

Wings in the Dark

NIGHT FLIGHT CONCEPTS PROVIDES THE FULL GAMUT OF NIGHT FLYING SERVICES

BY SARAH B. HOOD | PHOTOS BY SHELDON COHEN

Back in 2004, Adam Aldous was serving with the U.S. Army in Iraq when he and some of his fellow pilots realized how their military experiences could be shared with other types of air services back home. "We were flying exclusively at nighttime," he said. "It was at the end of a long mission flying with NVGs [night vision goggles], and we saw how our first responders could benefit by that as well."

However, it would take years to realize the initial vision, which was "actually thought up and dreamt up and drafted up on a piece of paper on a bunk over in Iraq," he said. "We held onto that vision when we were still on active duty for two years."

Today, Aldous is president of Night Flight Concepts, which is celebrating its first decade in business. Vice president David Luke, one of the co-founders, also served with the U.S. Army in

Korea and Iraq. Ten years ago, Aldous and Luke could already see how other law enforcement, military, firefighting, emergency medical services (EMS) and search-and-rescue teams could benefit from their experience in night vision operations, "so we brought that to the civil side with the appropriate changes," Aldous said.

These days, "our company has really evolved from a comprehensive night visions solutions company." With recently appointed CEO Dr. Gordon Jiroux, owner of Universal Helicopters, Night Flight Concepts has become a broad-based provider dealing with all aspects of night flying.

"We provide support to the best of the best," said Aldous. For instance, the company was recently awarded the contract to set up the newly privatized U.K. search-and-rescue services for night-vision operations. In 2013, Night Flight

Concepts had just completed night vision training for the Massachusetts State Police Department when the police were called upon to participate in the hunt for Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who was located hiding inside a boat through the use of infrared cameras.

Night Flight Concepts offers its services under three main areas, which it calls SOAR, LEASE and Laser Armor. SOAR stands for Special Operations Airborne Resources, which Aldous describes as a "single access point contracting solution" for a range of linked service areas that include environmental training, law enforcement, safety, human factors, crew resource management and emergency disaster response.

SOAR services are designed to suit the needs of specialized aviation operators working in challenging conditions to provide critical tasks at a



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high level of proficiency. "In order for them to do that, they need the right equipment and they need it to perform in the most austere of environments," said Aldous. "Processes and procedures need to be clear, defined and managed as their capability progresses or their mission evolves," he said. "We are a company, through our SOAR capabilities, that can address this."

Whether the mission involves search-and-rescue in "crazy offshore conditions," aerial firefighting or EMS, SOAR can address every facet, from training to the establishment of appropriate protocols and procedures to equipment acquisition and life cycle management. Training can be tailored to fit the specific needs of night vision pilots. It can approach every situation, from flying in mountain or desert conditions to altitude physiology, underwater egress or individual training to mitigate spatial disorientation.

LEASE stands for Law Enforcement Air Support Entity. "We just launched this program in 2015; this was a long term goal and vision for us," said Aldous. "This is a solution for government agencies that want or need to get into having the resource capability of an airborne law enforcement unit. Security is an important consideration these days. A lot of communities want an aviation law enforcement unit, but can't figure out how to get there. LEASE provides that solution."

Through LEASE, government agencies can provide themselves with aircraft and the option of experienced pilots for a predictable monthly cost. When the time comes to upgrade equipment, they can take advantage of a roll-over option to maximize their budgetary efficiency.

The third program, Laser Armor, is an example of thought leadership based on experience. Through their interactions with clients, Aldous and his

colleagues recognized that the malicious use of lasers was becoming an increasingly pressing issue for pilots.

"There have been thousands of cases of uses on aircraft that have affected their operation, or caused pilots to feel that their lives and every life on board were at stake," said Aldous. Partnering with aerospace physiologist Dr. Dudley Crosson, Night Flight Concepts developed laser protective eyewear and accompanying training to help pilots during and after a laser strike, including guidelines for medical follow-up.

Night Flight Concepts continues to grow and evolve, but after 10 years, Aldous said he can already look back proudly over the company's record since it was born as a soldiers' dream in Iraq. "Even though we're a very humble group of people," he said, "we're proud to say we've made a difference." ✈️



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