FREEZING RAIN. HEAVY SNOW. 60 MILE-PER-HOUR WIND GUSTS. BRISTOW PILOTS MUST NAVIGATE ALL YEAR ROUND, DAY AND NIGHT, THROUGH CONDITIONS THAT WOULD GROUND A TYPICAL COMMERCIAL AIRLINE FLIGHT. HERE’S A LOOK AT HOW THEY PREPARE TO MEET THESE CHALLENGES.
BOARDING A BRISTOW HELICOPTER ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD, YOU CAN BE CERTAIN OF THIS: THE FLIGHT CREW HAS EARNED THE COMMAND OF THAT AIRCRAFT AFTER COMPLETING AN INTENSIVE TRAINING PROGRAM OF MANY YEARS THAT ENSURES THEY ARE READY TO FLY WITH THE UTMOST COMMITMENT TO SAFETY AND KNOW WHAT TO DO IN ANY SCENARIO THEY MAY ENCOUNTER.

Being a helicopter pilot in the North Sea, Gulf of Mexico, West Africa or other challenging environment is not for everyone. To develop a pilot to be the best of the best, Bristow holds a unique advantage in that it operates Bristow Academy, the world’s largest commercial helicopter training service provider. But the initial training pilots receive at the Academy is only the start; more intensive training then occurs on specific aircraft types and in the environment in which they will fly. While experienced pilots joining Bristow with military or civilian aviation backgrounds may not train at the Academy, they still face years of training in the unique flying conditions of a specific region and in how to fly a specific aircraft type like the Sikorsky S-92.

STARTING OUT AT BRISTOW ACADEMY

Bristow Academy, with locations in Titusville, Florida; New Iberia, Louisiana, Carson City, Nevada, and Gloucester, UK, has trained thousands of civil and military helicopter pilots from around the world. The first day for incoming students is spent learning about Bristow’s Target Zero safety program. “Students learn immediately that we take their safety as seriously as they do and that they are entering into a very distinct culture, the Bristow Target Zero culture of safety,” says Academy Director Todd Smith. “Safety is continually reinforced and embedded in all our training programs. Because they learn to fly in a Target Zero culture, Academy students leave with a profound understanding of the core values required to be a pilot of Bristow’s caliber.”

PILOT PROFILES

OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS, MORE THAN 200 BRISTOW ACADEMY GRADUATES HAVE BEEN HIRED BY BRISTOW AND ARE STATIONED AROUND THE WORLD SERVING CLIENTS AND COMPILING AN EXEMPLARY SAFETY RECORD.

PILOT: JASPER GERRITSEN
LOCATION: ABERDEEN, UK
GRADUATED BRISTOW ACADEMY: 2011
 AIRCRAFT: SIKORSKY S-92

“I graduated Bristow Academy with both U.S. (FAA) and European (JAA) pilot licenses and an instrument rating. The high level of knowledge from the JAA ground school instructors, and their commitment to our being knowledgeable upon leaving the Academy, was impressive and inspiring. The Academy provided a place where I could safely commit a considerable amount of resources toward becoming a professional pilot with a successful outcome. The classroom knowledge gained at the Academy can be put to good practice on the job. For instance, the temperamental North Sea weather presents daily opportunities to observe, understand and use what we learned in the meteorology classes. Also, the busy airspace close to the airfield in Titusville helped to increase situational awareness, which is essential in any flying job.”
Job one at the Academy is teaching students the basics of flying helicopters and meeting the regulatory requirements of the region where they will be flying. Job two is to identify students with the most potential and put them on the path to becoming a Bristow pilot. “We’re looking for students with the understanding and thought processes that go well beyond just working the controls,” says Academy Standardization Manager Phillip Wynands. “We set the bar higher for these students with our SureTrac program.”

SureTrac has higher minimums across the board for evaluating pilots than any regulatory agency. The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration, for example, sets 70 percent as a passing grade. In SureTrac, 85 percent is required to stay in the program. “That’s how we know a person leaving the Academy as a SureTrac graduate is a high achiever who is well suited to move on to the commercial operating sector,” Wynands says. “But the training never stops.”

