

The logo for Guatefly, featuring a stylized white wing icon to the left of the word "Guatefly" in a white, sans-serif font. The background of the entire page is a low-angle, upward-looking shot of a blue helicopter against a cloudy sky. The helicopter's main rotor blades are visible, and a person in a helmet is seen in the cockpit area. The helicopter has a grey underbelly with some equipment mounted on it.

Guatefly

ISSUE No. 08
MAY
2026

**WHEN FAILURE
IS NOT AN OPTION**



Real Stories from Latin American Aviation

A dramatic photograph of a helicopter in flight, hoisting a person from the ground. The helicopter is silhouetted against a bright, glowing sun that creates a large lens flare in the lower right corner. The person being hoisted is also silhouetted, hanging from a rope. The sky is a deep blue gradient.

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COMING BACK TOGETHER



We are not returning because it is fashionable.

We are returning because something was missing.

Because we missed these conversations, these stories, and this community.

In a world where headlines disappear almost as quickly as they appear, we chose a different path. We chose to slow down, look deeper, and tell the stories that deserve to be remembered.

That is what Guatefly Magazine is about.

We believe aviation is much more than aircraft, airports, and technology. Behind every flight there are people, decisions, challenges, and experiences worth sharing.

Born in Guatemala and connected to Latin America, Guatefly now reaches beyond borders with editions published in both Spanish and English, allowing these stories to travel as far as the aircraft and professionals that inspire them.

TO OUR COMMUNITY

None of this would be possible without the people who have supported Guatefly throughout the years.

To the readers who patiently waited for our return. To those who continued asking when the next edition would arrive. To the contributors who share knowledge earned through real experience. And to the companies and organizations that continue to place their trust in us. Thank you.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS EDITION

Within these pages you will find authentic voices, operational experiences, industry perspectives, and stories that are rarely told in detail.

From general aviation and helicopter operations to rescue missions, training, leadership, and the lifestyle that surrounds aviation, every article reflects the people who make this industry what it is.

More importantly, this edition is about those who are passionate about aviation.

The pilots, technicians, rescuers, instructors, and professionals who continue to answer the call of flight every day.

We are not here to teach you how to fly.

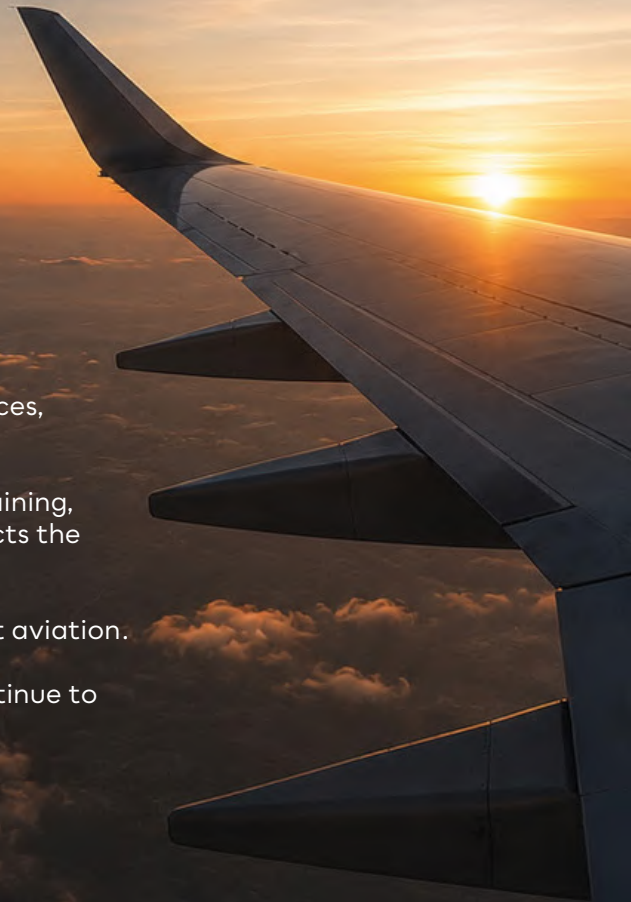
Many of you already know that better than we do.

We are here to share experiences, start conversations, and explore the side of aviation that often goes untold.

This relaunch is not an ending. It is simply the beginning of a new chapter.

Welcome back!

Alejandro Vargas A.
Director, Guatefly Magazine



WHEN FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION

Interview with Captain Josue Sian - SAR Helicopter Pilot

Real-world helicopter rescue operations in Guatemala, where every decision influences the outcome.

Not every mission begins with certainty.

Some begin with a set of coordinates and the hope of finding someone in time.

In a country shaped by mountains, volcanoes, dense forests, and remote terrain, there are situations where reaching a person by ground is simply not possible.

That is when a helicopter stops being a tool and becomes the only option.

For Capt. Josué Sian, a helicopter pilot involved in real-world search and rescue operations, flying has never been just a skill. It is a responsibility.

More than answers, Capt. Sian shared a clear perspective on what truly happens inside the cockpit during a rescue mission.

WHERE THE MISSION CHANGES

From the outside, aerial rescue is often seen as heroic.

From the inside, the reality is very different.

Aerial search and rescue missions are usually employed as a last resort or as support to ground teams when terrain, environmental conditions, and obstacles prevent rescuers from advancing any further.

Operating in these environments requires a higher level of preparation and demands safe, precise flying so the mission can be carried out effectively.

In many cases, the helicopter becomes the final option. When terrain no longer allows progress on the ground, the margin for error becomes smaller and planning takes on an entirely different meaning.

There are mistakes you simply cannot afford to make.

One of them is compromising operational safety.

If you are not completely confident in what you are doing, you risk making an already difficult situation even worse, potentially leading to an incident or accident in the air or on the ground.





BACK TO THE SEARCH AREA

During the search for aircraft Cessna 172 TG-DUL — which disappeared on the slopes of Guatemala's Agua Volcano in July 2024 — there was a moment that changed everything.

Hours of flying. No results. Dense terrain. Limited visibility.

Then someone said it: "We've got something."

In this type of operation, there is no pause button.

You cannot stop the aircraft. You mark the reference point, make a turn, and come back around.

"You're flying at around 7,800 feet, dealing with wind and staying close to the volcano's vegetation. It's a meticulous search where your entire focus is outside the aircraft, working together with your crew."

Then came the confirmation: "That's the airplane, guys. It's extremely well hidden. Let's mark the coordinates."

What happens next is immediate.

"Alex, Chris, let's get the rescuer ready. Hopefully we'll find good news."

At that moment, there is no celebration.

Only possibility. "I thought there was still a chance that someone might be alive, so we moved as quickly as possible."

TEAMWORK

In these operations, the pilot is never working alone.

The crew inside the aircraft and the personnel on the ground are essential to every mission.

"It's an extremely important role. They become the extra eyes a pilot depends on, both inside the aircraft and on the ground. Without them, these operations simply would not be possible."

During a rescue mission, trust is not optional. It is part of the process.

"From the moment search or rescue coordinates are received, planning begins. The entire mission is discussed with the team, and decisions are made together."

The pilot may be the one flying the aircraft. But the mission belongs to everyone involved.

FLYING AT THE LIMIT

Mountain operations come with their own set of rules.

Altitude. Wind. Terrain. And very clear limitations.

“Above 10,000 feet, you have to be extremely careful with power management and aircraft handling.”

But there are moments when the demands become even greater.

When a rescuer is lowered beneath the helicopter on a line extending up to 150 feet, the operation enters a completely different level of complexity.

“You know that person's life depends on your judgment.”

From the cockpit, there is no margin for error.

“At those altitudes, you're rarely in a stable hover. Even the smallest mistake can lead to an accident.”

The pilot is not only managing the aircraft. He is managing the environment, the pressure, and his own mindset.

“You have to remain calm and be completely confident in what you're doing.”

WHEN EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON A DECISION

There are moments when responsibility becomes absolute.
“Yes, absolutely.

There are times when you feel that everything depends on you.”

It is not just a feeling. It is reality.

Especially when the mission demands absolute precision:
“Hovering above 10,000 feet with a rescuer suspended beneath the aircraft and having to place that person in exactly the right spot.”

In those moments, there is no room for error.





THE DECISION TO TURN BACK

Not every mission is completed. And in many cases, the most important decision is knowing when to stop.

"Before the mission begins, or even while airborne, if weather conditions or winds exceed our operational limits, we cannot continue."

But that decision is not purely technical. It is deeply human.

"I always put myself in the place of the people who are waiting."

And that carries weight.

"When a mission has to be called ok, morale drops. You know someone is waiting for answers, and you cannot reach them."

WHAT REMAINS AFTERWARD

When the helicopter returns to the ground, something more than the flight remains.

There is the debrief. There is the weight of every decision made. There is satisfaction.

Sometimes frustration.

