In a surprise twist to the Enstrom Helicopter Corporation’s future, which many thought lay in the hands of bidder Mid Tex Aviation (HeliData News & Classified passim), in fact the company has been bought out of Chapter 11 bankruptcy by Indiana entrepreneur Chuck Surack, whose group Surack Enterprises includes online retailer Sweetwater Sound and several aviation-related businesses including charter, rental and training companies Sweet Aviation and Sweet Helicopters. Surack owns and flies his own Enstrom 480B helicopter and Sweet Helicopters is the official helicopter services provider for the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Surack stepped in to save Enstrom after Mid Tex Aviation encountered unexpected problems securing the funding for their bid. With the assistance of Carson LLP and Warner Norcross + Judd LLP, the trustees’ attorney, the purchase was able to be completed quickly. The entrepreneur says he is excited to have purchased “this outstanding company” that employs workers “right here in the Midwest”. Enstrom is headquartered at Menominee in Michigan, and in a letter to the Enstrom leadership team, Surack shared his appreciation to the employees for their devotion and dedication over the years and particularly during the last few difficult months.
Wrexham based Air Covers has been presented with the Queen’s Award for International Trade by the Lord Lieutenant of Powys, reflecting the steady growth of the company since it was founded by partners John and Sasha Pattison in 2006.

The company produces covers for a wide range of aircraft, using 3D Lidar scanning to create bespoke and form fitting protection, and recently won a contract to supply the UK Ministry of Defence with full covers for Leonardo Merlin helicopters operating from the aircraft carriers HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales. Air Covers is also supplying similar protection for the Norwegian AW101 SAR fleet. More than 65 percent of the company’s production is to export customers.

Leeds Bradford Airport has teamed with start up company Urban-Air Port to develop an unmanned and manned aerial vehicle hub at the airport to facilitate the operation of drone delivery services in the Leeds City Region. The site will provide the infrastructure for the command and control, charging and loading of logistics drones, alongside future eVTOL parking and charging facilities, and associated passenger services.

The project coincides with the publication of guidance by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), for the design of vertiports infrastructure to ensure the safe operation of Urban Air Mobility service in locations across Europe, especially within or close to cities. One notable innovation proposed is the concept of a funnel-shaped area above the vertiports, designated as an obstacle-free zone to protect the significant vertical landing and take off elements expected with eVTOL operations. Omnidirectional approaches to vertiports are also suggested, rather than the more constrained approach and departure option at traditional heliports. This additional flexibility would take better account of environmental and noise restrictions.

Rotortec in Chile has ordered two new Airbus H125 helicopters in an expansion of its high altitude and aerial work operations in the country’s mountain range. The company has more than 15 years experience in Chile, operating from bases at Santiago, Pucón and Parque Pumalin, and already operates earlier versions of the H125 on multi-role missions.

The new aircraft will benefit from the latest Safran 951shp Arriel 2D engine upgrade and the increased power available.

This year’s RotorTech UK event, being held at Cotswold Airport from 16-18 June, is to incorporate a separate outdoor display area for all types of pre-owned aircraft available for sale. The initiative is expected to allow individuals and brokers the opportunity to present aircraft to a large segment of the general aviation community, as well as giving potential buyers close and personal access to a significant range of aircraft. The show will also include a British Helicopter Association presence, with a BHA meeting area and a seminar, hosted by Chief Executive Tim Fauchon. This will cover a swift round up of European aviation Safety Agency, UK Department of Transport and UK Civil Aviation Authority issues and plans which may affect the private helicopter pilot. Whilst there will be an emphasis on safety, the content will also cover emerging legislation. The session will be open and audience participation will be encouraged.

Fly-in visitors to the event will benefit from free show access compared to an on-the-gate ticket charge. Further details are available via the website, www.rotortechuk.com.

Airbus reported the First Quarter 2022 results for the Group on 4 May, noting that Airbus Helicopters booked 56 net orders in the first quarter compared to 41 in the same period 2021. The EBIT adjusted for the division increased to Euro 90 million from Euro 62 million, partly driven by a growth in services and a favourable mix of the programmes it also reflects non-recurring elements, including the impact from retirement obligations.

As previously reported, Airbus Helicopters was awarded a contract for the Tiger Mk III attack helicopter upgrade programme as well earlier this year.
The province of Manitoba in Canada has launched a public tender Request for Proposals (RFP) to provide an improved multi-year air ambulance service on a 24/7 basis, with the primary aircraft to be supported by backups. More points will be awarded to providers who can offer newer, dedicated aircraft and higher levels of service reliability. The requirement covers both fixed-wing and helicopter services, with onboard equipment to include neonatal incubators and bariatric stretcher platforms. The deadline for replying to the RFP is 9 September.

