired. One possible new home for that airframe is the Museo de Gendarmeria Nacional, where the former GN Sud SA315B Lama GN-912 is.



There are no reports on where the third R44 (GN-921) is now, but the timings suggest that these three may be ready for their next overhaul and that was deemed not financially viable.

With the only known training helicopter remaining being a Schweizer 300C GN-920 the question is what replaces those R44s? [JP]

AUSTRALIA

VICTORIA: The police fleet and its Starflight Australia operator have now reached 20,000 flight hours with their fleet of three AW139 helicopters. The individual airframes have been averaging 1,300 hours each annually.

Since entering service in 2020 the fleet has undertaken support of a wide range of law enforcement and SAR duties.

Together the police and Starflight have achieved one of the highest utilisation rates in law enforcement worldwide. [Leonardo]



WESTERN AUSTRALIA: The police have taken delivery of their first jet landplane. The Pilatus PC-24 VH-WPF completed its delivery flight to Jandakot in late July. Western Australia already operates two Pilatus PC-12 jet prop aircraft.

The Western Australia Police Force integrated the brand-new Pilatus Aircraft PC-24 jet to serve as the fastest aircraft they have ever operated, the twin-engine jet cuts regional deployment times in half to reach anywhere in the vast state within three hours.

Funding of \$15.8M over four years was allocated to bolster the police aerial response capability by leasing the PC-24 and upgrading the existing turboprop powered Pilatus PC-12 fleet. The new jet will be able to fly police from Perth to Kununurra around three hours faster than current aircraft. The capability will boost the capabilities of specialist police from Perth such as Tactical Response Group Officers, detectives, forensic teams and even Chaplains to the furthest reaches of the state. Currently a fully packed PC-12 aircraft would take up to 6 hours to reach Kununurra and need to stop to refuel.



The Pilatus PC-24 jet aircraft can carry a team of eight officers and be reconfigured to hold cargo including policing equipment, evidence and emergency supplies.

The boost to air assets is additional to the rollout of satellite communications to 129 police stations and 550 police vehicles across regional and remote WA.

CANADA

PEEL POLICE: As part of its plan to protect Ontario and keep communities safe, the Ontario government has delivered the first Joint Air Support Unit helicopter in Peel Region. The deployment of the Airbus Helicopters H125 C-FCRR marks the first helicopter to enter service through Ontario's Joint Air Support Unit, a \$191M provincewide initiative that is expanding aerial policing capacity across Ontario.



The new H125 will upgrade the aircraft for the Peel Regional Police to undertake the law enforcement role in conjunction with surrounding air operations. Equipped with advanced aviation and surveillance technology, the aircraft will strengthen frontline policing in Peel and the surrounding areas of emergency response and support in Ontario. The helicopter will also support regional and provincial policing operations through collaboration with neighbouring police services and the Ontario Provincial Police.

Ontario is investing \$134M in the Joint Air Support Unit for police services to acquire five helicopters to serve the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and Ottawa, and an additional \$57M, announced in the 2025 budget, for two H-135 helicopters that will support Windsor Police Service and Niagara Regional Police Service.

JAPAN

AICHI: Last month Bell Textron Inc., announced the Aichi Prefectural Police have officially commenced aerial policing operations utilising the Bell 505, marking a landmark moment for aviation in the Asia-Pacific region.

A ceremony held at the Komaki Airport in Nagoya, Japan, celebrated the milestone, which commemorates the Bell 505 as the first aircraft of its type deployed for police operations across the Asia-Pacific. The Aichi Prefectural Police is the primary law enforcement agency responsible for maintaining public safety, order, and security within Aichi Prefecture, Japan. Operating under the oversight of the National Police Agency, the force is tasked with crime prevention, traffic management, disaster response, and community policing.

This latest addition builds on a deep relationship between the Aichi Prefectural Police and Bell. The agency has relied on Bell aircraft for years, operating models such as the Bell 206 and Bell 412.

THAILAND

ROYAL THAI POLICE: An online news source seems to be somewhat unhappy with the police in Thailand and has picked out the Police Aviation Division for specific criticism. It calls it “another gilded agency behind the monk” – an apparent reference to major financial and corruption scandals involving high-profile Buddhist monks and temple donations. (source AI).

Prior to last year, there was a recent case of a police aviation wing plane crashing. On April 25, 2025, and May 24, 2025, there were two incidents in a similar period of time. As a result, many police officers were killed.

After the incident next to each other. The commander of the police aviation division and 4 officers and 9 of them crashed the plane to investigate the facts of what happened, especially the issue of corruption in the form of “repairing the tip” or supplying counterfeit parts that do not have aviation standards.

More recently there have been complaints about improper and corrupt performance of duties of police officers, and neglect of the performance of duties of superiors. Additionally, there have been complaints of some police officers who were also flying for others when nominally on police duties and of traveling out of the country with supervisors neglecting to take any action.

The latter includes some police officers who go to work as pilots for commercial airlines an activity that is prohibited by the regulations. It is claimed that the Police Air Wing know of these abstractions but fail to act upon them.

Other allegations include that the unit does not plan maintenance of the aircraft and this results in there being no aircraft to fly.

A complaint was sent the State Security Commission to investigate the facts based on the available evidence.

The article challenged Lt. Gen. Kitrat Panphet a Thai police officer, currently serving as the 15th commissioner-general of the Royal Thai Police since 2024 and his deputy Lt. Col. Samran Nuanma. They regularly use the Police Aviation Division to provide them transport aircraft. [Police News Varieties]

TURKEY

POLIS: The order for six T129B ATAK helicopters, first delivered in 2021, has now been completed. These are fully armed aircraft used in support of the polis mission against internal terror attacks.



Not your usual police helicopter, the ATAK undertakes missions that are normally left to the military.

Deliveries have now started of the TAI T625 Gökbeý light utility helicopter of which 18 units are scheduled to be delivered. The T625 Gökbeý is a twin-engined light utility design developed by Turkish Aerospace Industries for the military and police. With room for 12 passengers and two crew it is significantly larger than the Bell 429.



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TACTICAL MISSION DISPLAYS



The image shows a black tactical mission display unit with a large screen and a keypad. The screen displays various flight and mission data, including altitude, speed, and fuel. The keypad has numerous buttons for controlling the display and associated systems.

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UNITED KINGDOM

NPAS: The fifth Airbus Helicopters H135 has now started its test flights with its identity of G-NPAD covered over with German test marks of D-HECQ. There are 'over the fence' photographs of it on the Internet but, take it from me, its dark blue and yellow.

NPAS have reported their operational figures for the month of July, and they follow a similar pattern to prior months with most flight time being recorded by the helicopters and a seemingly miserly amount by fixed wing. No reason for the lower figures for the fixed wing element has been put forward but, like several of the rotary wing fleet bases, they are restricted to a 12-hour day.

In July, NPAS aircraft were available for deployment 69.8% of the time, a decrease from 72.0% in June. Engineering-related unavailability increased to 23.3%, up from 17.5% in June, reflecting ongoing maintenance activity and fleet resilience requirements.

In July, NPAS received 3,799 calls for service, an increase on the 3,726 received in June and continuing the higher demand levels seen throughout the year.

42.4% of calls were attended, representing a slight improvement in June, while the decline rate reduced marginally to 16.1%. This was achieved despite reduced aircraft availability and increased engineering downtime during the month.

Flying hours so far - since the start of the financial year (April 2026):

Rotary aircraft have flown 4,466 hours on behalf of forces. Last year the rotary element of NPAS flew 9,778 hours significantly below the pre-NPAS expectation of hours per aircraft per year.

In July the fixed-Wing aircraft had flown 388 hours since April, supporting 32 police forces and contributing to patrol and tasking activity. This represents a slight improvement in the monthly rate since the weather improved (April 82 hours, May 77 hours, June 114 hours, July 115 hours). Last year the four fixed wing aircraft flew 801 hours, an average of 66 hours each month.

Coming up is the **Emergency Services Show** at the National Exhibition Centre near Birmingham Airport. Last year NPAS were exhibiting and had a significant presence including displaying a mock-up of the forthcoming drone for the Bristol area trials, but this year they will only be visiting the event and presenting.

Unfortunately, at the time of publication there were no details of the subject or the day of the presentation available.

UNITED STATES

ALABAMA: Etowah County Sheriff, Gadsden Alabama has recently acquired N632TC a military surplus Bell OH-58C (72-21376) from Tuscaloosa Police Depart, also in Alabama.

Meeting the newbie



Meanwhile the new training Airbus Helicopters H135 G-NPAS has been visiting the rotary wing units in turn to introduce the pilots to the Helionix system they will each be trained up on in the near future.

The detail of the training has yet to be finalised, and it seems probable that the first into the scheme at the Redhill base will be pilots operating out of Lippitts Hill to cover London.

The current equipment level of the helicopter means that the new airframe is of little practical interest to the TFOs.



They have filed a request for a change in marks to become N990EC. This brings it in line with their other airframes Bell TH-57s N991EC and N992EC.

Based at the Gadsden Airport, the Sheriff's Air Unit have a dedicated mission to significantly improve the quality of services provided to citizens. Etowah have had an aviation unit for over 30 years and were noted adding a rotary wing to the operation Cessna 172 they had around 12 years ago. [Parapex/FAA]

CALIFORNIA: In Pasadena, near Los Angeles, after the Council funded a larger police hangar, the Finance/Audit Committee was set to decide whether they would back the decision already made and recommend that the City Council award a contract of up to \$1,641,875 to build the new steel hangar at the Pasadena Police Departments heliport. They will also have to sign off an additional \$900.000 to complete the project.

