



# SOARING TO NEW HEIGHTS

ROTARY-WING OPERATORS HAVE  
STARTED TO TAKE NOTE OF  
DUNCAN AVIATION'S SUPERIOR  
AVIONICS SERVICE.

BY DOMINIQUE MILBURN

Duncan Aviation marked the turn of the century by opening a new hangar facility at its massive Lincoln, Nebraska, service location. As part of the ceremony, the privately-owned business aviation maintenance, repair, and overhaul company sealed a time capsule to be opened in 50 years' time.

In it, future Duncan Aviation team members may find any number of curiosities of the company's longstanding history in aviation. Perhaps they'll find a toy model of a tractor, like the one founder Donald Duncan traded for an airplane back in 1942 so he could learn to fly. They could find a 1956 advertisement announcing the newly opened Duncan Beechcraft, Inc., a distributor "located a short distance from anywhere." Or maybe a model turbine engine, a nod to 1963, when Duncan led the charge to help fund Bill Lear's promising Learjet project in exchange for distribution rights—a fateful and savvy busi-ness move.

Anything is possible, but what they likely won't find is a helicopter, model or otherwise.

If the capsule was sealed in 2016, however, they surely would have included one. That was the year Duncan Aviation debuted as an exhibitor at HAI Heli-Expo and quickly made a splash as rookie participants who happen to be one of the oldest, most established avionics and accessory service companies in the world.

Although they've been servicing helicopter avionics and accessories, such as Northern Airborne Technology (NAT) avionics since the mid-1980s, it's not a market that Duncan Aviation is known for in the wider field. But that's all poised to change, as the company is making strides to connect with a widened network of operators.

"We have customers that have sent us [helicopter] avionics and accessories for years," said Kevin Miesbach, manager of components and original equipment manufacturer (OEM) business development. "Our name is not really synonymous with helicopters as much as corporate jets ... but our components division works with avionics, instruments, and accessories. It doesn't matter what type of flying machine those come out of."

Duncan Aviation boasts an impressive avionics resumé, including repair



“Few companies in the aviation industry, if any, are 60 years old and still operating under the same name. We have seen competitors come and go and companies bought and sold, some several times.”

— Karl Detweiler, manager of components business development, Duncan Aviation

capabilities on more than 50,000 part numbers, inventory worth \$45 million, with access to \$500 million more from parts locator services like ILS or PartsBase. They operate a service call center with aviation parts experts available 24 hours a day, each and every day of the year.

With 15 test sets specifically built to troubleshoot and test hundreds of different NAT models and part numbers, Duncan Aviation has full overhaul and repair capabilities on many NAT units.

“What a lot of people in the helicopter operator industry don't realize is that Duncan Aviation exists as a major service center for avionics and instruments, but also accessories including starter-generators, fuel pumps, converters, as well as navigation equipment, radio and radar. Our capabilities list in that world is pretty big,” said Karl Detweiler, manager of components business development. “We have a really good product to offer helicopter operators. We put out the very top quality with experienced technicians, and we use OEM parts in our products as much as possible. Our quality is just superb and the people who use us, like us.”

Customers come to Duncan Aviation from all corners on the globe, and up to 75 percent of the company's component business is conducted by courier, with a robust work order system tracking thousands of units per month. Duncan Aviation operates 25 satellite avionics shops across the U.S. and employs a dedicated helicopter rotatable parts manager. That Goliath inventory ensures that customers hailing from as far away as Finland, Japan, and even Australia, can have parts and components serviced or exchanged immediately and without hassle.

What else might the Duncan Aviation execs of 2050 find once the time capsule is opened? There are a few more potential items that would fit the bill. There could be a 1958 high school portrait of former chairman Robert Duncan, from the year he began taking flying lessons. He'd go on to sell his first aircraft for Duncan Aviation while still in high school. A bet could be made on finding a Rolodex, signifying Donald's legacy as a sales connoisseur, spending an estimated 40 hours per week on the phone working deals. They could even find travel photos of Todd Duncan, present chairman, who loved to accompany his grandfather, Donald, on some of his many business trips.

One thing is certain, however. The capsule will be opened in the presence of a Duncan. The company has operated under the leadership of the Duncan family and its strong core values since inception.

“That's pretty remarkable when you think about it,” said Detweiler. “It's a matter of stability. The company intends to be here. It helps Duncan Aviation take a long-range view towards customers. We'll absolutely do the right thing, and we'll do the little things for customers.”



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