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>
> *— ASU vice president of engineering, Kip McDermott*

PARTNERS FOR LIFE

WITH THE EUROPEAN MARKET READY TO BEGIN ADOPTING NVGS, ASU IS READY TO UTILIZE ITS EXTENSIVE NIGHT VISION EXPERIENCE TO HELP EACH OPERATOR MAKE A SMOOTH TRANSITION TO SAFER NIGHTTIME FLYING.

BY AMITAV DASH

"We invest in and are vested with our customers," said ASU president Jim Winkel. "If they're not satisfied, we will do everything we can to remedy that situation. We view our customers as partners for life."

There is a powerful secondary meaning to Winkel's statement. Not only does ASU partner with clients, and promote standardization, to ensure mutual, long-term success, this industry-leading night-vision specialist partners with clients to protect the lives of those who save lives.

Aviation Specialties Unlimited, or ASU, was founded to advance safety in night vision goggle (NVG) use. Almost 25 years and nearly 1,300 aircraft modifications later, this mission has not changed. Improving safety in and through the use of NVGs is the company's continued focus, especially now as it helps European operators transition to safer nighttime flight.

INVESTING IN EUROPE

As part of its commitment to Europe, ASU has spent the last few years connecting with multiple stakeholders there.

Said Winkel: "Both Kip McDermott [VP of engineering] and Kim Harris [director of business development and sales] have spent months knocking on doors, talking to operators, regulators and manufacturers. At one point, Kip spent six weeks in a rental car, going from operator to operator to operator, covering almost a dozen countries. He talked about and demonstrated NVGs, evaluated aircraft, answered questions and listened to numerous concerns and requests."

Everything ASU learned from being on the ground in Europe has led it to believe the market is ready to adopt NVGs.

"When I was there this past spring," said Kim Harris, "what I heard, multiple times, from operators, regulators, hospital personnel, and so on, is that they've been reviewing previous events. They've realized that had operators been equipped with NVGs, they could have saved lives that were otherwise lost."

Harris believes these privately shared conclusions reflect a groundswell of NVG interest in Europe. If so, there is no better company in the world to help European operators transition to NVG flight than ASU.

THE BENEFIT OF EXPERIENCE

To say ASU is a pioneer and leader in NVG implementation would be an understatement. When Mike Atwood founded the company in 1995, he was one of the few champions of NVGs in civil aviation. He fought to convince operators, pilots and regulators that NVGs could help save lives—something he learned first-hand from working on night vision programs since 1978.

Like Atwood, most ASU employees have years of prior NVG experience. Said Harris, "Our people have thousands of hours doing this kind of work, in a variety of civil and military situations, even before they come to ASU."

Then, there is the company's own extensive experience, covering multiple sectors and every facet of night vision implementation.

"We've modified almost 1,300 aircraft for NVG use, including several in Europe—most recently the [Leonardo] AW139 for air medical services," said VP of engineering Kip McDermott.

"With that comes a wide base of knowledge, not just in numerous sectors (police, government agencies, search-and-rescue, air ambulance, utility, offshore), but in the intricacies of each sector."

That experience reaches customers through ASU's worldwide team of certified NVIS (night vision imaging system) technicians and installers, and its on-site NVG instructor pilots. In Europe, ASU also has an established network of certified repair stations. Plus, there are company reps who serve customers locally.

PROVIDING A COMPLETE SOLUTION

ASU helped pioneer night vision operations for rotary- and fixed-wing companies around the world, assisting in every aspect of that implementation. The company's holistic approach means it can navigate regulations, manufacture equipment, modify aircraft, provide maintenance and flight training, and so much more, all with an unmatched level of proficiency and focus on standardization.

"That's one of our biggest differentiators," said McDermott. "We do it all. When you get an NVG solution from us, we're not a bunch of companies each with their own agendas, we're one company that can help an organization establish a comprehensive NVIS program. It's a big benefit to our customers. They make one call and can literally get everything they need in a standardized package."

One other key differentiator is the company's considerable experience working with regulators. In fact, right now, ASU is working with the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to help harmonize regulations.

The goal is to help improve safety in NVG flight in Europe and make it easier to implement NVG programs there. This is part of ASU's commitment to improving standardization and the safety of the whole industry.

It's why ASU is chairing the NVG Working Group discussion panel at Helitech on Oct. 17.

"We have invited EASA and the FAA to join the discussion," said president Jim Winkel. "We're going to broker things and make it easier to move toward harmonization."

A number of operators have also confirmed attendance and ASU is hoping everyone who's interested in NVGs in Europe will attend. A limited number of seats will be available the day of the event for those who register at asu-nvg.com/roundtable.

REAPING THE BENEFITS

Although European operators are late adopters of NVGs, McDermott sees a great benefit in that: "We'll be able to bring them all that hard-won knowledge from North America and around the world." He said it's similar to buying the third or fourth version of a new product—you get a uniform, cost-effective, full-featured, problem-free, easy-to-use solution.

Still, ASU realizes some European stakeholders may not be convinced.

"That's why we created an educational demonstrator," said Winkel. "This one-of-a-kind device will allow Helitech attendees to view the latest white phosphor NVGs in a flight-simulated environment."

When asked what else Helitech attendees could expect, Winkel was coyer. He confirmed ASU is continuing to invest in new solutions that will "help make it easier and safer for operators to save lives at night," but only smiled when asked for specifics.

"All I can say is: anyone who's interested in NVGs should visit us at Helitech—we have some new, lifesaving solutions they'll definitely want to see."