**EBU PREPARES PILOTS FOR CONDITIONS IN THE NORTH SEA**

While the Academy excels at turning out qualified pilots, Bristow’s business units around the world do the bulk of the training that gets a pilot ready to move into the captain’s seat. Capt. Matt Rhodes, Offshore Flight Operations Manager for Bristow’s operations in Europe (EBU), talks about preparing pilots for the conditions they’ll encounter in the North Sea. “We operate in one of the harshest environments to support the oil and gas industry,” says Rhodes. “It is essential that we provide our crews with the best possible training to ensure that they are equipped to deal with the conditions. All pilots that join us – whether they come from the Academy or the civilian or military market – go through the same level of training. The first week consists of an in-depth induction in health and safety, Target Zero, HUET (Helicopter Underwater Escape Training), dangerous goods and Crew Resource Management (CRM), which is training focused on the ‘soft’ skills of leadership, decision making and communication in the cockpit. Then they complete two weeks of intensive ground school to familiarise them with the systems of the aircraft they are going to be operating. This is followed by simulator training, then aircraft training, before they are able to start line training, which is completed on revenue flights with a line training captain who instructs them on the complexities of North Sea operations.”

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**PILOT PROFILE**

**PILOT: GEOFF BELL**  
**LOCATION: ABERDEEN, UK**  
**GRADUATED BRISTOW ACADEMY: 2007**  
**AIRCRAFT: SIKORSKY S-92**

“Becoming a helicopter pilot is one of the toughest, most challenging things I have done. I got through it thanks to a stubborn, dogged determination to achieve my dream of flying helicopters for a living. For anyone thinking of becoming a commercial helicopter pilot, I would say there is no better place available to train than Bristow Academy. But no one should enter into this profession lightly. The challenges do not end when you finish your training. I achieved it and stuck at it only because there is nothing else in the world I would rather do for a living than fly helicopters.”
THE TRAINING FACILITY AT EBU HEADQUARTERS IN ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND, IS EQUIPPED WITH THREE FULL-MOTION FLIGHT SIMULATORS.
The training facility at EBU headquarters in Aberdeen, Scotland, is equipped with three full-motion flight simulators featuring high-definition exact cockpit replicas of the aircraft Bristow operates. “The simulators provide a safe training environment where crews are taught and can practice the various procedures we’ve developed to operate safely,” says Rhodes. “The simulators are also programmed with more than 200 emergency and system failure scenarios. We train our pilots to a standard higher than the minimum set by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). In fact, Bristow has been instrumental in developing industry best practices.

“During the past few years,” says Rhodes, “Bristow has replaced its aging fleet with a new fleet of modern complex types. The EC225, S-92, S-76C++, AW139 and AW189 represent the most up-to-date digital technology available to the industry. Each of our aircraft boasts a number of enhanced safety designs such as a Traffic Collision Avoidance System (TCAS), an Electronic Ground Proximity Warning System (EGPWS) and highly advanced autopilot systems, which help to reduce pilot workload and improve safety.” Bristow’s training and simulators provide the necessary experience to fly these advanced technology aircraft. “We are the only North Sea operator that has this standard of facility,” Rhodes continues. “Our pilots are encouraged to use the simulator whenever possible in addition to the six-month training checks that we conduct in accordance with Bristow requirements.”

Pilots that complete their training at Bristow Academy and go on to EBU spend the first four years building their experience under close monitoring until they reach a standard where they can be considered for command. As co-pilots, they are encouraged to make maximum use of the simulators and are measured against a checklist to ensure their progression takes place at a steady pace. They fly with line training captains on a regular basis and complete Qualifying Flight Reports (QFRs) that assess their decision-making skills as well as their ability to operate the aircraft correctly according to Bristow’s procedures. At the four-year mark, co-pilots undergo an intensive training course and a command assessment in the simulator before they are signed off as competent to command a Bristow helicopter.