Breeze-Eastern Corporation has been awarded a $7,938,309 fixed price contract by the US Army for the overhaul and upgrade of the winch on the Sikorsky HH-60M medical evacuation helicopter.

A specialist version of the UH-60M Black Hawk, the HH-60M has a medical interior developed by Air Methods United Rotorcraft Division, providing a mix of patient litters and ambulatory patient seating, along with medical equipment. It first entered service in 2008. A first batch of 100 aircraft were delivered by July 2012, with a second batch of 120 helicopters ordered at that time. The US Army is continuing to take delivery of further HH-60Ms and plans to have 419 aircraft in service by 2026.

Japan Aerospace Corporation and Kawasaki Heavy Industries have signed an agreement with Dart Aerospace for the design and certification of a Fire Attack belly-mounted system on the five-bladed Kawasaki-assembled BK117D-3 (H145) helicopter. The new firefighting system will be based on the current Dart Model 311G11 designed for the BK117C-2 (EC145), which includes a 912l (240 gall) main water tank and a 53l (14 gall) foam tank, with a 3m (10ft) hover pump able to pump 1,703l (450 gall) per minute from any water source.

US Federal Aviation Administration certification is expected by the end of this year, with Japanese Civil Air Board verification following in 2023.

The Honolulu Fire Department in Hawaii has put in a request to the City Council for funding to purchase a new $12 million helicopter for search and rescue and wildfire missions. Currently the Department operates three McDonnell Douglas MD520N NOTAR helicopters, all of which are over 20 years old, with two in particular requiring major overhauls. $12 million would also comfortably cover the price of the basic aircraft, currently at around $7.2 million, the installation of specialised equipment and avionics, and pilot training.
The Ukraine Coast Guard have recovered a downed Russian Mil Mi-35M helicopter from the Kyiv Reservoir, after it was shot down with a Stinger missile during the Russian attack on Hostomel airport early in the Russian invasion. The aircraft has now joined a number of other helicopters, including Mi-8s, Kamov Ka-52s and at least one Mil Mi-28 destroyed by the Ukrainian forces over the past two and a half months.

Swiss maintenance provider RUAG has completed the upgrade of the last of nine Swiss Air Force TH-98 Cougar helicopters, with the aircraft now back in service for continued operation until the planned fleet retirement date in the mid 2030s. The project to upgrade the nine began with a contract award in 2017, following a modernisation programme carried out on the Air Force fleet of 15 TH-89 Super Pumas.

The prototype TH-98 conversion first flew in November 2017 and, after a series of trials, was re-delivered to the Air Force as the first TH-19 in late 2019. The Cougars and Super Pumas are now both in a similar modification state, allowing more uniform and simplified operational procedures and training to be carried out. Further upgrade work is also being carried out under a supplementary contract, including improvements to the tactical communications and the installation of the ISSYS self-protection system.

These additional retrofit modernisations are being carried out in close coordination with RUAG's maintenance operations and should be completed, including post-modification flight tests in the final phase, by mid-2024.

The Brazilian Air Force is withdrawing all 12 of its Mil Mi-35M attack helicopters from service, according to industry sources. The aircraft in service with 2nd Squadron, 8th Air Group at the Porto Velho air base are being retired over the next several months, with final disbandment of the squadron planned for this coming December.

Known as the AH-2 Sabre by the Brazilian Air Force, the aircraft have been in service since 2010 following a tender process that also included the Agusta A-129 Mangusta in the final evaluation. The AH-2 was the Air Force preference and was also offered at about $14 million each per unit, $4 million less than the A-129. However, once in service the aircraft was criticised for its high operating costs and poor manufacturer support, leading to long periods of grounding. In late 2020 a new contract was signed under which Russian Helicopters were to supply repair kits for use in Brazil and also to supply several new components and carry out some repairs in Russia.

Despite this, reported pressure from the United States to retire the helicopters from service and to purchase surplus US Marine Corps Bell AH-1W Super Cobras as replacements, through a Foreign Military Sale (FMS) or Direct Commercial Sale (DCS) route, is one scenario now doing the diplomatic rounds.

Bell-Boeing has been awarded a $302,152,163 contract by the US Naval Air Systems Command to manufacture and deliver four additional MV-22B tiltrotor aircraft to the US Marine Corps. The work will be shared out between Textron Bell in Fort Worth and Amarillo, Texas (43 percent), Boeing in Ridley Park, Pennsylvania (15.22 percent), and other locations, and is expected to be completed in November 2025.
At least 16 Mil Mi-17V-5 helicopters, originally purchased by the US government for the Afghan Air Force, are being transferred to Ukraine, forces according to industry sources.