Pasadena, population approaching 139,000 last census has operated a helicopter in the law enforcement role since 1969 and currently flies a mixed fleet mainly consisting of Bell Kiowa's and MD500s. In December last year it was agreed that they would acquire two new Bell 505s which have yet to be delivered.

FLORIDA: Deputy Jonathan Lozada was awarded this year's Airborne Public Safety Association's Captain 'Gus' Crawford Memorial Air Crew of the Year award for APSCON 2026.

Lozada was representing the Indian River County Sheriff's Office and reflects the professionalism, dedication, and teamwork that their aviation unit demonstrates every day in service to their local community.

Hangar One Avionics in California have undertaken a completion of an H125 for Martin County Sheriff in Stuart, Florida. The 2025 build airframe c/n 9754 is registered N901JB and is fully equipped for policing including SAR winching and firefighting. It joins a similar H125, N814MC [seen right], acquired four years ago.

Equipment includes an MX-10 EO/IR with downlink, a Trakka searchlight and external hoist mounted on the port side. Additional features include a full wire strike protection system, bear pads on the rear of the main landing gear, steerable landing light and small external cameras enabling the supervision of the load (including the water bucket) and numerous aerals.

Also in Florida, the Jackson County Sheriff Dept, in Marianna, has sold N325JC OH-58C (71-20444) to a buyer in Battle Creek Michigan. It appears that the airframe has gone to the Defense Logistics Agency who are based in Battle Creek and will reappear on issue to another law enforcement agency in due course.

LOUISIANA: DeSoto Parish Sheriff's Office, Mansfield LA has re-registered OH-58A N355SJ (69-16230) to N355DS The aircraft was acquired from the from Louisiana State Police for \$15,000. And launched in conjunction with Shreveport Police in May of this year equipped with a Trakka EO/IR system. See page 10 of the June edition of PAN.



MARYLAND: Davenport Aviation has announced the receipt of an order for a second new H125 for the Baltimore County Police Department. N804CP is a 20-years old AS350B3 assigned to Baltimore County Police Dept. Serial Number 4133

The aircraft will replace an older AS350B3, presumed to be N804CP, allowing the department to maintain its three-helicopter fleet while modernising two thirds of its fleet to the H125 standard. One H125 was delivered to the unit in 2024. The role fit of the green aircraft will be undertaken by Metro Aviation Inc with delivery due in October next year. [Davenport]

TEXAS: Helicopter Services Inc (HSI) has completed a new Airbus H125 for the Dallas Police Department marking the agencies first H125 and its first Airbus helicopter following years of operating an all-Bell fleet.

The aircraft has been equipped with a range of mission-specific systems, including upgraded avionics, imaging equipment, mapping technology and a cargo hook to support the department's aerial firefighting capability.

HSI has equipped the H125 with a comprehensive law enforcement mission package, including: Garmin GFC 600 autopilot and GTN 650 and 750 avionics displays.

RSG air conditioning

Geneva pedestal console

REBTECH NVIS-compatible cockpit

Avalox Mercury digital video recorder

L3 Harris Wescam MX-10 electro-optical/infrared imaging system

Shotover ARS-750 mapping system

Technisonic TDFM 9000 radios

TrakkaBeam searchlight

The company also installed an Onboard Systems cargo hook swing kit, enabling the Dallas Police Department to retain its aerial firefighting capability.

AIR AMBULANCE

NETHERLANDS

ANWB: In December 2024 ANWB Medical Air Assistance ordered two new H135 helicopters to replace existing HEMS fleet EC135s PH-MAA and PH-HVB. Eighteen months later the replacement aircraft [including PH-HLP c/n 2347] were accepted at the Airbus Donauwörth factory near Munich and delivered to the Netherlands. In mid-June PH-HLP, a brand-new Airbus Helicopters H135 made its delivery flight from Donauwörth to Lelystad Airport, via Koblenz-Winningen.

The pair are now being role fitted with the medical interior and markings. [MMT Nederland]

POLAND

MINISTRY OF HEALTH: The Air Rescue Service has again announced a tender for the purchase of five new rescue helicopters with an option for a sixth machine. The tender seeks a helicopter type with a maximum weight of 4000kg offering two stretchers. The specification suggests such types as the H135, H145, B429 and possibly AW109 to be delivered by December 2028. Only the Bell and the H145 would actually meet the requirement on size. Due to manufacturing backlogs that date would remove the H145 from the competition which would apparently leave the Bell 429 as the sole bid airframe.

There was a similar March 2026 tender which reportedly had no bids. This may be partly due to the ever-growing H145 waiting list. Potential new customers buying now are faced with waiting until 2035 for delivery.

UNITED KINGDOM

NOT WHAT IT SEEMS: An all yellow Agusta A109E Power in the spurious colours of "South Wales Air Ambulance" has been noted operating at St. Athan, South Wales, last month. G-CMSR (11121) is operated by Castle Air in Cornwall and appears to be on a filming mission. The badge worn (South Wales Air Ambulance) is spurious. Oddly the airframe was carrying an incorrectly configured registration under the fuselage as G-CSMR. It has subsequently been learned that the airframe is for the BBC TV programme 'Casualty.' [source image Stu Carr Flickr]

CHANNEL ISLANDS: With a long history of chopping and changing its air ambulance suppliers regularly, the islands around the UK have brought forth a new change in operator for the upcoming year. The new Jersey/Guernsey joint contract has been awarded to 247 Aviation of Belfast. Having lost the contract at renewal the losing bidders Gama Aviation are said to be suing on some technicality.



Gama took this contract over when they acquired Capital Air Ambulance in June 2025. 247 Aviation is part of the SERE Group and has access to a fleet of five Lear45. Two Pilatus PC-24, three PC-12 and two Dimond DA-62. They also include Jet Assist based in Belfast, and Woodgate Aviation based Liverpool with two Be200s. The latter has been a regular on/off operator of the air ambulance services to the UK islands.

UNITED STATES

IOWA: LifeFlight in Des Moines, Iowa are swapping from EC145 aircraft to the Bell 429. This will be a phased changeover as the Bell aircraft come on line to replace the Airbus types.

UnityPoint Health have been an Air Methods customer with the EC145 N779LF and EC135P2s N615LF and N819LF operating. They appear to be remaining with their long-term supplier Air Methods in the transition to the new air ambulance.

The 429s slated to undertake the operation are to be.

N431LF msn 57399

N432LF msn 57406

N433LF msn 57484

which are all registered to Life Flight Network, and therefore presumably being acquired by Air Methods to meet their customers' needs. [Parapex Media]

PENNSYLVANIA: Penn State Health Life Lion Critical Care Transport has added a new helicopter to its fleet, strengthening access to rapid, lifesaving care across central Pennsylvania and surrounding communities.

Based at Life Lion's Lancaster base, the new aircraft joins two existing Airbus H155 helicopters, giving Life Lion three of the largest and fastest aeromedical helicopters in Pennsylvania.

The addition comes as Life Lion celebrates 40 years of air medical transport. Since its first patient flight in 1986, the program has transported more than 45,000 patients and continues to connect patients with trauma, stroke, cardiac, pediatric and neonatal specialty care.

The aircraft flew its first shift on June 19.

Life Lion sold their two Eurocopter AS365N2 in September 2025 leaving them with three Eurocopter EC155s now N916LL, N921LL and N725LL. (Parapex)



The newest Penn State Health Life Lion helicopter N725LL takes off from the helipad at the Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center Emergency Department.

By mid-August N725LL was not registered with the FAA, the entry still stated that a 2013 EC155B1 c/n 6983 although both are owned by the same Milton Hershey Medical Center. Just another instance of the FAA being behind in the paperwork! At least two months in this instance.

FIRE FIRE FIRE FIRE

CANADA

BRITISH COLUMBIA: Even as the unusual major fires in Spain and France cooled down temporarily in Europe those in Canada again exploded into action.

Thousands of evacuees were set to spend time away from home as crews continue fighting four major, out-of-control wildfires in B.C. More than 20,000 people were evacuated from relatively sparsely populated areas in the face of towering flames. Tens of thousands of others were put on notice that they too might need to flee.

The all too regular wildfires fires in north America put those in Europe and elsewhere in the shade.

EUROPE

As reported last month in PAN the situation in Europe has been ramped up several stages this year compared with previous years. Fires are starting earlier in the season and due to more intense than usual hot weather blasting in from the Sahara Desert the overall temperature is higher this year and fires have started earlier. Last month it was France, Spain and Italy, this past month the focus has shifted temporarily to Greece. Two Bell helicopters collided and crashed while operating over Greek fire in the start of the fire season.

It appears clear that no nation has enough resources to deal with the fires at their height. France has around 100 aircraft 'available' in country but was overwhelmed this year and Greece and others

become stretched far sooner because their fleet is only a handful of owned airframes bolstered by the global helpers under short term contracting. When the potential additional resources were already locked in to fires in other countries it became clear that there was little room for last minute contracts to be set up.

The result is that you have a league of nations fire fighting force that travels the globe fighting fires. The majority never work together from one day to the next for 'training' and even that incident in Greece goes some way to illustrate it. The two aircraft were American registered and operated; they were the same type and operator and yet one pilot was British and the other Danish. They appeared to be flying in formation, but one wonders whether they had even met before. They each had a Greek interpreter on board so what language was the standard? The sky is full of smoke and aircraft types (some old some new) ranging from crop sprayers to converted airliners via super scoopers all seeking water pickups on the same stretch of sea, lake or airport in the same time frame but differing speeds and altitudes. What could go wrong?