But there is also a conviction. "I try to do things the way I would want them done for me."

MORE THAN FLYING

For many people, becoming a pilot is a goal.

For others, it is a profession.

For those who fly missions like these, it is a constant responsibility.

"It was a dream I had since childhood. Thanks to God and to the people who believed in me, I was able to achieve it."

But in real-world operations, that is not what defines a pilot. What defines a pilot is judgment.

The ability to make the right decision when there is no margin for error.

Because there are missions where failure is not an option.



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**“In many missions,
the most difficult part happens before takeoff.”**



JULIO
HURTADO
LOBOS

I had the honor of taking this photograph without knowing it would become one of the last images I would ever capture of Captain Rodrigo Ibargüen (RIP).

I had the privilege of being part of G4 Team as one of its official photographers. This photograph means a great deal to me because it was at that exact location where I first saw a North American T-28B Trojan. It was love at first sight. At the time, I knew absolutely nothing about that aircraft.

Fortunately, a good friend and fellow photographer, Carlos Rubio, introduced me to the captain a few days later at the hangar in Guatemala City, when I brought him some photographs I had taken during that airshow in 2015.

I must admit that I miss the roar of those nine cylinders, but what I miss most is shaking hands with "Rocket," as he kindly allowed me to call him. Thanks to him, I had the opportunity to meet many wonderful friends in the aviation community. Some I still see today; others have simply taken flight at a higher altitude.

Without intending it, this photograph became one of my favorites. It brings back his voice, the endless conversations, the hugs, the smiles, and the occasional joke.

T-28B Trojan Technical Specifications

- Engine: Wright R-1820-86 Cyclone 9-cylinder radial engine producing 1,425 hp.
- Maximum Speed: 343 mph (552 km/h / 298 kt).
- Range: 1,060 miles (1,710 km).
- Service Ceiling: 35,500 ft (10,820 m).
- Wingspan: 40 ft 1 in (12.22 m).
- Length: 32 ft 8 in (9.96 m).
- Height: 12 ft 8 in (3.86 m).
- Maximum Takeoff Weight: 8,500 lb (3,856 kg).
- Crew: 2.
- First Service Entry: 1954.
- Total T-28B Aircraft Built: 489.



A LIFE IN FLIGHT

Capt. Rogelio Clará
Corporate Pilot / Photographer

The aviation profession, broad, diverse, and accessible, offers an endless variety of pilots and their stories.

In my case, the dream of flying was born from the romanticism of a family tradition shaped during the first half of the last century and the Second World War.

It began when I was three or four years old, admiring my uncle's bedroom on my mother's side of the family—a space transformed into a museum, surrounded by shelves filled with model aircraft, pilot jackets and flight suits, insignias, and banners from the American, German, and Guatemalan air forces. That room carried a unique scent, filled with stories unknown to me, weathered by time and the passing years.

Those were my first years of imagined aviation, with innocent games and paper airplanes that eventually led to aeromodelling and its lessons in aerodynamics, design, and construction.

Even then, flying remained a beautiful yet seemingly unreachable dream. One day, near the end of my teenage years, my father—a strong and disciplined man, yet kind and generous—approached me and, in his own way, made me understand that dreams are simply realities at rest, waiting for our courage to bring them to life.

Knowing me as well as he did, he set a noble trap and promised to help me pursue that dream.

He provided everything I needed to earn my student pilot certificate and complete my first ten hours of flight training. My surprise was enormous when, after completing my first solo flight at just nine hours, he not only failed to congratulate me—because he likely did not understand how important that achievement was to me—but also coldly informed me that from that moment forward, my aviation career would be entirely my responsibility.

Hearing those words felt like falling into an abyss with nothing to hold on to. For the first time, I found myself alone in the world, facing my future and the possible loss of that beautiful dream of flying. Many unexpected experiences followed.

I worked at anything I could find: cleaning bathrooms, selling whatever I could, working as a store clerk, a security guard, and even a driver.

At times I held three jobs at once. Everything I earned went toward my living expenses and flight training. It took me nearly two years to earn my private pilot license.

Burdened with debt and lacking opportunities, I was sustained only by that dream and by my father's promise. Then, thanks to the intervention of my good friend Erwin Gall, everything changed. He introduced me to the man who would later become my great friend, Carlos Prieto.

Carlos agreed to help me by allowing me to accompany him to his ranch, where I could log flight time in his aircraft.

He later introduced me to his brother, Luis Prieto, who became my aerobatic instructor and later trained me for my agricultural pilot certificate. Together they truly taught me how to fly.

More than that, they practically adopted me as a son, providing me with a home, food, and instruction. I owe my career to them, to their selfless efforts to see me succeed, and I do not believe a lifetime would be enough to thank them for what they did for me.

I write this because they deserve to appear on these pages far more than I do.

My first job as a pilot was with Mr. Jack Wilmeth, flying a Cessna 172. Later came my first position as an agricultural pilot—a wonderful time filled with adventure, risk, and hard work. Five years later, however, I suffered two consecutive chemical poisonings that caused severe liver damage.

The medical advice was clear: continue crop-dusting and likely face aplastic anemia, leukemia, or at the very least cirrhosis in the future—or stop and find another way to fly. Against all my wishes, I had to walk away from agricultural aviation and suddenly found myself holding both commercial and agricultural pilot licenses while searching for work.





Months passed and I was getting nowhere. Somoza had fallen in Nicaragua, and many pilots from the National Guard migrated to Guatemala, where they were granted local licenses and certifications with little bureaucracy, flooding an already limited job market and leaving virtually no opportunities for me. One day, my brother-in-law knocked on my door asking to borrow my camera. Since it was not particularly easy to operate, I offered to take the photos myself instead. After all, I had nothing else to do. So I did. Two days later I delivered the undeveloped rolls of film, and a week afterward I began receiving calls from Rafael Landívar University, for whom the photos had been taken. The truth was, I knew almost nothing about photography. Immediately I imagined ruined negatives, poor exposures, and a complete disaster.

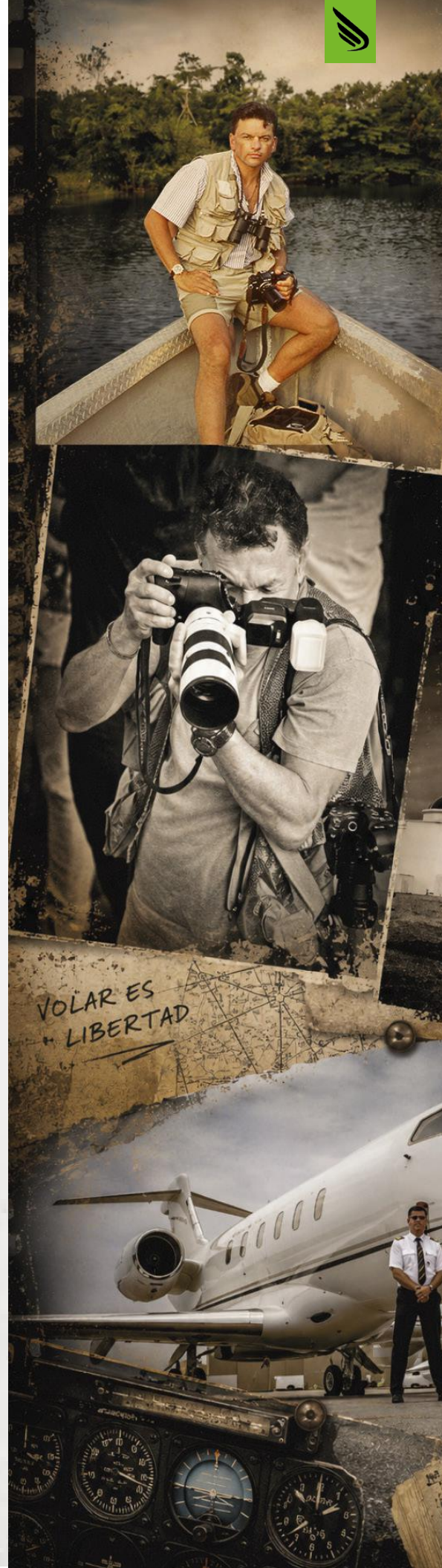
Embarrassed and deeply worried that I had done a terrible job, I avoided the calls at all costs until, a week later, my brother-in-law returned to tell me that the university wanted to pay me for my work because the photographs were excellent. Not only that, they also wanted me to stay on as one of their photographers.

If aviation is broad and extensive, then photography is infinite. I began my career as a self-taught photographer because at that time there were no photography schools, no courses, no tutorials—nothing at all. At La Perla department store, I bought a book called Basic Photography, which I still own today and which, together with my camera, got me through countless challenges. As I mentioned, my first work was in documentary and reportage photography, still one of the fields I enjoy the most. And as often happens in life, one thing led to another. My work in that field opened doors to commercial and advertising photography, aerial photography, film production, and eventually fine-art photography, leading to numerous exhibitions over many years.

