



Doing more – with less

The Common Thread

An Air Bear White Paper

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Having to do more – with less

Law enforcement is being challenged every day. Departments and hence air units are finding their budgets in jeopardy while public and political support is on the wane. We are all searching for the answer to the salient question: How to do more – with less.

This just published AIN [article](#), links to a very relevant discussion about acquisition and operational budgets as well as the social issues which are impacting the future of ALE operations. Well known agencies with large ALE fleets are facing significant cutbacks.

I was a CHP officer for 30 years, 24 of those years as both a fixed wing pilot and rotor wing TFO. You may know me from teaching tactical classes for APSA/ALEA over the years as well. I was on the CHP team which secured initial funding to adapt new (at that time) sensor technology to a fixed wing aircraft (Air-21, my aircraft). The results we achieved have revolutionized airborne law enforcement tactics.

Allow me to share some of the knowledge I've gained as well as a common thread in the conversations I've have had with air unit commanders of late:

One commander recently reached out to me asking how to better provide airborne services to his agency while dealing with a diminishing budget. Maintenance on his helicopter fleet is tying down at least 1/3 of his fleet in the hangar at any given time. Operational costs are ever increasing and he is finding it increasingly difficult to maintain flight hours. Having discovered the axiom "if you're not in the air, you're not there" rings true, stats are down and perception by management that they're not getting value out of their expenditures is problematic.

He was in the planning stages of gathering information on replacement aircraft, ISR equipment, ballpark figures to purchase, and hourly operating costs, in other words, how to do more – with less. Each of his three helo's are budgeted for 500 flight hours a year, 1,500 total. Maintenance requirements and budget shortfalls are restricting his flight time to not even 2/3 of his desired annual flight allotment.

In comparison, some of Air Bear's clients are budgeted to fly north of 100 hours per month, per fixed wing airplane, at far less cost than fielding a rotor wing asset. Thereby providing more effective support and chalking up exceptional stats. My recommendation to him was to sell his oldest helicopter and replace it with a less expensive, more capable fixed wing asset.

Mixed fleets are the wave of the future. Fixed wing assets are significantly less expensive to acquire and operate. Maintenance requirements won't break the bank nor require months of downtime. A fixed wing aircraft can remain on station hours longer, while providing better intelligence from beyond visual and audible range.

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Allow me to share insights I've discovered over the last three decades of my involvement with ALE operations:

- Air assets, when utilized with proven tactics and the right equipment are extremely valuable force multipliers.
- Assets need to be in the air, on station and ready to respond to be effective.
- Fielding effective and affordable solutions in this age of diminishing budgets is a requirement.

Additionally, my recommendations to you are:

- Invest in the highest level of ISR technology available, which you can afford.
- Deploy that technology over your region with a proven low-cost fixed wing platform for a minimum of 100 hours per month, then watch your overall effectiveness soar.

When an agency documents 600 felony locates and 200 pursuits in its first year while operating one special mission fixed wing aircraft, you may wish to investigate how those amazing stats were accomplished. My aircraft, Air-21 achieved these results. You can as well and I will be happy to assist you in doing so.

Focus on addressing the majority of your mission requirements (typically patrol support) by fielding cost effective assets to address those needs. Keep expensive assets used infrequently to a minimum. Fixed wing platforms are simply a more cost-effective and efficient solution for patrol support and counter drug operations, which as an added benefit provide better intelligence from above.

I have had hours of discussions regarding the worth of helicopters vs. airplanes for patrol support and all things being equal, the airplane is by far a more cost-effective solution. That alone substantiates the case for acquiring a mixed fleet to address your mission requirements.

All things are not equal, however. The airplane typically can carry far more payload, translating to larger sensors (15" gimbal size and above) which are superior to the 10" gimbals typically carried in rotor operations. This allows your crews to fly higher and further away from the incident, remain on station hours longer, thereby becoming more effective. Your overall stats will improve significantly.

I would suggest that you reach out to allied agencies that have faced the same issues and have discovered how adding a mission ready fixed wing platform has improved operational readiness and thereby arrest stats. The results? Lower cost of acquisition. Lower maintenance costs. Lower operational costs. Better intelligence and longer endurance. Higher availability. Case closed.

Here are a few comments from our customers who have implemented Air Bear solutions into a mixed fleet:

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- The math is simple, for every hour of helicopter flight time, we can dispatch the airplane for four hours.
- Our intention was to use the airplane solely for narcotic surveillance. What we found was the airplane was also extremely effective covering routine patrol support.
- Flight hours are up, while reducing our annual operating budget.
- We provide better service to our ground support, as well as to the community.
- We got it into its first couple pursuits last week. In both cases the airplane's speed and ability to fly high and wide was the deciding factor of apprehension. Motorcycles still outrun police cars.
- We have seized 64 guns, 40 kilos of drugs and helped with dozens of arrests in the last couple months.
- It's amazing what agencies come out of the woodwork asking for you when you have a great platform and a great aircrew.

The economic damage of shutting down the economy and fears of a resurgence of the corona virus pandemic are serious concerns we deal with every day. The social issues we currently face as a result will continue to require ALE units to do more - with less.

The math is simple! Field the highest capable assets which cost the least to acquire and operate. Let us show you how.

John

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