Wildfire suppression appears, from the outside, to be the sort of mission for which autonomous flight technology was invented – but the vision of large-scale robotic aerial firefighting remains, for now, just that.

Seasons are becoming longer and more intense, firefighting hours over Spain, Portugal and Italy have risen 90% compared with last year.

SOUTH KOREA

NATIONAL FIRE AGENCY: Two more new Surion helicopters were delivered to the Chungcheong Gangwon 119 Aviation Unit in Chungju, North Chungcheong province agency in mid-August – they were ready for service from August 22.

Auxilliary fuel tanks fitted to the new arrivals will allow them to provide support to Jeju Island which is 450km (280 miles) from Seoul.

SPAIN

VALENCIA: Following the declaration of a wildfire in Gatova Titan firefighting activated its base to support firefighting efforts.





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UNITED KINGDOM

WILDFIRES

The spate of wildfires last month has, albeit briefly, brought into the conversation the prospect of setting up a fire attack unit to cover the United Kingdom. As mentioned last month this prospect was the subject of specific helicopter trials thirty years ago, but it was obvious that such a project would be costly. Seen in isolation, having an expensive multi-aircraft operation sitting around for ten months of the year to deal with relatively few wildfires is a difficult project to sell. The McAlpine suggestion that the helicopters could carry equipment to the scene of fires all year was a way to obscure the negative vibes. A lot of the resistance thirty years ago was from the unionised fire brigades, which is unlikely to have changed.

In recent weeks the fire unions have called for more resources and equipment, but they are specifically looking at people, firefighters, and ground-based machinery. They clearly do not see airborne firefighting as anything they would be directly involved in. That is a government problem just as it has been in the past.

In recent weeks media led conversations with those who might lead on the subject seem to carry much weight simply because it has not been a subject they have considered. That is despite the wake-up call in 2022 when a limited amount of housing was destroyed in a “once in a lifetime” event. Unfortunately for that line of thought it has just happened again.

The latest Prime Minister, and we have had a few recently, Andy Burnham, promised to buy some water bombers to solve the problem. Unfortunately, his statement, made within days of coming into power, sat in the same areas of knowledge as the regular stated intention of UK political leaders to “stop the boats” crossing the English Channel. He knows little or nothing on the subject and the same is probably true of the Civil Service that supposedly advises him.



In some manner the answer to the emerging problem lies with what the rest of the world does. Either a fire fleet is merged with NPAS, additional resources mainly used for law enforcement and security work most of the year but available to fight fires, a subsidised commercial operation paid to prioritise firefighting in the summer season or using the military. The latter being the most popular option when you have no idea what to do and no money to do it!

The likely option is that the government contract to buy in aircraft time that a commercial operator is then free to offer to the global market to fight fires in other countries the rest of the year. That is roughly where we are now except there is a cut price caveat that the aircraft are only available for firefighting on days when the aircraft are not doing other work. That needs to change. RAF Chinooks already undertake Bambi bucket training in a small way to serve needs in Cyprus and the new firefighting kit for the Airbus A400 might be a good investment for as long as the transport type is in service. Fortunately, most Bambi buckets are not type specific. The threat of war, should it escalate, will alter all that.

One model of the proposed ‘extended NPAS’ operation is to be found with Securite Civile in France. They have a very large fleet of fixed wing and helicopters that provides a multi-task transportation role across France for most of the year and then focusses on fires in season. Despite the significant size and cost of the operation they declared that they were struggling to deal with the July wildfires across France and they identified a need for more resources even though they already had several aircraft from the migratory global fleet (from such as Australia and Sweden) helping out.

Securite Civile provides a range of law enforcement and rescue craft (mainly helicopters) that are active year-round but has a fleet of dedicated water bombers and scooper amphibians sat on the ground or just training for most of the year. That would be a difficult and expensive model to add to the NPAS fleet. Although they may well embrace the small number of 'secret' aircraft used by other UK law enforcement agencies in the future it is a different prospect to take up the larger converted airliners required for water bombing to meet a scenario that many uninformed experts probably still believe will not happen!

The logistics would be better placed alongside such as the pair of 2Excel Boeing 727 oil slick spray aircraft based at Doncaster. The soon to be replaced (by newer 737 aircraft) Boeings have been on contract for years with Oil Spill Response (OSRL) to provide global wide-area oil spill dispersant services to meet the specific threat. A decade on there has not been a call out. The current equipment fit is not compatible with water bombing, and the contract requires them to be available to be despatched to the spill anywhere in the world at short notice.

The point is that 2Excel and similar organisations are set up to be caretakers of aircraft that may never be used and they already provide government with second line surveillance and preventative aerial services including coastal patrols.

Alternatives of the water bombers for the United Kingdom being part of the global firefighting fleet might be easy to arrange, with no capital cost, but they still require money that does not yet exist.

The French model is accepted because it is a long-standing formation originally set up in a small way in 1951, but I cannot see any UK politician managing to create a mini air force that mostly flies for a couple of months a year. The answer, if and when they achieve it, is going to be one that draws on a mixed fleet from NPAS (helicopter), the RAF (perhaps Chinooks and A400 transports with a water bombing option) and commercial resources to make up the added need. But first someone in the Civil Service is going to have an enquiry to see what the options are.

A potential problem I foresee is that many will study the project and declare that it will be cheaper to undertake the wildfire tasking with drones. It may well be the case that technology will enable that in a few decades but meanwhile it depends on how long it takes for wildfires in the UK to get as bad as July around Bordeaux, France. The Airbus H145 helicopter may well be on back order to 2035, but similar lead times are to be expected for water bombers like the 515 when the whole world is facing ever more wildfires. The last really long hot summer in the UK was 1976; will it be that long until the next? The experts say it will not, but we have listened to this so-called expert opinion before on many subjects only with despair and the 2022 house fires caught everyone out.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

MALAYSIA

MARITIME ENFORCEMENT AGENCY: The MMEA (Coast Guard) received the first of four Leonardo AW189 helicopters to strengthen maritime surveillance and search last month. [Helis]

MALTA

ARMED FORCES: An additional Beechcraft King Air 360 is to be added to the existing fleet. Textron Aviation announced the delivery of the factory-new extended-range turboprop to Aerodata AG in Braunschweig, Germany, where it will undergo mission-system integration before being delivered to Malta in 2027. The aircraft will join the AFM's existing fleet of Beechcraft King Air maritime patrol aircraft, which has been operated for more than a decade.

The King Air 360ER is designed for long-range and mission-focused operations, featuring increased fuel capacity and payload capability compared with the standard King Air 360. Powered by Pratt &

Whitney Canada PT6A-60A engines and equipped with Pro Line Fusion avionics, the aircraft is used globally for government, military, and commercial special missions.

Editor: This is undoubtedly a welcome enhancement to the strength of the AFM. Meanwhile some local voices are pointing out the island is merely adding to its maritime SAR role and in these dangerous times of threats from Russia not looking to armaments. The question is being asked 'can little Malta expect Europe and the world to protect it' when they have been equally tardy in looking after their own defence?

FRONTEX: (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency) moves a range of resources from across Europe into the Mediterranean Sea every year. It is a broad mix of helicopters and fixed wing of all sizes drawn from police and other state groups or commercial suppliers. One noted recently was undertaking an interesting search pattern from the Italian island of Lampedusa - which is about mid-way between Malta and Tunisia. The helicopter was a LAR MD902 Explorer LX-HSR (900-00053). [Flight Radar 24]

UNITED KINGDOM

HEADLINE NEWS: A new Prime Minister and new promises made about a subject that leaves many confused.... "Stop the boats"

On a tour of briefings on many subjects the brand new incumbent Andy Burnham was at Dover overlooking the English Channel talking with Border Security Command and learning of their plans to deliver a "broader strategy across the UK with near border countries and upstream working with international partners"

Ed: Their words on social media, but I am unsure what they mean, let's hope the new PM does.



UNITED KINGDOM - CHANNEL REPORT

According to the recent figures released by the British government, the year ending June 2026 was, compared to the year ending June 2025, relatively quiet in terms of the number of inflatable boats crossing the English Channel, those boats carrying illegal migrants from northern France, lured to the UK by the promise of free accommodation, together with an allowance for food and additional expenses. These are the same boats that are escorted to mid-Channel by the French police, before the migrants are then 'rescued' by the UK Border Security Command and landed in the UK at the Port of Dover. Using the government figures, in the year ending June 2026, 33,374 illegal migrants were landed in the UK, some 23% fewer than in year ending June 2025. Nevertheless, there were 2 recent records! First, one boat was carrying 128 migrants, then, within days a second boat was found to be carrying no fewer than 165 migrants, a new record, one that is more than twice the current average of 70 migrants per boat. Nevertheless, 33,374 illegal migrants brought to the UK in 12 months, by the UK's Border Security Command is still a big number.

A New Record

Then, in August, a 'taxi boat', began its journey from a beach near Dieppe, some 80 miles south of Calais, picking up migrants along the coast. This boat had 230 passengers on board when it reached mid-Channel, more passengers than a Boeing 737 airliner! On this occasion the French did nothing to stop this unseaworthy, grossly overloaded inflatable boat as it cruised along the coast of northern France, before it turned left, towards the Dover Strait, the busiest shipping lane in the world. Nevertheless, there was plenty of time for the French to take photographs and, presumably, to wish the passengers, the illegal migrants, bon voyage!