From my beginnings in 1979 to the present day, I have worked with analog systems in every format, from 35mm film to 11x14-inch large-format plates. I spent years processing film and printing black-and-white images, and later, in the early 2000s, I integrated digital systems into my business. In total, nearly five decades of experience opened the doors of academia as well, where I served as a university professor teaching Photography I and Photography II for several degree programs. Working in that environment allowed me to study and complete a degree in Journalism, which in turn led me to pursue a degree in Literature and Philosophy, and later a master's degree in Phenomenology.

The academy also brought me closer to the visual arts, which I had already been exploring since childhood through drawing and painting. With that foundation—and through the unexpected turns of life—I became deeply involved in the world of dance. There I founded the Kriyá Alternative Dance Company, serving as both director and choreographer. This experience became especially important to me because it allowed me to unite Philosophy, Literature, Image, Lighting, Sound, Rhythm, and Stage Design within a single artistic discipline.

Throughout all of this, I continued my aviation career in parallel. In the late 1970s I flew for oil companies and the Mediterranean Fruit Fly eradication program. Later I joined Aeroquetzal, flying the Convair 580-S, and afterward Aviateca, operating the Boeing 727 and Boeing 737. By the 1990s, I had moved into corporate aviation, flying a wide variety of turboprop and business jet aircraft—a career that I continue to enjoy today.





When I look back on the thousands of hours I have flown, I realize how rapidly everything has evolved alongside technological progress. Flight training has changed. Instruction seems more condensed, sometimes placing Fundamental manual flying skills in the background while introducing automated systems almost immediately, making aviation appear easier and therefore more accessible. Today, it often takes little more than pressing a button on the mode control panel for the aircraft to fly an approach within acceptable parameters.

The same can be said for satellite and computer-based navigation. The trend now is to rely heavily on GPS and FMS systems, while too often neglecting cross-checking with other navigation aids and the basic principles of navigation.

It is certainly true that pilots must remain current with modern systems in order to benefit fully from today's technology. I completely agree with that. However, those initial lessons—the basic foundations of flying—must continue to be emphasized. Because when computerized and automated systems fail, and that failure coincides with other adverse factors, only the fundamentals learned at the beginning of our careers, combined with sound judgment, can prevent a tragedy.

Now, at 71 years of age, as my professional career gradually approaches its conclusion, I can do nothing but express gratitude to all those who placed their trust in me and, in many cases, offered me their friendship. To my fellow pilots, from whom I have learned so much. And to all those who shared in the countless adventures and stories that defined a lifetime connected to aviation.

At the end of my life, they may take away my licenses and certificates, but they will never take away my wings. Those wings will carry me home, to where I truly belong...

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**“By then, aborting the takeoff
was no longer an
Option.”**



The end of

SPIRIT AIRLINES

Lessons from an Airline Collapse
That Will Be Felt Across Central America



By Alejandro Vargas A.

On May 2, 2026, Spirit Airlines permanently ceased operations, bringing to an end a 34-year chapter in commercial aviation. Known for its bright yellow aircraft and ultralow-cost business model, Spirit carried millions of passengers throughout the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Its closure left nearly 17,000 employees without jobs and disrupted travel plans for thousands of passengers.

For Central America, however, the consequences go far beyond one airline. The region is now facing reduced connectivity, fewer low-cost travel options, and the likelihood of higher airfares.

Key Facts

Spirit had been facing serious challenges: two bankruptcy filings (2024 and 2025), accumulated post-pandemic losses exceeding \$2.5 billion, high debt levels, and a sharp increase in fuel prices (further aggravated by tensions in the Middle East).

In 2022, JetBlue offered \$3.8 billion to acquire the airline. The deal was approved by shareholders, labor unions, and company leadership. The combined carrier would have controlled only 9% of the U.S. domestic market, compared to the 75–80% held by the four largest airlines (American, Delta, United, and Southwest). However, the Department of Justice blocked the merger in 2024 on antitrust grounds.

With Spirit's permanent shutdown, low-cost capacity has declined, and fares on many of the routes it once served are already beginning to rise.

THE IMPACT ON CENTRAL AMERICA

Spirit maintained an important presence throughout Central America, particularly through its hubs in Fort Lauderdale (FLL) and Orlando (MCO).

For Guatemala, the airline represented one of the most affordable options connecting the country with South Florida.

Its services supported three key groups:

Members of the Guatemalan diaspora traveling between Florida and Guatemala.

Budget-conscious American tourists visiting destinations such as Antigua Guatemala, Lake Atitlán, and Tikal.

Central American travelers using Florida as an affordable gateway to the United States.

For many travelers, Spirit was not simply another airline. It was the lowest-cost path between families, businesses, and tourism markets.

Expected Impact

- Higher fares: Historically, when Spirit exits a route, average ticket prices increase by 14% to 23%.
- Reduced capacity: The availability of low-cost seats declines. While JetBlue, Frontier, and other airlines may absorb part of the demand, they are unlikely to match Spirit's fares.
- Impact on tourism: Fewer budget-conscious travelers from the United States could affect hotels, tour operators, ground transportation providers, and restaurants—particularly during the low season.

Practical Tips for Central American Travelers

- Always compare fares across airline and travel booking websites.
- Book your flights 30 to 60 days in advance whenever possible.
- Stay flexible with your travel dates and consider alternative airports.
- Keep an eye on promotions from JetBlue, Frontier, Avianca, and United.

What's Next for Low-Cost Aviation in the Region?

Spirit's exit reinforces an important reality: ultra-low-cost carriers have made air travel more accessible, but their business model is highly vulnerable to rising operating costs and regulatory changes. For Central America, this means:

- Greater reliance on traditional airlines, with the possibility of higher airfares.
- An opportunity for JetBlue, Frontier, Avianca, and regional carriers to strengthen their presence.
- A growing need for governments to encourage competition and promote more open skies agreements.

In my view, the best protection for consumers is having more choices and greater market capacity. Spirit's closure is a clear reminder that, in aviation, well-intentioned regulations can sometimes produce unintended consequences. At the same time, it is undeniable that the airline faced significant management challenges, despite successfully implementing an aggressive business model that thrived when fuel prices were low and travel demand was strong. For travelers in Guatemala and across Central America, the takeaway is simple: plan ahead, compare fares carefully, and continue advocating for more—and better—air travel options

EL MANUAL NO ES UNA SUGERENCIA

En motores aeronáuticos, la mayoría de las fallas no aparecen por sorpresa. Por eso existen los manuales.



Intervalos, límites y procedimientos fueron establecidos a partir de años de operación, pruebas y experiencia acumulada. El problema comienza cuando esos parámetros se interpretan como referencia y no como límites operativos.



Extender tiempos, postergar inspecciones o volar fuera de lo recomendado puede parecer mínimo en el momento. Pero muchas veces es ahí donde inicia el desgaste que después termina en falla.



En aviación, la confiabilidad no depende de cuánto vuela un motor, sino de qué tan correctamente se mantiene.



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OPERAR DRONES NO ES SOLO VOLAR. ES FORMARSE.

El crecimiento de las operaciones con drones ha abierto nuevas oportunidades en distintas industrias. Pero también ha dejado algo claro: operar ya no es suficiente.

En CRAMEX Aerospace decidimos formar pilotos RPAS bajo estándares aeronáuticos, combinando capacitación, evaluación y operación dentro de un mismo proceso.

Somos la primera escuela en México certificada por la AFAC para formar y licenciar pilotos de drones, además de participar activamente en comités y subcomités de normalización RPAS junto a la autoridad aeronáutica mexicana, colaborando en la implementación de mejores prácticas operacionales y actualización normativa.

Nuestro objetivo no es solo enseñar a volar, sino preparar operadores capaces de ejecutar misiones reales con criterio, seguridad y profesionalismo.

Después de más de 20 años en la industria, sigo convencido de que la diferencia no está en el equipo, sino en cómo se opera.

Ing. Yousefh Pineda
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WHEN EVERY MINUTE COUNTS

The first helicopter casualty evacuation took place in April 1944 in Burma, using a U.S. Army Sikorsky R-4.

Later, during the Korean War (1950–1953), helicopters became a standard evacuation tool. The first dedicated helicopter detachment (8055th MASH) was established in 1951.

These helicopters did not provide medical care during flight. They simply served as a rapid air ambulance transporting casualties to a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH).

THE BIG LEAP IN VIETNAM

It was not until the Vietnam War that helicopter air ambulance operations truly came of age.

With the introduction of MEDEVAC helicopters (Medical Evacuation), patients began receiving medical treatment while in flight.