“Operating over the North Sea is a demanding but rewarding experience, and our crews pride themselves on delivering safe, efficient service to our clients,” Rhodes says. “Our pilots seldom require a reminder that safety comes first and that they have the responsibility to say ‘Stop’ if they have a concern with any aspect of the task at hand.”

PILOT PROFILE

Pilot: Ingar Blomso  
Location: Bergen, Norway  
Graduated Bristow Academy: 2007  
Aircraft: Sikorsky S-92

“My goal was to finish helicopter training quickly and have the opportunity to gain experience by working as a flight instructor, so Bristow Academy was a very good choice. People from all over the world come to the Academy to train, which creates a very international environment. The Academy provides a lot of practice on emergency situations and ‘hands-on’ flying. While there is a big difference between flying the smaller helicopters at the school and the big offshore helicopters with autopilot, the training gives you a good platform to advance to bigger helicopters and different flight operations later in your career.”
AUSBU NEW HIRES RECEIVE EXTENSIVE TRAINING

Bristow’s operations in Australia (AUSBU) are extensive, requiring travel over vast areas of oceans, from the cold southern ocean to the tropics of the Timor Sea. The distances flown vary, but can range from 40 miles to more than 350 miles.

“Added to the wide variety of bases, Bristow also operates quite a number of different types of helicopters to suit our clients,” says AUSBU Head of Training Steve Pearson. “The BK117 is very popular for the short-range, multi-stop operations, with the S-76s and AW139s taking over the medium ranges. The backbone of the fleet has been the AS332L Pumas and EC225s, and now the S-92s.”

Pearson explains how AUSBU obtains its pilots. “We regularly take two pilots a year from Bristow Academy, but the majority of our new crews are gained from smaller operators in Australia. The recruiting and interview process is well defined and tested, and generally reduces the applicants to around 10 percent of those who apply. Similar to EBU, our pilots complete a CRM program following their induction, integrated with an initial instrument course conducted in AUSBU’s simulator in Perth. Following this, they are sent on their helicopter type’s ground school, from which they progress to the helicopter simulator.” Australian pilots travel to Malaysia for simulator training on the EC225 and AW139, China for the S-76, Norway for the AS332L and the United States for the S-92. Once they’ve completed this initial phase, the pilots are trained on a non-revenue basis on flights to offshore facilities. Once this is complete, they then fly with a line training captain, a process that normally takes six months.

PILOT PROFILE

PILOT: KIERAN BELL
LOCATIONS: KARRATHA, WESTERN AUSTRALIA; MELBOURNE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA
GRADUATED BRISTOW ACADEMY: 2009
AIRCRAFT: SIKORSKY S-76 C++

“I was lucky enough to be one of the first two pilots selected for the Bristow Australia SureTrac cadet program. The Bristow Academy experience is one that I will never forget, because its remarkable community feel grasps you on arrival and stays with you forever. From the first day, the Bristow way of life is taught to everyone. Target Zero and FOCUS cards are just a couple of the core values that help me stay safe at work as well as at home every day. I can safely say the skills I learned at the Academy are the skills I use every day in my current role in Australia. All I have had to do is adapt them to a larger scale of operations and a more sophisticated aircraft.”
First Officer (FO) Peter McClelland, FO John Stanley and Senior FO Matt Tueller complete familiarization training in oil and gas operations before moving into their new roles supporting the European Business Unit and UK Search and Rescue for Bristow.
Training is a continuous process of checks every six months along with assessment interviews. To be promoted to senior first officer requires additional licensing exams, and technical and flying skill tests before the pilot is considered suitable for promotion by Bristow training and management staff.