This very large inflatable boat, 49 feet in length, crossed the English Channel on the 10 August with 230 illegal migrants on board. The French made no attempt to stop this unseaworthy, grossly overloaded inflatable boat, before it attempted to cross the world's busiest shipping lane.



SNSM - French lifeboat service

Stopping the Boats

Despite the fact that, in April, the British government paid the French a further £662 million (\$900 million USD) to 'stop the boats', a total of over £1.3 billion (\$1.77 billion USD) since 2018, there is very little evidence that the French are anywhere close to stopping more than a handful of the boats once they have set sail, to carry their cargo of illegal migrants across the English Channel. The widely publicised reduction in the number of boats crossing the Channel in 2026, compared to the same period in 2025, is just as likely to be the result of a change in tactic by the criminal gangs. The new generation of very large inflatable boats, the 'super dinghy', requires near perfect weather, with a light breeze of less than 10 knots and a calm sea before they can attempt their illegal journey.



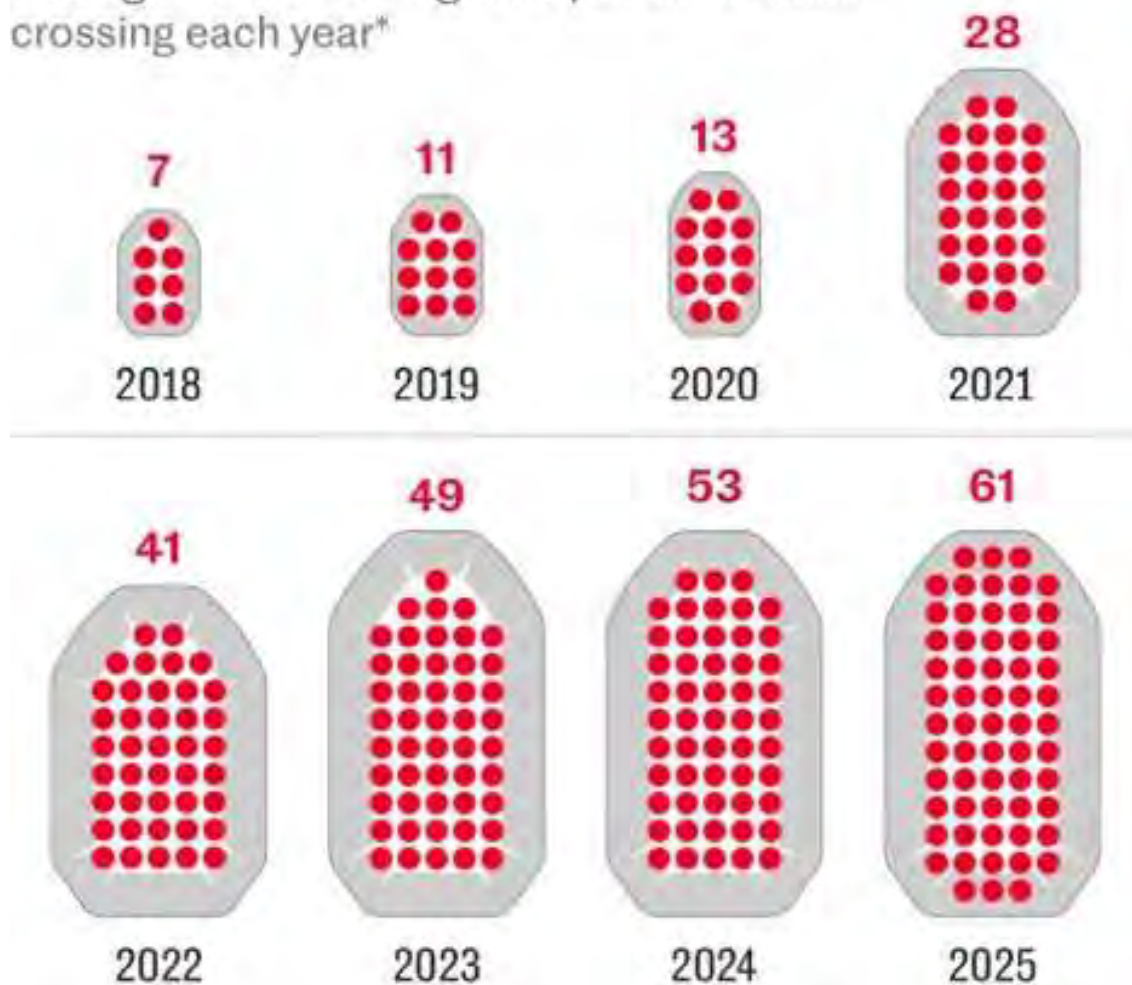
Unlike the smaller, well-constructed boats used in the past, the new, the 'super dinghy' often grossly overloaded with migrants, requires near perfect weather, with a light breeze and a calm sea.

According to the British government, the French have stopped 12 boats at sea in recent months, which, according to border security commander, Charlie Estaugh is evidence that the French are now, "taking a bold and aggressive approach to halt the attempted crossings". Despite this, in 2026, up to and including 28 August, 16,483 illegal migrants have been landed in the UK from 243 boats. Also, although the Home Office publishes the numbers of migrants 'prevented' by the French from crossing the English Channel, these are the same migrants who will make a further attempt, the next day, the next week, or the next month. Prevention is, for those migrants who are determined to reach the UK, no more than a temporary change of plan!

The critical figure, the number of boats turned back in French waters and subsequently destroyed, together with those boats destroyed on the beaches of northern France, before setting sail, has never been published in the UK. Since the Labour government came to power in July 2024 the total number of migrants, landed from small boats, with an increasing number now being landed from very large boats, is currently 81,197 migrants landed from 1,337 boats. Until more boats are destroyed than can be delivered to northern France then the criminal gangs will continue to 'run circles' around the security forces in France, in the UK and in Belgium too! In the meantime, the UK is paying a France to secure its southern border, which, in truth, remains as porous as it was last year and the year before that!

The rise of the 'super dinghy'

Average number of migrants per small-boat crossing each year*



Daily Telegraph image

In just 2 years, the British government claims to have removed more than 80,000 foreign criminals and illegal migrants, including, 12,000 criminals and 24,500 failed asylum seekers, together with nearly 20,000 enforced removals of people with no legal right to remain in the UK. However, in the 'small print', the government also admits that just 7.6%, just over 6,000 of the 81,197 illegal migrants, those who arrived in small boats since July 2024, have been removed from the UK.

To the dismay of British citizens', instead of illegal migrants, those who arrive in boats by an irregular route, being served with a written notice, to inform them that they will be detained and then deported at the earliest opportunity, they are now provided with accommodation, a living allowance and a Home Office booklet to explain the 'do's and don'ts' of life in the UK. Is it any wonder that French citizens', those who live in northern France, are as frustrated as the British by what has been described as a UK government sponsored 'pull factor'; an encouragement to enter the UK without permission.

The do's and the don'ts of life in the UK - a multi-lingual Home Office booklet for illegal migrants. For those migrants, mostly young men, who arrive in the UK without permission, after crossing the English Channel in a small boat.



Conclusion

Despite the much-publicised reduction in the number of illegal migrants crossing the English Channel, an irregular route, in small boats, a reduction from 43,309 to 33,374 in the year ending June 2026 compared to the previous year, a reduction of 23%, the number arrivals this year, up to the end of August 2026, 16,483, is still a big number.

It would seem that this government, just like the last, is bereft of new ideas to 'stop the boats'. Since the Labour government came to power in July 2024, 81,197 illegal migrants have been landed in the UK by the Home Office Border Security Command with, on occasion, support from the national lifeboat service, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.

There are only two options to end this illegal activity. First, with the cooperation of the French, and the Belgians too, all those boats carrying migrants, between France and the UK must be stopped at the earliest opportunity, with the migrants rescued and returned to France. Alternatively, invoke Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty and declare a security emergency now, before a terrorist act is committed by a person, or persons entering the UK without documentation and without permission by an irregular route, by crossing the English Channel in a small boat.

In the meantime, the UK Home Office (Department of the Interior) has published a pamphlet explaining the do's and the don'ts of life in the UK. At the same time, in Essex, an English county, the county council has agreed to pay for town centre security guards in the towns of Braintree, Colchester and Chelmsford, those towns frequented by illegal migrants, mostly young men, those who are accommodated at the former military base at RAF Wethersfield, where the Home Office plans to increase the number of asylum seekers from 800 to 1,245. These illegal migrants are not detained; they are free to come and go from their accommodation which is provided at public expense. Is it any wonder that illegal migration, which has not been stopped since the first illegal migrants crossed the English Channel in small boats in 2018, has caused the British public to lose faith in their political leaders.

James A Cowan MBE

Note: The author is a former military pilot, a member of the Royal Air Force, a former police pilot and a former air ambulance pilot.

UNITED STATES

COAST GUARD: The US Coast Guard has long operated the Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules in transport and surveillance missions. Currently they are upgrading their fleet to the HC-130J Super Hercules, receiving the 19th of this model on April 10, 2026. Now there are plans to expand the fleet.

The Coast Guard is seeking companies capable of converting new C-130J transport aircraft into HC-130J surveillance planes, part of a programme that will eventually cover 28 Coast Guard aircraft and 12 more for Customs and Border Protection.

The Coast Guard's Office of Aviation Acquisition posted a request for information on August 14, asking industry for market research ahead of a future solicitation. Responses are due September 17. The notice covers what the service calls "missionization," the process of installing its Minotaur Mission System Suite, known as MSS+, onto baseline C-130J aircraft built by Lockheed Martin Aeronautics. Once the system is installed, the aircraft is redesignated an HC-130J.

