



COLUMBIA HELICOPTERS SEES OPPORTUNITIES IN EUROPE

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By Jeremy Parkin

Columbia Helicopters was attending AFF Europe 2019 to build its knowledge, contacts and reputation in Europe. The Oregon-based operator sees opportunities in countries which currently fly just fixed-wing firefighting aircraft, and are bringing the message of the benefits in a mixed fleet of fixed and rotary wing. The operator also expects to start flying in countries where no helicopters comparable to their Chinooks are currently available, and thus where the economies of scale afforded by these larger helicopters have yet to be realised.

Now in its 62nd year, Columbia has for many years concentrated on tandem rotor helicopters, and one of the key benefits of this rotor format is access with large rear doors or a ramp. The company owns 14 BV107/CH-46 helicopters, 10 BV234s and 11 CH-47Ds. Three of the 47Ds are permanently fitted with internal tanks as dedicated firefighting assets, while the 234s perform this role using external buckets. Columbia purchased the production certificate for the BV234 Commercial Chinook from Boeing in early 2000, and they also own every such helicopter worldwide. The company also has significant in-house MRO capability, including being a Honeywell T-55 engine Service Center, and they regularly

support CH-47 Chinooks being operated by foreign militaries.

The fleet is engaged in a number of different tasks, with firefighting, external long-line operations and passenger transport being the main three. In Afghanistan, Columbia has flown for the US Transportation Command since 2011 transporting both passengers and external/internal cargo between various bases and forward operating locations. Cargo typically includes equipment, supplies and mail. A contract announcement from the US Department of Defense in August 2018 documented an additional \$243 million being awarded to the operator for this work. Columbia is also active in Papua New Guinea, supporting oil and gas exploration and production with a pair of BV234 utility aircraft.

The tandem rotor format, on which Columbia Helicopters focus, has a number of advantages over traditional format helicopters. For example, there are no tail rotor clearance requirements for the safety of both personnel and equipment, and no cross-wind limitations.

When questioned about the now-aborted take-over by Bristow Helicopters, Business Development VP Santiago Crespo told Tangent Link that the impetus behind the proposal was around the lack of overlap between the two operators and the benefits of entering markets as a bigger organisation. With Bristow's approach now dead – primarily due to the collapse of the acquirer's share price - Columbia management are now doubling down on maintaining the status quo and continuing with their business plan, which is underpinned by two record financial years.

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