MEDEVAC helicopters—known by the call sign “Dustoff”—achieved an extraordinary 98% survival rate for wounded soldiers who reached medical facilities. This was largely due to the speed of evacuation, often delivering patients to definitive care within 35 to 60 minutes.

THE BIRTH OF CIVILIAN HEMS

In 1970, the first U.S. civilian helicopter emergency medical operations were conducted by the Maryland State Police, marking the beginning of civilian HEMS. In Europe, ADAC established the world’s first permanent HEMS base in Munich, Germany (Christoph 1), which remains in operation today.

Depending on the country, modern HEMS systems have evolved into services capable of delivering advanced critical care directly at the scene of injury.

SPECIALIZED CREWS

Flight crews may operate in either single-pilot or dual-pilot configurations. Medical staffing varies from the U.S. model of Flight Paramedic / Flight Nurse to the European model of Flight Physician / Flight Paramedic.

The term “Flight” carries both professional and legal significance. It means these clinicians have completed extensive additional training and examinations in aviation physiology and flight-related pathophysiology.

Under the supervision of their Medical Director, they have access to advanced medications and medical interventions that are not typically available outside the hospital environment.

What people **DON'T** **UNDERSTAND** About These Operations

In Central and South America, we are often called for what people describe as a “rescue.” For me, a rescue is strictly about saving life and preserving physical integrity.

At Black Wolf Helicopters, we have the capability, training, and equipment to deliver advanced medical care directly at the scene of an accident or injury. Depending on the helicopter assigned to the mission, our priority may be transporting hoist rescue equipment, long-line systems, and extraction gear.

We do not carry a full advanced medical kit on every rescue mission due to helicopter weight and balance limitations. Instead, we carry a compact rescue-specific medical kit designed for those operations.

A REAL CASE THAT ILLUSTRATES IT

On one occasion, I received a request for what was described as a “rescue.” In reality, it was not a rescue at all—it was a critical-care transport mission. The task involved picking up a seriously ill patient from one hospital and transferring them to another hospital in the city.

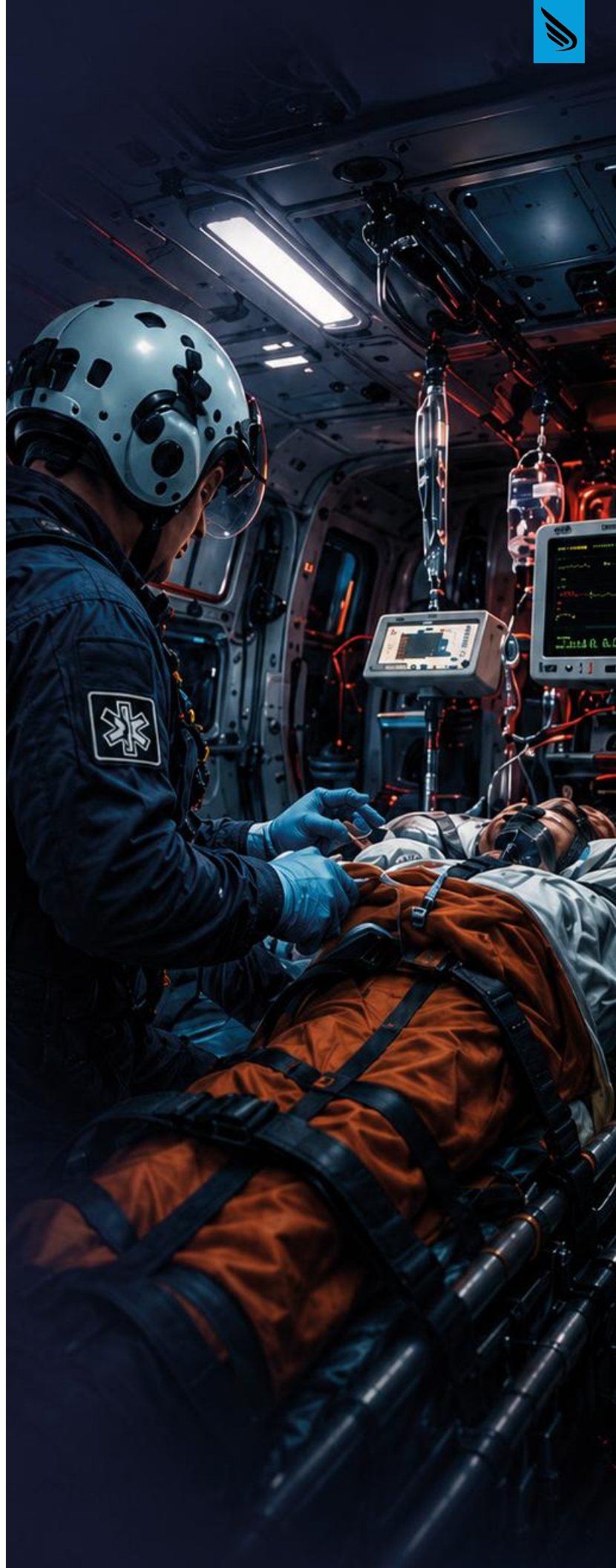
As a result, the helicopter deployed for that mission was configured differently because the original call had classified it as a rescue. The medical equipment requirements were therefore significantly different.

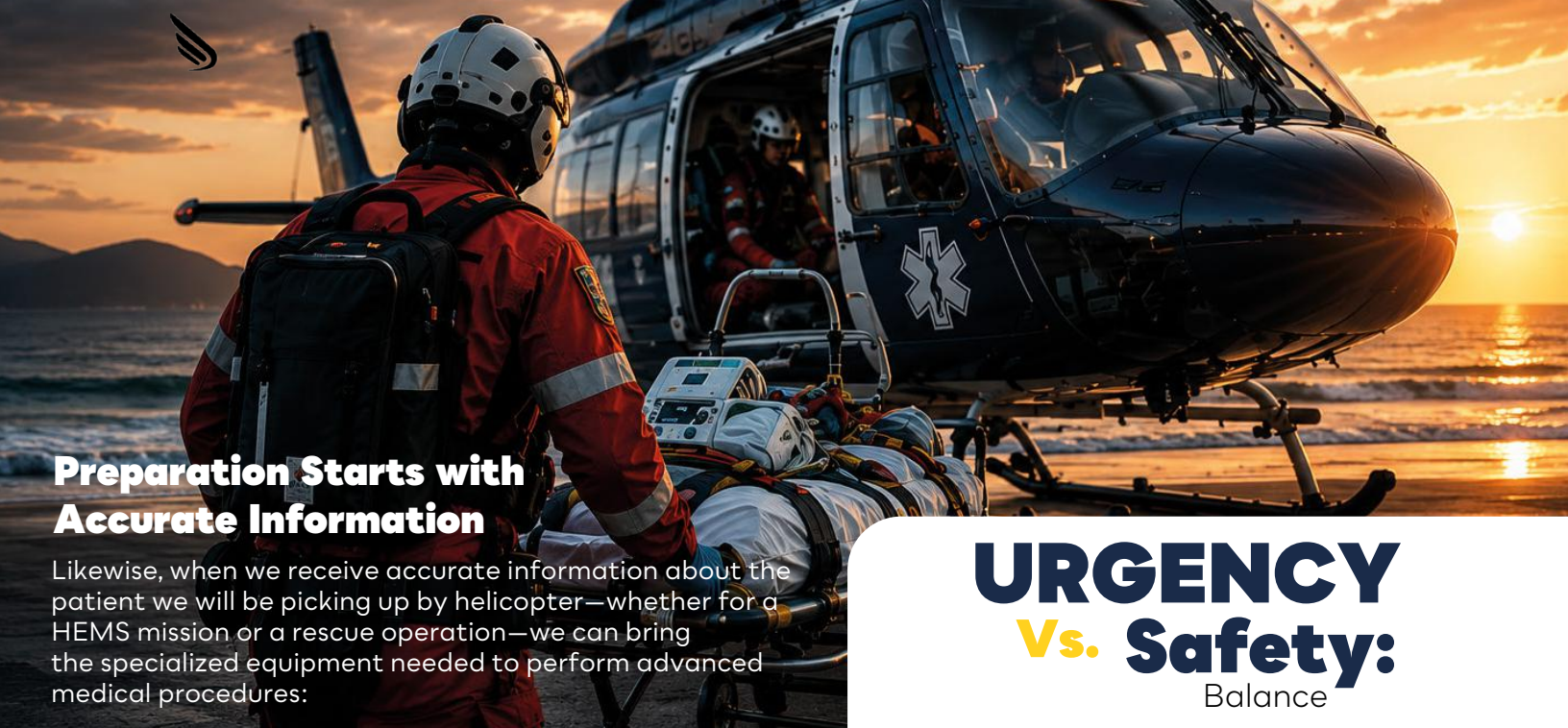
The patient transfer was completed successfully, but the level of care required clearly corresponded to a HEMS mission rather than a rescue operation.