The initial contract covers a base of four aircraft, three for the Coast Guard and one for Customs and Border Protection's Air and Marine Operations, with options for three more Coast Guard aircraft and five more CBP aircraft. The effort is a continuation of the existing process and will continue with the 23rd HC-130J starting in fiscal year 2030.

The MSS+ package includes twin Minotaur Processors that serve as the system's computational hub, two mission system operator stations installed on the flight deck, a turret-mounted HD EO/IR sensor, and a multi-mode radar mounted in a radome under the aircraft's belly. The suite also adds a DF system, an automatic identification system transponder for tracking vessels, and a communications package built around two HF radios, two RT-7000 radios and two ARC-210 radios capable of satellite communication.

The draft schedule visualises that the overall programme will run through 2028 to 2038. Each individual aircraft will take approximately one year to be role fitted. [Defence Blog]

Editor: If the UK Government had not been in such a rush to sell off its own Hercules transport fleet (mostly to Turkey) they might have had resources to bolster the tiny RAF maritime fleet of 9 P-8 Poseidon that replaces the 35 Nimrod aircraft.

INDUSTRY

Last month **Tekever** signed a contract with the Portuguese Air Force to deliver the AR5 autonomous system, strengthening Portugal's sovereign capability across maritime surveillance, security and defence missions.

The AR5 systems will be delivered in September and operated directly by the Portuguese Air Force, supporting long-range missions including surveillance of Portugal's Exclusive Economic Zone, coastal security, environmental protection and other missions of public interest.

The contract also includes a Ground Control Station, TEKEVER's ATLAS mission system and a comprehensive training programme, ensuring the Portuguese Air Force can operate the capability independently from the outset.

The previous month Tekever were announcing a similar deal with the military in the United Kingdom. The drone has come a long way since its somewhat faltering first steps flying surveillance sorties across the English Channel looking for illegal migrants.

Tekever now has a new drone building factory in Swindon, Wiltshire as well as the original facilities in Portugal.

A little late news from the Farnborough Air Show relating to the **Textron Cessna 408 Skycourier** being marketed in an ISR role. This one had apparently turned up at the Marshalls facility at Cambridge Airport from a visit to Belgium. Belgium Special Forces ordered 5 x SkyCourier's making it the first military order for the type.

It is reported that the Thailand Department of Royal Rainmaking and Agricultural Aviation (KASET) – ordered a pair, one came through London Stansted in the summer on its delivery flight.

Other rumours suggest that the Jamaica Defence Force Air Wing have ordered a pair but nothing has yet been substantiated in the Department Security Cooperation Agency Foreign Military Sale documentation. [Ian Frain]

The cameras on **the Kraken K3 Scout USVs**, supplied under Project BEEHIVE, have been sending data back to China. A salutary lesson against the use of cheap Chinese components favoured by military and police services across the Western World. The experts of course said it would not happen.

I hadn't heard of this before, and they don't seem to do marketing very well, but Vertical picked up this story from APSCON and I'm forwarding their link for you. Bit grim promoting the opposition (!) but the subject seems useful and definitely of interest to some of the readers of PAN.

[Zero Fox Worx](#) is developing a lightweight, receive-only device designed to display nearby tracking information on smartphones, tablets, and computers.

For airborne public safety crews operating beyond reliable cellular coverage, maintaining awareness of aircraft, boats, and emergency beacon signals can require multiple systems and data sources. Zero Fox Worx is developing Arcus to bring those capabilities together in a single portable receiver. Demonstrated during APSCON 2026 in Ft Lauderdale, Florida, Arcus is a lightweight, receive-only device designed to display nearby tracking information directly on smartphones, tablets, and computers. The first-generation system focuses on Automatic Dependent Surveillance–Broadcast, or ADS-B, aircraft traffic. The upcoming second generation will add Automatic Identification System (AIS) data from marine vessels and the ability to detect emergency locator transmitter (ELT) signals.

In Gen 2, they will add AIS, which is tracking for boats, and also an ELT-tracking capability. Arcus was initially developed for military users, but the company now is promoting it to law enforcement, firefighting and civil aviation.

The updated unit will be the size of a handheld radio, either carried or installed in an aircraft, boat or road vehicle.

Brazil's National Civil Aviation Agency (ANAC) issued a Supplemental Type Certificate (STC) for the **Universal Avionics InSight** integrated flight display system. This certification complements other STC approvals for InSight from the FAA, TCCA, and EASA.

With each new regional validation, Universal simplifies the upgrade process for airframe manufacturers and service centres supporting flight deck modernisation worldwide. This specific Brazilian STC was issued for the Cessna Citation VII, introducing a new flight display system on the aircraft, complete with engine indication and complemented with Universal's comprehensive flight management system (FMS).

The InSight display system is available directly from Universal Avionics or through its global Authorized Dealer Network. To learn more about InSight STCs and specific upgrade paths for the Cessna Citation VII and other aircraft platforms, visit universalavionics.com/insight or contact an authorized integration partner.

Airbus has recently carried out a trial linking aircraft, helicopters, drones and personnel with communication systems. Drones and light aircraft transmitted fire-zone images to a ground vehicle, which combined the information with terrain and wind data using AI, and uplinked flightpaths and retardant-drop points to an ATR simulating a firefighting aircraft.

Meanwhile the construction of the new build **De Havilland Canada (Canadair) CL515** continues in Canada. The prototype should lift into the skies in 2028 with predictions that the aircraft will be delivered that year as well to a long list of new and existing customers.



After a year of planning a group including Meeker Aviation, Aerocraft and **PJ Helicopters** have completed FAA STC flight testing on three Blackhawk payload mounts. The final testing was undertaken on the 45-years old PJ Helicopters Sikorsky UH-60A N806PJ [CM]

There is a shortage of some **Airbus Helicopters**. As regularly commented upon buying an H145 is to deal in the 'futures' market with 2035 a likely delivery date. This is despite there being factories sprinkled across the world to make them.

The Airbus factory in the USA, located in Columbus, Mississippi, has just been reminding us that they started production here in 2003 and have so far produced 1,800 aircraft.

Right: The AS350 or H125 as it is marketed now is produced in Brazil, France, India and the USA. The airframe in build during 2024, 9503, is currently flying as N120PD with the Albuquerque Police Department, New Mexico. It was tested as N195AH and delivered to the operator in May 2025.



Right: 21297 Airbus Helicopters H145 with manufacturer serial number (MSN) 21297 is a 2024-built twin-engine light utility helicopter. It is registered in the United States as N19AH, configured for VIP transport, and held in trust by A7P Trust Company Inc. based in Cheyenne,



Airbus Helicopters USA production line images 2024

After five decades of having their aircraft being considered too flimsy for military use and even kept at arm's length by most 'serious' police aviators, Torrance, California based **Robinson Helicopter** look to have had their turbine powered R66 selected by the US Army as their next training aircraft. Editor: If it all goes through, this will bring joy to the American people. A few years ago, the management at MD Helicopters, Lynn Tilton, shouted to the world that they built the only true US built helicopter – all the while they were actually being built in Mexico and Turkey – but the Robinson returns to the real all-American product mostly constructed in California. They currently build around 300 a year but, when the demand is there, have capacity for 1,000 annually.

With **Emergency Services Network (ESN)** looming, ever looming, the latest report on the state of the UK mobile phone network does not make good reading. Ofcom the regulator claims 96 % of the population has good 4G coverage allowing them to stream videos or play games on line. In contrast data derived from more than 25,000 tests on phone signals found that the country is riddled with blackspots that result in millions being beset by poor reception or even no service at all. Buffering Britain, the app behind the audit, said that the findings found many instances of poor service. Which? the consumer group claims that the service is the worst in 27 EU countries and the worst in all the G7 countries.

Editor: All this does not bode well for ESN which relies upon the 4G mobile phone network that is seen as the future of communications for a broad swathe of emergency services.

The cause of the problem is blamed in part on difficulties in filling in the gaps in the pre-ESN coverage, the authorities have found themselves struggling to erect the additional towers in the face of local objections by members of the public.

Users of the existing system will know that signals still drop out in the most unexpected of places – even those that were always seen as problematic 30 years ago. Anyone got a fix for the rubbish service at the Wake Arms, Epping Forest? It has been the bane of my working life since 1976. I suspect the owners of Epping Forest say no to new cell and ESN towers.

Milestone Aviation has sold three Airbus 225 helicopters to Austria based Kitz Air GmbH supporting the operator's expansion into aerial firefighting, Kitz Air is based in Erpfendorf, Austria and uses a variety of aircraft on a broad range of utility roles.