“From senior first officer to command generally takes another two to three years where the continuous processes of assessments are made,” says Pearson. “Once selected as a suitable candidate, the pilot undergoes an intense two-week simulator course specialising in command judgment and multi-crew coordination. After successfully passing this stage, the pilot progresses through instrument check to the simulator for a Line Oriented Flight Training (LOFT) session with command assessments. These assessments are generally flown with three different co-pilots, each at a different stage of development, in varying environments. Once this section is passed, the next hurdle is a day and night line check in the pilot’s local area, after which the new captain will only be permitted to fly with an experienced first officer for the first year.”

Like the leading airlines, Bristow’s training assessments have reached a new level where not only knowledge, skills and attitude are assessed, but also Crew Resource Management. Assessments are computer based, so the data demonstrate the trend of not only the individual but also the pilot group. “With this data,” says Pearson, “we can continuously review our standards and trends, which leads to continuous improvement.”

**NABU REQUIRES SEMIANNUAL CHECK RIDES AND TRAINING FOR SINGLE-ENGINE PILOTS**

In addition to hiring from Bristow Academy, Bristow’s North America Business Unit (NABU) hires experienced pilots. “We look first to Bristow Academy when we are in a hiring phase,” says NABU Director Rob Phillips. “However, we’ve been fortunate in that our pilot attrition has been very low the last few years. So for the few we do hire, we can be very selective.”

Once on board, new hires go through an extensive two-week ground school that provides the basics on aircraft and operations. While they’re going through ground school, they’re going through flight training. The first section of training is to transition to the NABU aircraft type, the Bell 206. The second week is focused on offshore training and flying in the offshore environment. When they complete the training and check ride, they are turned over to commercial operations. “We are one of the few companies in the Gulf of Mexico that conducts semiannual check rides and training for pilots of single-engine aircraft,” says Phillips. “Our Training Department conducts check rides on all of our pilots twice a year, which include simulator training and check rides in the aircraft.”

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**PILOT PROFILE**

**PILOT: JAMES GAITHER**

**LOCATION: NEW IBERIA, LOUISIANA**

**GRADUATED BRISTOW ACADEMY: 2008**

**AIRCRAFT: BELL 206, BELL 407, EUROCOPTER EC135**

“After receiving my Certified Flight Instructor Instrument Certificate at Bristow Academy in 2008, I joined Bristow’s Gulf of Mexico operations in January 2009. After four years flying passengers, I am now a Check Airman in Bristow’s Training Department. It was the training I received from Bristow Academy that had a large influence on my desire to return to a training position. The Academy plays a very important role in the helicopter industry, serving many diverse cultures and ensuring that students are well prepared for any direction they choose to advance their careers. I enjoyed my time as an instructor at the Academy, and now as a Check Airman I feel it is important to pass on my experience and knowledge to both new and veteran pilots. There is no greater reward than to be a part of their career pursuits and help them achieve their dreams.”
For the recurring training, pilots first complete computer-based training and ground school before moving to the simulator, where Line Oriented Flight Training (LOFT) provides realistic scenarios and emergencies to deal with. “We can monitor how they respond in an emergency,” says Phillips. “We use medium and heavy aircraft simulators for the S-76s, AW139s and S-92s at Flight Safety International in Lafayette, Louisiana, where pilots do their scenario training followed by their check rides in the aircraft.”

Training is customized to address emerging issues before they become problems. “We look at any leading indicators or trends in certain types of incidents that may be occurring in the Gulf of Mexico, and we focus our ground schools around these trends. The computer-based training encompasses all the regulations we have to touch, as well as any safety-related trends. We modify the simulator sessions to incorporate these trends to make sure the pilot reacts properly.”