The patient survived, but only because of the training, experience, and equipment carried by the SAR crew.

For example, performing a life-saving medical intervention during a hoist rescue or during a HEMS mission is essentially the same.

The equipment used for patient extraction may vary —stretchers, rescue devices, and extraction systems— but the medical equipment is often very similar.





Preparation Starts with Accurate Information

Likewise, when we receive accurate information about the patient we will be picking up by helicopter—whether for a HEMS mission or a rescue operation—we can bring the specialized equipment needed to perform advanced medical procedures:

- Intraosseous cannulation
- RSI (Rapid Sequence Intubation using a variety of medications for advanced airway management)
- Transport ventilation with CO₂ and ETCO₂ monitoring
- Cardiac management (AED, pacing, and cardioversion)
- Chest tubes
- Foley catheters
- Field amputations, etc.

The list is virtually endless, but everything depends on the patient's medical condition and the balance between risk and benefit. Personally, I have had to perform critical interventions due to the patient's condition in order to save a life, both on the ground and during flight. Without those interventions, the patient would not have survived.

I was able to do so because of my training, established procedures, operational standards, local HEMS crew protocols, and the support of hospital physicians.



URGENCY Vs. Safety: Balance

How do you balance urgency with helicopter safety?

They are completely separate concepts—urgency and safety—but both are equally important. Many organizations continue to follow the principle of the “Golden Hour,” the concept that severely injured patients need definitive hospital care within 60 minutes.

It remains a valuable guideline for emergency response teams. However, since the conflict in Afghanistan, the concept of the “Platinum Ten Minutes” has become a critical component of prehospital emergency care. It emphasizes that the first 10 minutes after a traumatic injury are crucial for survival.

A Local Example from Guatemala

In terms of urgency and helicopter operations, if we cannot reach the patient within ten minutes—or if the patient does not receive any professional prehospital care (ambulance services) at the scene—the chances of survival are already significantly reduced.

Is it worth taking the risk? Yes, we willingly accept that risk in order to save a life. For example, a cardiac arrest on Guatemala's Pacific coast means approximately a 30-minute flight. If no one provides CPR—and more importantly, uses an AED (Automated External Defibrillator)—within the first ten minutes, statistics clearly show that the patient's chance of survival drops below 50% at the onset of the cardiac event and approaches zero in less than ten minutes.

However, we always ask ourselves: What if that patient were you? Your child? Your spouse? Or your mother? That is why we seize every opportunity to save lives, while still carefully considering the risks to the helicopter and the three or four crew members on board.



THE MILITARY MANTRA

A phrase we often used in the military was: "Slow is smooth, and smooth is fast." There is a very real tendency to rush an operation because of weather conditions, the patient's age, or even their gender.

Personally, I do not treat men, women, children, or infants differently. To me, they are all equally important. A human life is a human life.

I strictly follow the Rescue Hierarchy:

1. Helicopter
2. Aircrew
3. Everyone Else
4. Patient

This establishes a clear framework of priorities. Without the helicopter and the crew, nothing can be accomplished. If we place emergency responders, other services, or the general public at risk for a single patient, we may ultimately create more casualties than we can manage. The actual patient comes last. The patient is not going anywhere. If our risk management systems determine that it is unsafe to fly, then we do not fly.

Other options may be considered, such as ground ambulance transport or keeping the patient at a local hospital capable of providing an appropriate level of medical care.

WHAT DEFINES GOOD DECISION-MAKING IN HEMS?

A thorough understanding of Crew Resource Management (CRM). Effective communication among all crew members.

Comprehensive pre- and post-mission briefings.
Proper mission planning.

The integration of Air Medical Resource Management (AMRM), ensuring that patient requirements are fully incorporated into the overall Safety Management System (SMS).

This includes everything from policies and procedures outlined in the helicopter operator's Operations Manual, to medical equipment, crew protective equipment, and HEMS-specific uniforms. And above all, a Medical Director. We are not simply first-aid providers. We deliver highly advanced medical interventions and administer medications that require a high level of clinical oversight. For that reason, we must remain accountable for our actions through a licensed physician.



Medical Director

The Medical Director typically functions in two ways:

- Offline: Through established medical protocols, procedures, and decision-making flowcharts that have been developed, practiced, and approved in advance.
- Online: Certain procedures require direct consultation with the Medical Director for approval before proceeding, based on the patient's vital signs and other clinical indicators.

It is important that HEMS medical crew members do not share patient details with the Pilot in Command (PIC). Human nature may influence a pilot to accept greater risk for a two-week-old infant than for a 56-year-old patient. The flight must remain SAFE regardless of who the patient is.

Conclusion: An elite service

HEMS and Rescue represent a unique and highly professional service. It is a complete operational concept built around people, training, procedures, protocols, specialized equipment, and mission-specific aircraft.

Everything is supported by standards and operating procedures. Without them, the entire system fails.

Chris "Razor" Sharpe
Master Aircrewman
Black Wolf Helicopters



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COORDINATION SAVES LIVES

By Julio Gálvez — SAR Specialist



Introduction

In Search and Rescue (SAR) operations, time is measured by more than minutes. It is measured by decisions. Every coordinated action—or lack of one—can make the difference between life and death.

Multi-agency coordination is at the heart of every effective SAR system.

It is not simply about written procedures. It is about the ability of different organizations to communicate, trust one another, and operate as a single team when circumstances demand it.

The Evolution of SAR

Over the years, search and rescue systems have evolved significantly. What once depended largely on individual initiative and the experience of rescue teams is now supported by regulatory frameworks, government established protocols, and technologies that improve the detection and location of aircraft in distress, their crews, and overall response times. However, this evolution has not been uniform.

Across many countries in the region, SAR systems have developed at different rates, influenced by factors such as available resources, personnel training, and access to appropriate technology.

An Ongoing Challenge

Despite these advances, significant challenges remain. Limited availability of resources, specialized aircraft, and technological equipment continues to affect many operations. These challenges are compounded by communication difficulties in remote areas and the ongoing need for joint training and cooperation among participating agencies. In this environment, coordination becomes more than a concept—it becomes an operational necessity. Without coordination, even the best resources lose effectiveness. In SAR operations, no single organization works alone. Success depends on how effectively all available capabilities are integrated.

Multi-Agency Coordination

Effective interagency coordination is built on three fundamental pillars:

- Clear protocols that are understood, practiced, and followed by all participants.
- Effective communication that ensures the timely flow of information.
- Mutual trust developed through shared experience and collaborative operations.

When these elements are present, SAR response becomes faster, more accurate, and safer.

Each organization understands its role and operates toward a common objective: saving lives.

Lessons Learned

Years of SAR experience have revealed several important lessons. Preparation is just as important as execution.

Joint exercises, simulations, and post-mission evaluations help identify areas for improvement and strengthen the system before a real emergency occurs.

It is also important to recognize that SAR is a dynamic environment. Threats evolve. Conditions change. Technology advances. As a result, procedures and operational capabilities must continuously adapt.

The Road Ahead

Strengthening SAR systems requires a long-term vision. Investing in training, technology, and regional cooperation is essential to effectively respond to increasingly complex emergencies. Coordination is not an end in itself. It is a means of delivering more effective, safer, and more human-centered responses. When institutions work together with a common purpose, the system becomes stronger and the likelihood of saving lives increases significantly.

Life-saving coordination is never improvised. It is built long before the emergency begins.

This article seeks to encourage reflection on the critical role of coordination in Search and Rescue operations, based on the experience and responsibility that come with being part of a SAR system.



BEYOND THE AIRSHOW

Jesús Núñez — CLEAS President

Something is changing in the skies of Latin America. It is not a new aircraft. It is not a new demonstration team. It is not simply another airshow.

It is a vision.

A vision born from experience, necessity, and above all, responsibility.

This is how the story of the Latin American Council for Airshows and Safety (CLEAS) begins.

When Airshows Must Evolve

For decades, airshows throughout Latin America have grown remarkably.

- Airshows
- Aviation festivals
- Military exhibitions

But behind every maneuver, every aircraft, and every performance lies a reality that the industry can no longer ignore:

- Lack of standardized safety practices
- Different operational procedures at each event
- Limited regional coordination
- Absence of harmonized protocols
- Limited training for new organizers
- Insufficient integration between civil authorities, military organizations, and private operators

Each event advanced independently. Like an island. And in aviation, operating as an island creates risk.





What If We Had to Organize the Best Airshow in the Continent Today Under True International Standards?

The answer was clear.

Latin America already has:

- Talent
- Exceptional pilots
- Passionate organizers
- Aircraft
- History
- Enthusiastic audiences
- Unique tourism destinations

What is missing is structure.

What Is CLEAS?