ACCIDENTS & INCIDENTS

4 July 2026 Leonardo AW119 Koala EC-MYR firefighting helicopter of Pegasus Aero Group, impacted the ground when it was manoeuvring to the entrance to the water collection point in the Águeda River, near Villar de la Yegua, Salamanca. The airframe fell on its right side damaging the MRB and skid undercarriage. The aircraft had taken off from the El Bodón base (Salamanca) to carry out firefighting work. As a result of the incident, the aircraft was significantly damaged and the pilot only slightly injured was taken to hospital. [Official Report]

5 July 2026 Bell 407 EC-JBU firefighting aircraft operated by the Avincis Group. The Bell was participating in firefighting efforts in Loporzano (Huesca), Spain. Transported fire fighters to the location and dropped them off. Carried out water drops for two hours drawing water from Montearagón Reservoir, river Flumen, Loporzano, returned to its base in Plasencia del Monte for a rest and refuelling stop. Returned to the fire with the pilot as the only person on board and enough fuel for another two hours, began a second operation. It took off and again headed to the Montearagón Reservoir. As the 407 approached the marsh, specifically during the transition to hover and before the water scoop had begun, the helicopter yawed and the skids made contact with the water's surface, causing the aircraft to tip onto its right side. The pilot managed to get out of the water through the left door, inflated his life vest, and swam to shore. The pilot was unharmed and the aircraft was submerged in the swamp. [Official Report/ASN]

29 July 2026 Bell 206L3 N29AE Air ambulance of Air Evac Lifeteam. While landing at Air Evac 16 Heliport (6AL4), Tuscumbia, Alabama, USA the main rotor struck a truck causing substantial damage [Parapex/ASN]

2 August 2026 Bell 214ST 746H and N511EV. The two Bell-manufactured helicopters both of McDermott Aviation, each carrying two passengers took off from the Elefsina military airport to fight fires in the Psatha region of Attica, west of Athens, Greece. Video footage shows one of the aircraft approaching and overhauling the other from above and behind with its snorkel deployed. In smoke laden air the angles between the two suggest neither could see the other. The snorkel of the upper helicopter struck the MRB of the lower aircraft, which was destroyed, there was fire as the fuselage plummeted down into the fire ravaged ground below. The upper helicopter made a controlled emergency landing with two crew surviving. Romanian operator and a Greek translator were found dead, while a British operator and a Greek translator were rescued. [Media/ASN]

5 August 2016 Airbus H175 310? Royal Thai Police. One of the four airframes operated by the police on government VIP flights suffered slight damage when a main wheel fell down a road drain. The H175 had just returned from a mission in Nakhon Nayok Province. While being towed from the parking spot to the hangar, the right rear wheel fell into a drain that could not bear the weight. Extracting it took nearly 3 hours. [Police News Varieties]

7 August 2026 Sikorsky CH-54A Skycrane N793HT firefighting helicopter of Helicopter Transport Services under contract to the US Forest Service. Took off from Richfield Municipal Airport to operate on the Widemouth 2 fire for fire near Three Creeks Reservoir near Bever Utah, USA with a crew of two, Chris Anderson from Nevada and Miles Elliott from California. Crashed two minutes after lifting off killing both crew and burning. [KUTV/ASN]

7 August 2026 Beechcraft B200 Super King Air VH-ZVI Air ambulance of CareFlight, Australia. During the post-flight inspection, at Darwin International Airport, Northern Territory, the crew observed that the engine intake bungs had not been removed from the aircraft. The engine intake bungs had shifted from the main intake entry point to the bypass doors. [Parapex/ASN]

15 August 2026 Kamov Ka-32S UR-CIT Operating with the Artic Group on missions including firefighting. While standing on test at the Kuala Lumpur Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah, Subang Airport outside Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia the helicopter caught fire and exploded on taxiway victor while

preparing for a post maintenance engine test. Although the airframe was destroyed, all four Ukrainian occupants escaped the helicopter without injuries, but someone nearby was injured by debris. [X]

15 August 2026 Bell 214B Firefighting helicopter owned by McDermott Aviation. Autorotated into a field trailing a long line and water bucket at Cache Creek, British Columbia, Canada. It is believed that when the helicopter suffered an engine failure the pilot dumped the water then tried to release the belly hook, but the ring jammed on the hook and would not release the empty bucket. The resultant landing trailing the line through grass resulted in a damage free landing. [Pprune]

16 August 2026 Air Tractor AT-802AF EC-LTN firefighting amphibian of Avialsa. While operating from Preveza-Aktion Airport made a forced landing on the water southeast of Astakos, Greece, whilst performing a scoop manoeuvre. The float structure collapsed but the airframe remained supported on the floats with one wing partly under water. The pilot was picked up by the Hellenic Coast Guard the 14 years old aircraft was substantially damaged.

19 August 2026 Bell 407GX N873ST and Cessna 150H N23330. Pennsylvania State Police helicopter and civil aircraft. A mid-air collision was reported between two aircraft near Runway 28, Carlisle Airport (94), Pennsylvania. Reports say the Cessna was landing and it veered onto the Bell which was in the hover at a very low height over the off-runway grass. The police Bell, with two crew aboard, came down on grassland with the cabin largely intact but MRB and tail boom detached. Both occupants survived with injuries. Corporal Bryce Corman pushed out a window and helped trooper Jason Mills, who was bleeding heavily and appeared badly hurt, to get clear, with both men escaping. There was no fire. The Cessna on a training sortie was thought to be set to land on the hard runway behind the police helicopter but may have drifted offline or hit a wake vortex in the final seconds. The Cessna was broken apart on hitting the MRB, the pilot Dr Paul Sokolosky, 57 (Penn State Health) was killed. [media,ASN/cctv]

20 August 2026 Leonardo AW169 I-LIDI Alidaunia. The helicopter suffered a serious incident shortly before landing in Vieste, Foggia, Apulia, Italy when the right-hand engine cowling opened, causing damage to the main rotor. The helicopter landed safely and the five occupants were not injured. [Parapex/ASN]

22 August 2026 Airbus Helicopter H145D2 I-SLND Air ambulance of Avincis Italy. The helicopter was conducting a HEMS (Helicopter Emergency Medical Service) rescue operation near Passo del Falzarego, near Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. The aircraft was hovering above the recovery site while the medical crew was preparing to evacuate an injured climber using the rescue hoist winch. During the operation, while attempting to attach the injured climber to the winch to hoist them back to the helicopter, the helicopter's rotor downwash caused the doctor to lose her balance and fall from the mountain face. The injured climber remained at the site and was not affected. The rescue doctor sustained injuries was recovered and taken hospital by helicopter. The injured climber was subsequently evacuated separately by a second helicopter. No damage to helicopter, but doctor badly injured [Parapex/ASN]

22 August 2026 Mil Mi-8MTV-1 RF-32830 Firefighting helicopter of EMERCOM, Made an emergency heavy landing in the village of Kalezh in the Lazarevsky City District, Krasnodar Krai, northern Black Sea coast, Sochi, Russia. Believed to have been double engine failure. Aircraft came down upright on gravel but sustained damage to the tail boom, main and tail rotors, nose and left main gear, fuselage and fuel tank. No injuries reported. [ASN]

28 August 2026 IAI 1124A Westwind II C-GIAW Air ambulance of SkyCare Air Ambulance. While taking off from runway 26R Las Vegas-Harry Reid International Airport, Nevada, USA veered off and had a runway excursion. The aircraft was about 35 seconds into the take-off roll, at a ground speed of 146 knots when it began veering to the left. It veered off the side of the runway, crossed a taxiway and came to rest in the grass. The left main gear collapsed in the process, but other damage not known. No injuries reported It has not been confirmed whether this was an ambulance mission [ASN].



A BAD DAY AT THE OFFICE

But fortunately, a good outcome. As reported last month one of the older 'super scooper' Canadair CL215s EC-GBT operated by Avincis suffered severe damage to an outer wing and the fuselage on July 16. The question now is whether – in a time when such aircraft are in high demand – the damage is such that the 50-year-old aircraft will be written off. [Seaplane Amphibious]

 **TELEDYNE** | FLIR Defense

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FLIR.COM/380X

UNMANNED

Last month's edition of *Emergency Services Times* featured an item on Superintendent Taryn Evans of the Metropolitan Police. She explains how Drones as first responder (DFR) is working out for 6 UK police forces that are now operating them – she sees it as transforming policing, improving situational awareness and supporting operational decision-making.

This month at the Emergency Services Show at the NEC in Birmingham she is one of the speakers on this and associated subjects. You need to be there on September 16.

The theme of the presentations given are that police forces have used drones for many years, and they are now a key part of crime fighting but given the developments in the technology, how can policing make even more use of them in dense urban spaces and wide rural landscapes? Drones as first responders is one part of that evolution, and the experts at the show will share how policing is using this approach to improve both intelligence and response.

Others in the presentation include Sergeant Jim Le-Bon Olive the Operational Lead NPCC Drones. Formerly Royal Marines and Metropolitan Police he has been with the NPCC since last summer. Tom Joyce Chief Drone Pilot North Yorkshire Police. Now retired he worked with the Metropolitan Police, Hampshire & Isle of Wight, and Thames Valley Police. He is the BVLOS Lead for Hampshire & Thames Valley, helping to shape the future of advanced drone operations.

Sergeant Vince Saunders, Nottinghamshire Police. He works with police forces across England and Wales to develop national performance standards, governance frameworks, and data-driven insights that support the safe, effective, and efficient use of drones in policing.

Editor: So far no-one has shared what it costs to set up each individual DFR unit and link it to the control room. Only with that price in the public arena can anyone hope to make an assessment of what the drone future looks like against a manned future. It is OK when the technology is the flavour of the month but wait and see what happens when the money is short and the set up has been flying for 10,000 hours.



Whoops, things are falling out of the sky. Fortunately, there is a lot of other news going on (politicians, wars and fires for a start) so mostly the mainstream media is either missing it or simply parking it as low interest news. But still, they are falling from the sky and the unintended consequences of fatal injury to an innocent member of the public is currently deferred. The unintended crash into a yard may be an embarrassment for the operator but that is all - so far.