Five of the aircraft, which were already in Ukraine under overhaul, have already been categorised as “excess defence articles” under the US Arms Export Control Act, and handed over. Another 11 Mi-17V-5s, embargoed before delivery when the Taliban took control in Afghanistan and currently stored at the giant Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona, have now also been earmarked for Ukraine.

Further Mi-17s, along with Mi-25 gunships and some Sikorsky UH-60 helicopters, are parked up in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the result of Afghans fleeing their country during the Taliban take over. An estimated 24 helicopters escaped in this way to Uzbekistan, with several more landing in Tajikistan. The US State Department is now discussing the future disposition of all these helicopters with various parties, including the Uzbek President and US agencies.

Erickson Helicopters in Portland, Oregon has won a $16 million contract modification to provide continued fixed-wing and helicopter services at Edwin Andrews Air Base in the Philippines, for the six months from 28 March to 27 September this year. The modification brings the total cumulative value of the original contract to $119,640,341.

Edwin Andrews Air Base is situated in Zamboanga City alongside the international airport, and is used to support US Special Forces engaged in operations against Islamic Muslim Extremists in the south of the country.

INS Vikrant, India’s first indigenous aircraft carrier is due to be handed over to the Indian Navy this month by the Cochin Ship Yard, following the completion of final sea trials involving the first take offs and landings by the navalised Mig-29K fighter-bomber aircraft from the angled deck. Following the handover the vessel will take up the Vikrant name and will be officially commissioned on India’s Independence Day in August.

The new carrier is named after its predecessor, the British-built HMS Hercules, a Majestic class aircraft carrier which was purchased incomplete by India in 1957 and completed in 1961 as the country’s first aircraft carrier. Decommissioned in 1997 she was preserved as a museum piece until 2012 but then sold and finally scrapped in 2014. Although the new Vikrant is described as of indigenous manufacture, in reality only the hull and structure of the ship is of Indian origin, with 70 percent of the weaponry and 50 percent of the propulsion system being supplied by overseas companies.

Construction of the ship began in February 2009 and it was launched in August 2013, with construction of the hull and flight deck completed and the installation of machinery etc underway by early 2016. Initial basin trials to check the propulsion and other systems began in October 2020, followed by the start of the sea trials in August 2021.

Defence INTERNATIONAL

Documents published by the US Army have revealed that the Future Attack Reconnaissance Aircraft (FARA) prototype fly-off testing will not now begin before at least late 2023, marking a 12 month slippage from the original programme, with the contract award for the engineering and manufacturing development phase now delayed by up to 18 months. Other key milestones for FARA will be delayed by up to four years according to the budget documentation. Bell Textron and Sikorsky Aircraft are competing to provide the Army with the new helicopter but have already been delayed by the non availability of the Army-mandated GE Engine T901 powerplant.

Bell is offering the Model 360 Invictus, which is the more conventional design of the two contenders but utilises a booster engine to meet the performance specification. Sikorsky is developing the S-97 Raider X, a coaxial helicopter with a pusher airscrew for additional high speed cruise power.

The Taiwan Defence Ministry has confirmed that the country is no longer planning to buy 12 Sikorsky MH-60R anti-submarine helicopters for naval operations after failing to secure US Foreign Military Sales funding for the purchase.

The aircraft were due to replace ageing McDonnell Douglas MD500M helicopters in the role, but the Ministry says the MH-60R is too expensive without US support. It is now expected to consider alternatives to fulfil the anti-submarine warfare role, with likely contenders from India, South Korea, and the UK Leonardo Wildcat helicopter.

Meanwhile the Royal Australian Navy is to purchase a further 13 MH-60R helicopters to increase its operational fleet to 36 aircraft. The additional helicopters will be home-based at Nowra in New South Wales, where Sikorsky Australia employs 195 aviation engineers, technicians and training and logistics personnel to maintain the MH-60R fleet.
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One early result of the partnership may be the use of the EH216 to provide air taxi services for the 2025 World Expo, due to take place in Osaka, Kansai Region between May and November of that year.

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New Zealand planning law reforms could threaten offshore tourist islands like Waiheke and Aotea, by eroding Auckland Council’s already limited ability to control helicopter flights. The two islands have local council boards but are unable to legislate on applications for helicopter landings, and the overruling Auckland Council says they are a non-complying activity in most places on the mainland.

Waiheke already has almost 50 helipads consented, many operated by business linked with tourism, whilst Aotea had five in the pipeline at the beginning of May, all of which were within a few miles of the Claris airport. Auckland Council’s planning committee has now approved a staff investigation to ascertain if helicopters operating on the islands are complying with the few existing rules governing their consents with a report promised by the end of this year.