The Latin American Council for Airshows and Safety (CLEAS) was created as a regional initiative dedicated to professionalizing, integrating, and strengthening the airshow industry throughout Mexico and Latin America.

Its mission is clear:

To elevate the standard of airshows in Latin America through operational safety, technical training, professional development, and international cooperation.

What Is CLEAS?

CLEAS seeks to build a new aviation culture for aerial events across the region.

Among its primary objectives are:

1. Establish Airshow Safety Standards

Develop manuals, protocols, and operational procedures that help reduce risks and improve overall event organization.

2. Train the Entire Operational Chain

Not only performers (pilots, skydivers, and aerial performers).
But also: Coordinators, logistics teams, production personnel, civil protection agencies, public safety organizations, suppliers, emergency responders, operational staff, communications teams, and media personnel.

3. Integrate Authorities and Organizers

Build meaningful bridges between:

- Aviation authorities
- Armed forces
- Civilian organizers
- Governments
- Tourism organizations
- Academic institutions
- Sponsors and private operators

4. Promote Economic and Tourism Development

Well-organized airshows generate:

- Tourism
- Hotel occupancy
- International visibility
- Investment
- Regional pride

5. Position Latin America as an International Reference

Establish the region as a place capable of hosting safe, professional, world-class airshows.





GLOBAL INSPIRATION WITH A LATIN AMERICAN IDENTITY

CLEAS draws inspiration from international organizations such as the International Council of Air Shows, which has played a key role in the development of the U.S. airshow industry.

However, Latin America cannot simply copy foreign models. They must be adapted.

The region faces unique challenges:

- Different regulatory frameworks
- Uneven infrastructure
- Budgetary constraints
- Distinct tourism environments
- Operations in urban, coastal, and large-scale venues

That is why CLEAS is not seeking to replicate a model—it is seeking to evolve one for the realities of Latin America.

Tulum Airshow 2026: The Starting Point

CLEAS.

For the first time in the region, the following groups came together in one place:

- Aviation authorities
- Armed forces
- Pilots
- Performers
- Event organizers
- Academic institutions
- Safety experts
- Logistics providers
- Tourism representatives
- Specialized media

These were not simply conferences. They marked the beginning of a regional conversation that had been overdue for years.

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Bringing the Entire Industry Together

The Aviation Events Congress addressed key topics that will shape the future of airshows across the region:

- Aviation regulations
- Operational safety
- Event logistics
- Civil-military coordination
- Risk management
- Strategic communications
- Tourism impact
- Airshow planning

• International experiences and success stories
The goal was to create a permanent platform for collaboration and learning throughout Latin America.

The Airshow Was Also in the Sky.

Tulum Airshow 2026 was not only the conceptual birthplace of CLEAS.

It also demonstrated the tremendous potential for integration between civil, military, and sport aviation.

Among the activities, several civilian demonstrations promoted through CLEAS stood out:

- Paramotor exhibitions
- Skydiving operations
- Experimental aircraft
- International performers

Among the participants were:

- José Henrique Herrera “Fabul” and Erick Orozco, showcasing paramotor and skydiving demonstrations.
- The impressive manned airship commanded by Javier Merino.
- The spectacular performance of Canadian pilot Jason Newburg, who amazed spectators flying his Pitts S-2S aerobatic aircraft over the Mexican Caribbean.

The message was clear:

Latin America has the talent. It has the show. And it has the passion. What it needs now is structure and coordination to grow safely and sustainably.

Safety: The Real Headliner

At CLEAS, the true star of the show is not the performance.

It is safety.

Because aviation leaves no room for improvisation.

For that reason, the council seeks to promote:

- Standardized protocols
- Specialized training
- A culture of prevention
- Risk analysis
- Exchange of best practices
- Interagency coordination
- Operational professionalism

The objective is not simply to protect aircraft. It is to protect:

- Lives
- Communities
- Spectators
- Organizers
- Governments
- And the future of the industry itself

The vision is to become the leading regional organization for:

- Airshow safety
- Operational professionalism
- Technical training
- International integration
- Aviation cooperation

A platform capable of connecting:

Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, and the entire region.

Because the sky has no borders.

But coordination must be built.

The Beginning of a New Industry.

CLEAS represents far more than a council.

It represents the beginning of a new chapter for airshow aviation in Latin America. An industry that is:

- Safer
- More professional
- More sustainable
- Better connected
- Better prepared for growth

Tulum Airshow 2026 marked the beginning.

And perhaps, years from now, history will remember this moment as the point when Latin America chose to organize its skies with a vision for the future. Because great transformations begin with a decision. And CLEAS has just taken off.



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AIR RESCUE SECTION

Guatemala Volunteer Fire Department



More than just a specialized unit, the Air Rescue Section of the Guatemala Volunteer Fire Department represents one of the few teams in the country capable of responding to emergencies in locations where ground access is impossible. Behind every mission lies planning, operational judgment, continuous training, and decisions that must be made under pressure—often with lives at stake and limited resources. For this edition, we spoke with Officer Alex Glaesel, a member of the Section, who shared how their operations work and described a real mission that reflects the complexity of aerial rescue in Guatemala.

What is the role of the Air Rescue Section, and what types of missions do you perform?

The role of the Air Rescue Section is to respond to emergencies using rotary-wing and fixed-wing aircraft, together with trained and certified personnel capable of carrying out missions safely, efficiently, and in a well-planned manner, especially in hard-to-reach locations. Our objective is to reduce response times and increase victims' chances of survival.

Among the main missions we perform are:

- Search and rescue of people and aircraft on land and in bodies of water
- Air medical transport
- Wildland firefighting





REAL-WORLD OPERATION

“We knew that every hour made the situation more difficult.”

Can you share a mission that represents the work of the Section?

On February 28, 2026, the Volunteer Fire Department’s central dispatch center received a call reporting a Guatemalan tourist lost on Atilán Volcano.

Personnel from nearby stations were immediately deployed to begin a ground search operation.

Hours later, the tourist managed to send his location using his cellphone and reported that he had suffered a fall and sustained injuries. During the night of February 28 and into the early hours of March 1, mountain rescue teams successfully located him and provided pre-hospital medical care.

At daybreak, it was determined that a ground extraction would take approximately 24 hours, prompting the activation of the Air Rescue Section. After mission planning was completed, at 08:30 hours the helicopter TG-RSC, a Bell 206 LongRanger VI operated by Helicópteros de Guatemala, departed under the command of Captain Josué Sian.

The crew consisted of:

- Master Crew Chief Chris Sharpe
- Officer Alex Glaesel as Crew Chief
- Sgt. Rogel Mazariegos as Rescue Technician

Twenty-five minutes after takeoff, the patient was located alongside the ground rescue personnel.

The extraction was conducted to the airfield at Bahía de Santiago Atitlán, where an initial medical evaluation was performed.

The patient was then transported to a private hospital in Guatemala City.

The mission concluded at 10:30 hours.

What was the main challenge of that operation?

The most difficult part was not the flight itself. It was coordinating the availability of the aircraft and helping the family raise the funds required to carry out the mission. The two-hour flight had an estimated cost of approximately \$3,500.

From the family’s perspective, all they want is to rescue their loved one as quickly as possible. And from our side, we often wish we could take off immediately.

But the reality is that, at times, we must wait hours—or even days—while the necessary resources are gathered to make the flight possible. Meanwhile, we try to maintain communication with the victim and provide basic survival instructions, although that depends heavily on cellphone coverage and the area where the person is located.

What made the operation successful?

The location information was critical.

Equally important was the work carried out beforehand by the mountain rescue team, which remained with the patient throughout the night, providing care and preparing visual markers to facilitate identification from the air.

After two hours of aerial operations, the patient was delivered to a hospital in Guatemala City in stable condition and alive.



LIMITATIONS

What are the main challenges currently facing aerial operations?

- Aircraft availability and the lack of financial resources to carry out missions.
- Operating costs.

In many cases, the need is there, but the resources required to launch the mission immediately are not always available.

DECISION-MAKING

What factors do you consider when determining whether a mission is viable? The main considerations are:

- Aircraft availability and financial resources.
- Weather conditions and time of day.
- Availability of personnel and the necessary equipment.

How do you manage the pressure when lives are at stake?

Training is essential.

It allows us to work safely and confidently within the role each team member performs.

We always prioritize the safety of the rescue personnel and the aircraft, while respecting the judgment and experience of everyone involved.

A successful operation is not only about rescuing someone. It also means that the entire crew and the aircraft return safely and without incident.

Being able to launch the mission immediately is always the goal.

FINAL MESSAGE

What would you like the public to understand about the work your team performs?

We are a specialized unit within the Volunteer Firefighters Rescue Brigade focused on aerial operations and rescue missions in hard-to-reach locations.

Our goal is to save lives more quickly and efficiently by utilizing aircraft, pilots, and rescue personnel specifically trained for these types of operations.