At the end of July an Amazon delivery drone crashed into a garden in Darlington, County Durham, A spokesperson said its initial assessment suggested an "object extending above the roof of a moving vehicle inadvertently came into contact" with the Prime Air drone during a delivery. There were no injuries. The drone delivery trial started in the town earlier this year. The Air Accidents Investigation Branch is investigating so we may yet hear what manner of object caused the crash.

The limited launch has seen packages weighing less than 5lb (2.2kg) and containing everyday items such as beauty products, bin liners and cables being delivered within a 7.5-mile (12km) radius of Amazon's fulfilment centre. Delivery drones weigh roughly 80 to 83 pounds (about 36 to 38 kilograms). There was something of an emergency declared when a landing helicopter downdraft knocked over and killed an old person passing a Plymouth hospital helipad in 2022. That death closed many important helipads until safety was improved. I wonder how it will affect public opinion if someone is hit by the equivalent of two sacks of potatoes travelling at even 10mph? I suspect it will not go well.

A few days later Amazon announced that they are planning a major expansion of its drone delivery service, with the company targeting nearly 500 U.S. cities and towns by the end of 2026.

The expansion would represent roughly a sixfold increase from Prime Air's current footprint. Amazon currently operates from 11 delivery sites serving 10 metropolitan areas across Arizona, Florida, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Nebraska and Texas.

The company said it expects the expanded network to reach tens of millions of customers. New markets expected to come online soon include Chicago, Atlanta, Cleveland, Syracuse, New York, and Boise, Idaho, with additional communities planned later this year.

Amazon said it has already delivered hundreds of thousands of packages by drone in 2026, with its most active sites handling thousands of deliveries each day.

Prime Air uses Amazon's MK30 autonomous delivery drone to carry packages weighing up to 5 pounds. The company says more than 60% of the items customers most frequently purchase is eligible for drone delivery. Orders can arrive in as little as 30 minutes, although most deliveries currently take about an hour.



The MK30 is designed to fly without a pilot onboard. Amazon's Detect-and-Avoid system allows the aircraft to monitor its surroundings and make real-time decisions about other aircraft and obstacles. Cameras and other onboard sensors are used for navigation and delivery, with the system determining whether the designated drop area is clear before releasing a package. Each Prime Air site covers an area of approximately 175 square miles. Customers in eligible areas see the drone option during the normal Amazon checkout process, where they can select an approved delivery location on their property.

Left: Another whoops moment as a customer stands in her garden to record her first drone delivery in Texas, USA, only to see it drop the package into her swimming pool. I am sure they had another one in stock!

PEOPLE

From another site is mention of the passing of PC 442 Andy Keeble on August 15. He passed following a short illness at his home in Scotland and the occasion reminds us of one of the few fatal accidents that UK police have faced over the years.

On October 10, 1998, he was aboard the tri-force police AS355N helicopter G-EMAU serving Leicestershire, Warwickshire and Northampton when it crashed on take-off from their remote base at Husbands Bosworth. Andy Keeble and the civilian pilot were thrown clear, but PC Stuart Ross (Warwickshire) died in the impact and fire. Although the helicopter came down right alongside the base no-one was aware they were down.

Despite suffering a broken leg and other significant injuries Andy managed to drag himself back to the hangar to summon help and bring assistance to the pilot as the wreckage caught fire. He made a telephone call from the helipad to the police control room to inform them of the accident and to request assistance. As a result of this accident flight following of police aircraft by control rooms became mandatory. Crew were also required to carry phones or radios, thereby enhancing safety into the future.

His courage was nationally recognised in 2000 with a People of the Year award, but his injuries were such that his police career with Leicestershire was over and he retired to the Isle of Skye in Scotland.



Editor: It is notable that the investigation into the 1998 police accident highlighted the then dire fuel tank safety in the Ecureuil/Squirrel/AStar series of airframes. As we know it was a long time before they were corrected.

A significant difference between the two Ecureuil/Squirrel helicopters (single engine and twin) lies in the fuel tank design. The modern AS 350 fuel tank comprises a discrete fuel cell manufactured from a material which provides enhanced crashworthiness. The AS 355, now out of production, fuel tank comprises two unlined structural tanks which were liable to rupture if aircraft structure suffered serious deformation. Self-sealing fuel tank liners were offered as an optional extra for some military purposes, and these have the properties necessary to provide additional protection in the event of a crash or other damage to the fuel tanks. This option was not available for G-EMAU, or the other civil models which were destroyed by fire. Although the AS 355 is no longer manufactured, its derivative models are now available with crashworthy fuel tanks. The AS350/H125 has of course seen major revisions in its fuel tank design in recent years after other authorities took on board the clear problems of post-crash fire.

UK Air Ambulance changes

The usual monthly Companies House update of movements within the UK charity air ambulance fraternity.

Wales - Appointment of Mrs Sian Lowri Lloyd as a director on 2026-07-15

Lincs Notts - Termination of Stephen Woodthorpe Clarke as a director on 2026-08-05

London - Appointment of Ms Caroline Valerie Pidgeon as a director on 2026-07-30

Great North - Termination of appointment of Stephen Groves as a director on 2026-07-31

LETTERS There are few entries for Letters to the Editor in PAN, just one or two a year, so this is therefore a special month!

The writer this month is David Lewis formerly of McAlpine Helicopters by way of the Metropolitan Police (PC349W), the North Sea etc, He was another example of would be police pilots who had to leave UK police service to learn to fly but became one of the first commercial pilots flying for the Merseyside Police air unit and rose to the heights with the sales team at what is now Airbus Helicopters, Oxford. His team sold most of the police AS355 and EC135s in the 1990s. At one time in their lives, most bore his cheeky personal signature, a chequer pattern on the tail. Note to operators – think before you paint, in this instance someone HAS done it before!



Hi Bryn

As always, many thanks for the latest edition!

It would appear that, albeit reluctantly, certain elements within the FRS are still pondering over the extensive trials we carried out around the UK quite some time ago!

The current wildfires are obviously the reason, and the limited success of bringing in small, leased helicopters to waterbomb is certainly useful but, by the time they arrive the fires have taken hold and the chances of extinguishing them at the source has been lost.

If, as we had proposed following the success of those trials, there had been a now established national multipurpose unit of say 6 or 8 dedicated FRS helicopters spread around the UK, then 'attacking' a wild fire within the first hour would and could have made a huge difference to the outcome of some of the recent outbreaks?

I don't think anything will change because of FBU (union) influence, but it might be worth stirring the pot again at some stage????

It would be a great idea to remind both the FRS and industry that those trials took place and if lessons learnt then had been acted on, the long-term benefits would now be fully in place?

The issue here for me is that the message I would still like to get over to current FRS decision makers is that, properly managed and operated, air support should be regarded as a cost effective, multi role asset which could have a massive effect on fire prevention and command and control in areas where vehicular access is either restricted or impossible by traditional means? NOT an expensive 'white elephant'.

Yes, drones are a great idea but their ability to deliver resources other than live pictures is, at present heavily restricted.

The current situation throughout the UK and Europe should be a positive wake up call for the FRS to revisit the success we generated with the extensive trials we carried out in Avon & Somerset, London, Sussex, West Wales, Cumbria and Strathclyde some years ago.....all at the total expense of McAlpine Helicopters, Eurocopter and latterly Airbus.

My challenge is, IF the FRS have a better solution to address future anticipated wildfire and similar scenarios AND protect the lives of FIREFIGHTERS, I would really like to know what it is??

Well done Bryn, keep me posted??

David
Sent from my iPhone



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POLICE OFFICERS KILLED WHILST ON DUTY

At approximately 03:30 hrs on the morning of Saturday, 22 August, two police officers belonging to Cleveland Police, PC Tom Clough and PC Matthew Blades, members of an armed response unit, driving a marked police vehicle, were both killed when their vehicle was in collision with a VW Passat which was being driven at speed on the wrong side of a dual carriageway, the A66 at South Bank, Middlesbrough. The occupants of the VW Passat, five young men between the ages of 23 and 17, were also pronounced dead at the scene. Four of the five killed in the VW Passat had previous convictions, a total of 37 convictions, including assault on the police.

Police constables Tom Clough and Matthew Blades who were killed in a road collision on the A66 at South Bank in the early hours of Saturday, 22 August.



Cleveland Police

The VW Passat was being driven with false number plates and had been involved in an earlier police pursuit. A pursuit which was abandoned when the vehicle being pursued was driven onto the wrong side of the dual carriageway. Subsequent to the collision, Cleveland Police have, at the time of writing, arrested seventeen people, part of a wider investigation. Offences being investigated include being involved in organised crime, together with firearms and drugs offences. A second vehicle, a Volvo XC60, believed to associated with the activities of those in the VW, has been located and recovered.

Police Air Support

Not that many years ago, when I was a member of the North East Air Support Unit, a former military pilot, flying the police BN Islander based at Teesside Airport, the word, "pursuit" on the local radio channel would have resulted in an immediate response. The aircraft, with 'eyes in the sky' would have been on top of the incident within minutes. The pursuing police vehicles, now acting under the direction of the airborne observers, would then continue the pursuit with greater safety and, for those trying to evade arrest, there would be no escape.

Then, in 2005 the police air support consortium, Cleveland Police, Durham Constabulary and Northumbria Police, agreed to replace the aeroplane based at Teesside Airport with a second

helicopter, to join the police helicopter that was already based at Newcastle. Despite the warnings that 2 helicopters would be unaffordable the police hierarchy pressed on with their plan. Two years later, in 2007, after the warranty for the new helicopter had expired, the then Chief Constable of Northumbria Police, Mr Michael Craik announced that 2 police helicopters were indeed, unaffordable and that just one police helicopter would be based at Newcastle to cover the whole of the North East of England. As a result, Cleveland Police, some 30 miles distance from Newcastle, withdrew from the North East Air Support Unit and, on the 1 April 2009, formed the Cleveland Police Air Operations unit with an EC135 helicopter.