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AirX is a major helicopter service platform provider in Japan, having developed reservation platforms for over 100 helicopter sightseeing routes and private helicopter charters. Annually the AirX platform can book over 2,000 sightseeing flights throughout Japan and more than 200 chartered flights, with over 15,000 chartered flight customers served to date. The company now believes the low altitude transportation and tourism market has new growth potential, leveraged by AAV technology and centralised management. The EH216 is seen as providing customers with cost-effective air taxi services, facilitating various Urban Air Mobility projects in Japan and hence the decision to select EHang as a partner in the global eVTOL market.

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Straight Up. A History of Vertical Flight by Steve Markman & Bill Holder. Published by Pen-and-Sword. Price: £25.00 (UK), $29.95 (USA). This 184 page softback was first published 20 years ago but nevertheless remains a “must have” compendium of VTOL aircraft, build and unbuilt since the 1930s. Following a broad introduction, the contents are split into 13 chapters, each dealing with the different and varied systems. These include compound VTOL, Tilt-Wing, Vectored Thrust, Lift-Cruise and so on. What you won’t find is the pure helicopter, but there is so much more with lots of photographs (and drawings of those that never progressed beyond the design stage). Whilst the majority are of US origin, other countries are also represented including Canada, France, Russia and the UK. There is the occasional error, not picked up in the proof reading (for example the Sikorsky S-72A Rotor Systems Research Aircraft described in the picture caption as the Lockheed XH-51N and the McDonnell XV-1 captioned as the Lockheed AH-56 Cheyenne), but frankly minor flaws in a bargain for VTOL reference.

Special Duties Pilot by John M. Billings. Published by Pen-and-Sword. Price: £19.99 (UK), $29.95 (USA). This is the autobiography of a man who began taking piloting lessons in 1938, joined the US Army Air Force in 1942 and has been flying ever since. At the age of 92 he even flew around the United States over a distance of 5,758 nautical miles and 56.6 flight hours. Of course the most interesting recollections are his time flying Consolidated B-24 Liberators on top secret low altitude missions, delivering agents and supplies by parachute to resistance groups during WW2. Post war he flew with TransWorld Airlines and Eastern Airlines before turning to lighter aviation and flying medical patients to clinics and hospitals in over 300 missions. This 128 page book is one for your next beach holiday.

Airborne Anti-Submarine Warfare by Michael E.Glyn. Published by Front-Line Books. Price: £25.00 (UK), $35.00 (USA). Subtitled “From the First World War to the Present Day”, and written by a veteran US Navy submarine hunting pilot, this 258 page hardback is an excellent primer for anyone seeking to understand the evolution of the title subject. Beginning in 1916 with bombs dropped on a French submarine in the Adriatic, the author takes us through the threats and counter-measures employed against the early German U-boats over the following two years and again follows the more sophisticated measures needed to fight the same enemy and the Japanese Navy in the Second World War.

Post that period the emergence of Russia and China superpowers and the introduction of nuclear power plants for submarines, not to mention the ability to launch cruise missiles, saw the growth of new sensor technology and search techniques to find and identify the underwater threats. The cat and mouse game continues today and this book is an exciting read for anyone wanting a glimpse and better understanding of this high-stakes world…

Test Pilot by Chris Taylor. Published by Pen-and-Sword. Price: £25.00 (UK), $49.95 (USA). The author of this 319 page hardback is definitely qualified to write this book, having flown over 400 types of aircraft during his career as a pilot, first with the Fleet Air Arm, then with the Empire Test Pilots School at Boscombe Down and finally with the UK Civil Aviation Authority, the European Aviation Safety Agency and as a freelancer. That he was qualified to test both fixed-wing aeroplanes and rotary-wing (of all classes) makes the content all the more interesting, especially as it’s delivered in a humorous but “no punches pulled” manner. A prime example of the latter is his view of the PZL Swidnik SW-4 helicopter, which he had to fly on several occasions and each time found wanting. Quite a few light fixed-wings got similar short shrift.

He even flew our Brantly B2B helicopter on a check flight in 2009, finding a list of snags that had to be put right before it could be flown again. (It did eventually get signed off and kept going until 2015, when EASA withdrew the Type Certificate because the Chinese owners of Brantly wouldn’t pay the annual fees but that’s another story). Meanwhile Chris went on to fly for the Police and Air Ambulance Services before eventually hanging up his boots and, from all accounts becoming a comedic ale connoisseur. This is a highly recommended read.
Leonardo Helicopters provide unique, integrated and affordable products to the global healthcare delivery system.

The AW169 is ideally suited to life-saving primary and secondary EMS missions anytime, anywhere. Easily adaptable, rapidly configurable and uniquely designed around patients’ needs, the AW169 ensures that air medical professionals can provide the best care at the most critical moments.

Inspired by the vision, curiosity and creativity of the great master inventor - Leonardo is designing the technology of tomorrow.