Since 2019, we have maintained a continuous training program thanks to the instruction provided by Chris Sharpe.

Today, the Section is composed of seven Volunteer Firefighters. We now have personnel certified as Crew Chiefs, as well as specialists in rescue and aerial operations.

Behind every mission lies preparation, coordination, and countless hours of training— most of which the public never gets to see.





THE SCIENTIFIC EVOLUTION OF SEARCH AND RESCUE (SAR) OPERATIONS

By Enrique Martín Cuervo
Humboldt Rescue Organization (ORH) – Venezuela

For thousands of years, when a storm caught a vessel at sea or a ship disappeared into the vastness of the ocean, survival depended on the knowledge of sailors and their ability to interpret winds, currents, and the behavior of the sea.

Today, that principle has evolved into a highly specialized field: Search and Rescue operations, internationally known as SAR. Through the use of satellites, emergency locator beacons, artificial intelligence, and global monitoring systems, it is now possible to locate aircraft, vessels, or people in distress almost anywhere on the planet.

Yet the fundamental idea remains the same as the one that guided ancient mariners:

**USING
KNOWLEDGE
AND SCIENCE
TO SAVE LIVES.**

MARITIME EMERGENCIES IN HUMAN HISTORY

One of the earliest accounts of a maritime emergency is found in the Book of Acts, written in the first century AD. The text describes the journey of the Apostle Paul to Rome aboard a vessel carrying soldiers, sailors, prisoners, and crew members. While crossing the Mediterranean Sea, the ship was caught in a violent storm known as the Euroclydon, a weather phenomenon capable of producing extremely strong winds and dangerous seas for the navigation of that era. The account provides remarkable detail about the decisions made by the crew to preserve both the vessel and the lives on board. These included reducing speed, securing the ship's structure, throwing cargo overboard to lighten the load, and allowing the vessel to drift under controlled conditions to avoid capsizing. These actions were not improvised. They were the result of knowledge accumulated through generations of mariners who understood weather patterns, sea behavior, and ship handling in extreme conditions. In other words, they were USING THE SCIENCE AVAILABLE IN THEIR TIME to confront an emergency situation. After several days of stormy weather, the vessel eventually ran aground near an island and broke apart along the shoreline. However, the account states that all 276 people on board survived, some by swimming and others by clinging to pieces of the wreckage. This episode represents one of the earliest documented examples of what today would be recognized as maritime survival and rescue.



NAVIGATION AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE ODYSSEY

Centuries earlier, another collection of stories reflected the dangers of navigation in the ancient world. These accounts are found in *The Odyssey*, attributed to the Greek poet Homer and composed around the 8th century BC.

The story recounts the long journey home of Odysseus (Ulysses) after the Trojan War, a voyage filled with storms, shipwrecks, and maritime challenges.

Although the work contains mythical elements characteristic of epic literature, it also includes surprisingly accurate descriptions of navigation in the ancient Mediterranean.

Among its references are:

- Ocean currents
- Seasonal winds
- Coastal navigation
- Celestial navigation using the stars
- Sea conditions during storms

These elements reflect the nautical knowledge possessed by mariners of that era.

Ancient sailors relied on systematic observation of nature, knowledge of winds and currents, and astronomical navigation to travel safely between different regions of the Mediterranean.

Once again, a fundamental idea emerges: they used the science available in their time to navigate and survive.

USING THE SCIENCE AVAILABLE IN THEIR TIME TO NAVIGATE AND SURVIVE.

From Ancient Knowledge to Modern Rescue

For centuries, survival during maritime or aviation emergencies depended largely on the practical knowledge of navigators and the ability of nearby individuals to respond when an incident occurred.

With the development of aviation, global maritime transportation, and modern communications came the need for organized search and rescue systems, internationally known as SAR (Search and Rescue).

From that point forward, rescue operations increasingly relied on:

- Technology
- Scientific analysis
- Telecommunications
- Satellites
- Mathematical search models

In essence, this reinforced an idea that had already existed since ancient times:

USING SCIENCE TO SAVE LIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY.

EMERGENCY LOCATOR BEACONS

One of the most important advances in modern rescue operations has been the development of emergency locator beacons, devices designed to automatically transmit a distress signal when an accident occurs.

Today, several types of emergency beacons exist, each designed for a specific environment.





ELT - Emergency Locator Transmitter

ELTs are emergency locator beacons installed on aircraft.

They are activated automatically during an impact or can be manually activated by the flight crew. Once activated, they transmit a signal that can be detected by satellites within the international COSPAS-SARSAT system.

This allows SAR coordination centers to quickly determine the approximate location of a downed aircraft.

EPIRB - Emergency Position

EPIRBs are emergency locator beacons used on vessels.

Some activate automatically when they come into contact with water, while others can be activated manually by the crew.

Once an emergency signal is transmitted, satellites can determine the vessel's position and relay the information to rescue coordination centers.



PLB - Personal Locator Beacon

PLBs are personal emergency locator beacons used by hikers, pilots, mariners, and explorers.

When activated, they transmit a distress signal along with the user's location, allowing a SAR operation to begin quickly.



SSAS - Ship Security Alert System

The SSAS is a security alert system used on commercial vessels for security-related emergencies.

It allows a silent alert to be transmitted in situations involving threats such as piracy or vessel hijacking.



“...the Apostle Paul on his journey to Rome aboard a vessel. During the voyage across the Mediterranean Sea, the ship was caught in a violent storm known as the Euroclydon...”





COSPAS-SARSAT

An international satellite-based search and rescue system that detects signals from emergency locator beacons activated by:



Aircraft



Vessels



Persons

Participating countries include:



Technological Advances in Emergency Beacons.



Today, emergency beacon technology has advanced significantly. Some modern devices now include a return link service, allowing the Mission Control Center (MCC) to confirm that the emergency signal has been received. This means that the person in distress can know that their alert has been detected. In addition, some devices can transmit extra information to the control center, including:

- Number of people involved
- Type of emergency
- Environmental conditions

This information helps rescue authorities plan search and rescue operations more effectively.



Artificial Intelligence Applied to **SAR**

The Organization Rescate Humboldt (ORH) has developed technological tools designed to improve the efficiency of SAR operations.

Among these developments is the use of artificial intelligence for search pattern analysis, helping optimize the planning of rescue missions.

By analyzing historical data, weather conditions, ocean currents, and human behavior in survival situations, it is possible to improve the probability of locating survivors.

This demonstrates that modern rescue operations depend not only on the willingness to help, but also on the intelligent use of science and technology.

Global Aircraft Tracking

Another major advancement has been the development of real-time aircraft tracking systems.

Platforms such as Flightradar24 allow users to monitor global air traffic through ADS-B technology, which transmits aircraft position data to ground stations and satellites.

These systems have significantly enhanced aviation safety and improved emergency response capabilities.

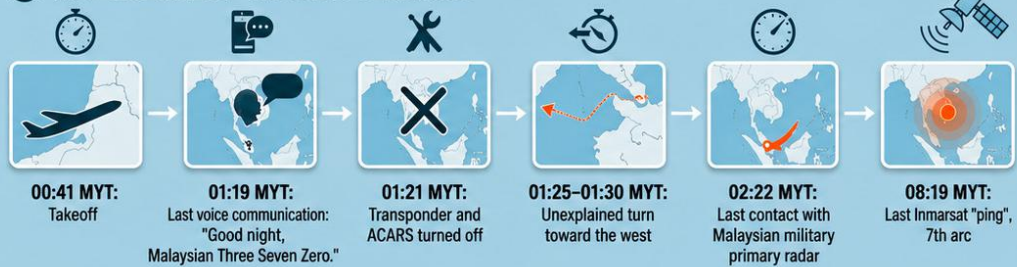


INFOGRAPHIC: THE MYSTERY OF MALAYSIA AIRLINES FLIGHT MH370

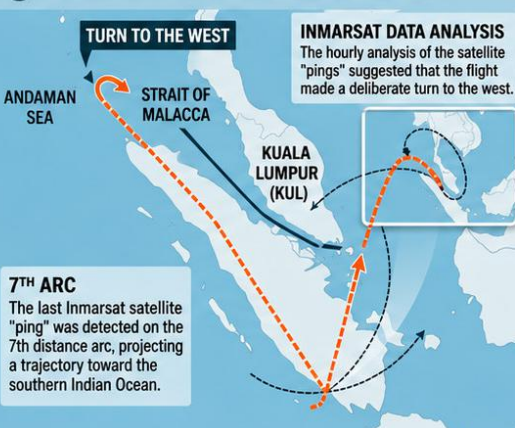
1 FLIGHT MH370 DATA



2 KEY TIMELINE OF THE DISAPPEARANCE



3 THE TURN AND THE SATELLITE ROUTE



4 THE SEARCH AND THE DEBRIS FOUND



5 FINAL SUMMARY AND FINDINGS



The Impact of MH370

The disappearance of Flight MH370 in 2014 led to significant changes in international aviation.