OIBU TRAINS PILOTS FOR COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTS

With operations ranging from the Baltic Sea to Brazil and from Trinidad to Turkmenistan, Bristow’s Other International Business Unit (OIBU) faces some of the most difficult pilot training challenges because flight

“EACH NEW CONTRACT BRINGS A NEW SET OF PILOTS, TRAINING REQUIREMENTS AND CHALLENGES. IT IS A UNIQUE GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO CAN MEET THIS TYPE OF CHALLENGE WHILE PURSUING THE GOALS OF TARGET ZERO AND OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE.” – CAPT. PAUL MASSINGBERD-MUNDY, TRAINING AND STANDARDS SUPERINTENDENT, OTHER INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS UNIT

PILOT: ROSH JAYPALAN
LOCATION: TANZANIA
GRADUATED BRISTOW ACADEMY: 1999
AIRCRAFT: AS332L/L2, SIKORSKY S-76, AW139

“I was fortunate enough to be selected for sponsorship by Bristow Helicopters in 1999, and was enrolled on the first UK CAA Commercial Helicopter Pilot course undertaken in the USA, at Bristow Academy when at its former location in California. Since then, recurrent training with Bristow has been an integral part of the job while flying over the North Sea and various locations worldwide within the Other International Business Unit. Over the years, the aircraft flown have developed with the times, with increased automation. The training has had to adapt accordingly, and the use of simulators has proved invaluable as a training aid. One thing that hasn’t changed over the years is the standard of training provided by Bristow.”
crews need to be trained to operate anywhere, anytime, under a variety of national registers. Head of Flight Operations for OIBU Stephen Hogarth says their training system has traditionally looked to the EBU for guidance on standards, training methods, support, documentation, facilities and access to training staff. More recently, Bristow's Australia Business Unit (AUSBU) and North America Business Unit (NABU) have helped the group meet its training objectives for both oil and gas and search and rescue (SAR). “Our modern aircraft and the ability to train in simulators have made things easier compared with local training, where anything from sandstorms and typhoons to language issues with air traffic control can complicate the process,” Hogarth says. “But the biggest factor in helping us maintain our high standards is the dedication of the training staff.”

“These individuals are able to provide quality training under often difficult circumstances to ensure that the pilots under their supervision are properly prepared for every situation,” says Training and Standards Superintendent Capt. Paul Massingberd-Mundy. “Each new contract brings a new set of pilots, training requirements and challenges. It is a unique group of people who can meet this type of challenge while pursuing the goals of Target Zero and operational excellence.”

WASBU SENDS NIGERIAN PILOTS TO BRISTOW ACADEMY

Bristow’s operations unit in West Africa (WASBU) has trained more than 90 Nigerians as pilots, beginning with candidates who first must meet high entry standards and pass intensive screening. Cadet pilots are sent to Bristow Academy for immersion in the Target Zero culture of safety. This year alone, 13 fully qualified pilots have gone through the Bristow Academy from Nigeria. (See related article on page 16.)

FLYING INTO THE FUTURE

As helicopters have evolved from providing mostly utility functions like lifting heavy machinery to moving people all around the globe, they’ve followed a similar safety and pilot training path as seen in commercial fixed-wing aviation. “More people are aboard helicopters today than ever before,” says Bristow Academy’s Smith. “That trend is going to continue, and as an industry we’re moving toward the level of safety seen today in U.S. airlines, which was regarded as practically unachievable just a few years ago.”

The good news is that solutions to issues facing the helicopter industry have already been identified and implemented in the fixed-wing commercial sector. “We don’t need to reinvent the wheel,” Smith says. “We’re looking at what they did and adapting it to helicopters.”

PILOT PROFILE

PILOT: ABIMBOLA JAYEOLA
LOCATION: PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA
GRADUATED BRISTOW ACADEMY: 2008
AIRCRAFT: SIKORSKY S-76

“From a technical perspective, my Academy experience is the foundation of my success on the job today. More broadly, exposure to the rich and multicultural diversity at the Academy greatly facilitated my understanding and appreciation of different cultures and the way they do things. Effective communication, establishing good interpersonal relationships, networking and sharing ideas are just some of the important ‘soft’ skills I developed and honed during my Academy training. Coming from a part of the world where some professions are viewed as the exclusive preserve of men, I found enormous encouragement in the Academy. I learned to believe in myself because I was determined in my choice of becoming a pilot. I’ll always remember what one of the instructors said to me: ‘If you have faith in yourself, other people will have no choice but to believe in you.’”