Later, in October 2012, the National Police Air Service (NPAS) was formed. Then, in February 2015, NPAS announced that 10 bases would be closed over 2 years. Now, in 2026, there are just 15 NPAS police air support bases in England and Wales, of which 5 operate 24/7, 4 operate for 20 hours per day and 6 operate for just 12 hours per day. Moreover, all 4 aeroplanes, the Vulcanair P68R, are located at one base, at East Midlands Airport, a base which operates for just 12 hours a day, from 12 noon to midnight. The NPAS base at Newcastle, to cover the North East of England, including Middlesbrough, operates for just 20 hours per day, from 07:00 hrs to 03:00 hrs the following day. The next nearest NPAS helicopter base to Middlesbrough is some 60 miles away, at Wakefield, near Leeds in West Yorkshire.

In England and Wales there are just 15 NPAS air bases, including London, of which only 5 operate 24/7.



NPAS

Without NPAS aircraft, helicopters or aeroplanes, being readily available to provide air support for the officers of Cleveland Police there has been a significant shift from crewed aircraft to Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), commonly called 'drones'. Cleveland Police now has a mature drone unit with 59 drone 'pilots' with, in addition, a growing number of 'Drones as First Responder' (DFR), often referred to as, 'a drone in a box' at 5 sites across Cleveland.



Two of the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles used as 'first responders' by the Cleveland Police drone unit.

Cleveland Police

However, without the immediate support of a crewed aircraft, aircraft which are currently 30 and 60 miles away from Middlesbrough, the 'playing field' is far from level. It's difficult, impossible, to demonstrate that in many circumstances, including a fast-moving vehicle pursuit, the crewed aircraft at the scene of an incident, carrying airborne tactical flight officers (TFOs), will always outperform the drone operator whose view of the ground is limited to the direction in which the camera, mounted on the drone, is pointing. In many scenarios, 3 pairs of eyes above an incident, the pilot plus two TFO's, coupled with their peripheral vision, will always be the game changer. Moreover, the crewed aircraft will always have the advantage, over a drone, when measuring speed, reach and flight endurance.

Conclusion

One can only hope that the tragic loss of two police officers by Cleveland Police, two young men who should have returned to their homes at the end of their shift, will lead to a re-think of police air support in England and Wales. A starting point would be to increase the availability of the NPAS helicopter based at Newcastle from 20 hours to 24 hours per day. Also, to move one of the 4 aeroplanes based at East Midlands Airport to Teesside Airport. If you're going to do police air support, then do it properly! When flying, distance equals time. Moreover, when engaged in police air support operations, distance and time will result in success, or failure!

If the national model for police air support in England and Wales isn't working, then, for goodness sake, return to the regional model of yesteryear with a mix of aeroplanes and helicopters. Regional police air support units, those with both an aeroplane and a helicopter, a case of 'mix and match', not only worked, they worked extremely well. On reflection, the former North East Air Support Unit with a helicopter, an EC135 based at Newcastle and an aeroplane, a BN2B-20 Islander based at Teesside, some 30 miles apart, was, at the time, a fine example of a successful police air support unit. A unit that served police colleagues on the ground with targeted, timely air support and, at the same time, served and reassured the local communities too.

James A Cowan MBE

Note:

After 10 years of exemplary police service the BN2B-20 Islander, G-NESU was sold to Shetland Islands Council and re-registered, G-SICB. Built in 1991, this aeroplane continues in service 35 years later. Why this BN Islander, an aeroplane which, statistically, enjoyed the same success as a helicopter when it was in police service, but was then sold by the police to purchase a second helicopter, which, within 2 years, proved to be unaffordable, has never been explained.

Editor: On balance (must have balance) the aircraft was replaced in police service by an EC135 helicopter. Faced with a decision by its partners in the NEASU to get rid of the second helicopter the police in Cleveland purchased their own, an EC135P2+ G-CPAS In 2010 and that was being operated when NPAS took over and eventually closed down the police unit at Teesside Airport in 2013. It is still in service today usually at Exeter. Being a small police force in UK terms, Cleveland really struggled to operate the helicopter alone and reflecting that they have also been seen to struggle with the often violent aftermath of the deaths of their two officers. Other forces sent in aid to help them out but that is a short-term fix for what is a long-term problem.

MOVE ALONG THERE

A California Police Department Adds Cowboy Hats to Uniform Options.

The Lincoln Police Department is embracing the city's agricultural roots by allowing officers to wear cowboy hats as part of their uniforms, a change officials say has already generated positive feedback from the community. Officers can now optionally wear cowboy hats as part of their official uniforms in a nod to the city's ranching and farming heritage. The policy allows white straw hats in warm months and black felt hats in winter (Sacramento Bee 31/7/26)

Editor: So why did The Times not carry a story when the British police started wearing inappropriate US style caps?



Right time wrong place. A field fire outside London in 1985 [MP]

In recent years I think it is fair to say that the emergency services in the UK have reluctantly got around to talking to each other. But it was not always the case.

Back in 1987 the police in Devon & Cornwall were still experimenting with helicopters and had spent time flying Aerospatiale AS350 single Squirrel helicopters operated by McAlpine Helicopters in the police role before moving up to twin-engine types. They were operating an AS355 Twin Squirrel when they came across a heath fire just outside Exeter. This was not a 'wildfire' as such, but it was the sort of small fire that was common in the summer months before 'Global Warming' became a buzz word.

Fighting the burn was a single fire engine and its small crew. In order to offer assistance, the helicopter landed and the observer got out ran over to the senior man present – the bloke in the white helmet - and offered to take one of his men up for a look at the fire from above. The police officer came straight back got in and just said 'let's go!' The response to the offer was obviously a 'no thank you' in FB speak, which ably demonstrated the state of the relationship that existed between the police and their emergency service colleagues at the time!

The UK College of Policing sometimes struggles to be noticed, several plans to promote its training to the wider police market have been seen to go awry recently. The plan to ensure that everyone coming into police has a University Degree has struggled in the face of both getting people to join policing and then keep them there. Lots of people joining with a superb knowledge of the theory of police work but when they get in, they find that the customers are often argumentative thugs who might biff you on the nose – and worse! It is doubtful that such activities require extensive educational qualifications, if you are that well qualified you may as well go off to be a pilot, doctor or lawyer....



Another ploy straight out of the College of Policing is training officers in the theory of searching. It comes with a badge and it's called a Licenced Search Officer. Open to all it offers an opportunity to learn systematic search procedures and techniques as applied to counter terrorism and crime search. At the end of this training, a delegate will be competent to operate as an effective member of a police search team.

LSOs act as part of a police search team. They are trained in tried-and-tested techniques to systematically search in situations where a high level of assurance is required. They work in pairs, usually under the direction of a police search adviser (PoSA), on three categories of deployment – counterterrorism, crime and missing person searches. Licensed search officers not only use techniques required to search effectively, but they also have the awareness to identify suspicious items/component parts of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).



"Student demo? Hell no – this is the Police Graduate entry queue!"

We know it is a 5-day e-learning module, but have yet to ascertain whether the pretty badge can be attached to an official police uniform or whether you have to sew it on a tote bag.

So, I guess that the person is trained up to undertake a duty that we really have no understanding of. Another voice emanating from a bunker somewhere telling you to put your life on the line while they stay in the warm.

Please form a queue next to the very long one of the disaffected police staff leaving the service.

Those were the days. Unfortunately the queue of graduates envisaged by the late great John Edwards seems to have reversed flow!

It appears that the world is upsetting President Trump and he is, verbally at least, threatening his allies with the bombs he has run out of because they disagree with his many varied opinions. On August 13 Trump issues a Section 232 proclamation adjusting imports of unmanned aircraft systems and components that threaten to impair the national security of the United States. All well and good but the peoples of the wider world do not know what Section 232 is, also tend to ignore proclamations by foreign people (or we might have listened to Stalin, the Chinese leadership and a whole lot more) and thought that it was tough to get bombs on the heads of Iran these days. Still the leaders of the rest of the world are probably being tight lipped because they are awaiting an invitation to the opening night of the slightly delayed new White House ballroom.



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STOP PRESS

As this edition closes for publication I have been alerted to a new article on the French Gendarmerie that is something of an eye opener. I am told that the words from zone militaire opex360.com are like reading the story of NPAS all over again. We shall see.

Too late for this edition unfortunately but for those that can read and understand French the link to it is <https://www.opex360.com/2026/08/30/la-flotte-dhelicopteres-de-la-gendarmerie-nationale-est-dans-une-phase-de-grande-vulnerabilite-previent-le-senat/>

I will precis it next month but there is nothing like getting it straight from the original writer and apparently the comments that go with the article are a revelation in themselves.

It would appear that like NPAS in the UK there are some who think that operating 40 years old Aerospatiale AS350 helicopters is something to be proud of even if they are rotting and rarely available! Then there is buying the H160 for the Gendarmerie that it seems reeks of someone in high places purchasing a machine that is very pretty but way too big for the police patrol role.

For the British audience it may be pertinent that the Channel boats have meant that the people in the UK have also been paying a chunk of the bill for a French debacle! That should go down well!. *Shushhhhhh*.



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Keeping up with Emergency Services News





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