Following this event, global aircraft tracking requirements were strengthened to help ensure that a commercial aircraft cannot disappear without a trace for extended periods of time.

This accelerated the development of new distress tracking and satellite monitoring technologies.

Science to Save Lives

Search and rescue operations have evolved dramatically over the past decades.

Today they integrate satellite technology, advanced telecommunications, artificial intelligence, and global monitoring systems.

Yet the fundamental principle remains unchanged:

**IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO WANT
TO SAVE LIVES
YOU MUST KNOW HOW TO SAVE THEM**



BETWEEN MOUNTAINS AND DECISIONS

Capt. Eri Alas – AGAPE



It was in December 1999 when a good friend invited me to join a youth outreach activity in the mountains of northwestern Guatemala.

The most exciting part was that we would travel in a six-seat single-engine aircraft. We were told to bring no more than 20 pounds of luggage for a four-day trip.

The day finally arrived. About ten minutes after takeoff, I began to see the majestic Cuchumatanes Mountains, and my friend said with great excitement, “That’s where we’re going. Roads haven’t reached those mountains yet, which is why we use airplanes.”

Nearly 26 years have passed since that first adventure, and to this day I still admire Guatemala’s breathtaking mountains every time I fly.

There are many stories I could tell, but one in particular changed my life. It was May 18, 2018. I received a call to conduct a medical transport flight – what we commonly refer to as an emergency flight – from La Perla Estate in Quiché to La Aurora Airport in Guatemala City. The weather was good, the aircraft was in excellent condition, and I was healthy and current with all required flight training.

Because it was a medical emergency flight, we were mentally prepared for any contingency. This airstrip was 450 meters long, but only 350 meters were usable. I landed as I had done many times before. The patient was already waiting on the runway. I boarded her along with her mother, who was accompanying her, plus two additional passengers, including my pilot friend Jorge Barraza.

An important detail about this airstrip was its 14 percent slope and the fact that it had only one way in and one way out. Because of that, our landing and takeoff abort points were clearly defined. Once those points were passed, options for rejecting the landing or aborting the takeoff became extremely limited.

With the patient and passengers on board, I prepared for departure. My takeoff abort point was the moment I released the brakes. With full power applied, 20 degrees of flaps set, trim adjusted, I released the brakes and verbally repeated the phrase: “Continuing.” As we started descending down the slope, a pack of dogs suddenly ran onto the runway. I struck them with the propeller and the right main landing gear. I could not abort the takeoff. By the time the impact occurred, there was not enough runway remaining for a safe stop if I reduced power. I managed to get airborne, and everything initially appeared normal. The engine was running smoothly, all parameters were within limits, and the landing gear remained intact.

So we continued toward La Aurora. During the flight I kept asking Jorge, “If we lose the engine right now, where are we going?” It was part of the informal training discussions we often have whenever we fly together as pilot friends.



We delivered the patient at La Aurora so she could be transported to the hospital, and at that very moment I received another call to pick up an elderly woman who had suffered a fractured hip and leg.

I turned to my friend Jorge and asked, “Do you want to come with me?” We were already refueling the aircraft for a flight to Barillas, Huehuetenango, when Jorge noticed something unusual on the nose of the airplane. To everyone’s surprise, one of the propeller blades was completely loose and out of its normal alignment.

We immediately canceled the flight and called a mechanic for assistance. When he arrived and inspected the damage, he looked at me and said, “Mr. Wings” (that’s what he calls me), “you knocked on Heaven’s door, and they didn’t let you in. You’re here by a miracle.”

I can say with certainty that God protected all of us that day. The flight had been intended to help someone in urgent need of medical care.

For many of my pilot friends, this seems crazy—risking an aircraft and your own life to help people you do not even know and who often cannot afford even the minimum operating costs of the airplane.

I have often heard people say, “Those flights are not worth it. Too much risk and too little reward.” What they have not understood is that many years ago I chose to serve our people in this way. I had the opportunity to study and train as a mountain and jungle pilot, learning to operate in challenging terrain and weather conditions. The only way I can repay those opportunities is by serving in these regions and flying into these types of airstrips.

You do not get rich doing this kind of flying, and that must be understood from the beginning.

But what I can say with complete confidence is that these missions provide a level of fulfillment that is difficult to describe. For many people, that may sound unusual because aviation is an expensive profession that demands years of study, discipline, and sacrifice. As a result, many pilots pursue financial rewards and the prestige often associated with the profession. In my case, I made this choice because it brings me purpose. Mountain flying requires discipline and constant training. It also demands sound judgment, since terrain limitations leave far less room for error. Several years ago, I became a flight instructor so I could pass on whatever knowledge and experience I have gained and help train more pilots in this type of flying. I believe that each of us continues to make an impact long after we leave this world through what we teach and pass on to others.

Guatemala is blessed with excellent flight instructors, and our terrain provides an exceptional environment for learning mountain flying techniques.

As a result, I have the opportunity to fly with young pilots and teach skills that are generally not covered during primary flight training. I recommend that a pilot have at least 150 hours as Pilot in Command before beginning mountain flying training, along with a thorough understanding of the aircraft that will be used for the course.

To conclude, this type of flying has taught me two things above all else: humility and discipline. Humility because we never stop learning. Every training session should be approached with a learner’s mindset, even if you already have more than 5,000 flight hours.

Discipline because the risks are greater in mountain flying, where the margin for error is smaller. Mountain operations place higher demands on both the pilot and the aircraft, requiring performance levels beyond those expected in routine flying.

Outside the aviation world, I try to apply these same principles. No matter how old I am, there is always something new to learn from younger people as well as from experienced men and women. To me, humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is maintaining the curiosity of a beginner, even when you are already an experienced adult. Discipline, on the other hand, is what allows you to achieve your personal goals. But discipline must be accompanied by humility. Without it, success can go to your head and you stop improving.

Without discipline, talent is simply wasted potential.

There is a saying I once learned from someone, though I no longer remember who. It goes like this:

“Humility to learn, discipline to execute – that is the winning combination.”

WHEN A PROPELLER SPEAKS

Inspection, Maintenance, and Flight Safety

In aviation, not every warning appears as a panel light or a cockpit alarm. More often, the first signs are far more subtle: an unusual vibration, a sound that wasn't there before, or a sensation that experienced pilots learn to recognize over time.

The propeller is one of those components that is constantly "speaking." Correctly interpreting what it is telling you can make a significant difference in safety, reliability, and operating costs.

More Than Flight Hours

There is a common perception that propeller inspection and maintenance depend solely on accumulated flight hours. While flight time is certainly a key factor, it is far from the only criterion that should be considered.

Propellers are subject to service bulletins, airworthiness directives, and manufacturer recommendations developed through technical analysis and real-world operational experience. These guidelines are designed to identify potential issues before they develop into conditions that could compromise the performance of the propulsion system.

Ignoring these requirements not only increases risk, but often leads to more complex and costly repairs down the road.

A propeller rarely fails without warning. In most cases, it gives signs first—if you know how to listen.

Warning Signs That Should Never Be Ignored

Abnormal vibrations, unusual noises, irregular wear patterns, or signs of corrosion are not minor details. In many cases, these are early indicators of imbalance, material fatigue, or conditions that require specialized attention.

Addressing these warning signs promptly allows issues to be corrected before they evolve into major failures, helping prevent extended aircraft downtime and reducing operational impact.



Professional Inspection and Technical Expertise

Propeller maintenance goes far beyond a simple visual inspection. It requires specialized inspection procedures, proper tools, and qualified technicians with a thorough understanding of the limits, tolerances, and unique characteristics of each propeller model.

Working with specialized maintenance facilities and experienced technicians ensures that every intervention is carried out in accordance with established standards, preserving both the structural integrity of the propeller and the performance intended by the manufacturer.

Safety That Also Improves Operational Efficiency

A properly inspected and maintained propeller does more than contribute to flight safety. It also has a direct impact on operational efficiency, reducing vibrations transmitted throughout the aircraft and extending the service life of other components within the propulsion system.

For pilots and aircraft owners, this translates into a more predictable, comfortable, and sustainable operation from both a technical and economic standpoint.

Listening Before It's Too Late

In aviation, many critical decisions are made before takeoff. Understanding that a propeller communicates the condition of the aircraft is part of a safety culture that defines responsible operations.

Timely inspections and maintenance should never be viewed as a mere requirement, but rather as a direct investment in safety and operational continuity. Listening to what the propeller is telling you—before it becomes a serious issue—can make all the difference when it matters most.

**IN OUR
NEXT**
Issue.



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4 DE OCTUBRE



7:00 AM



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99

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42

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