



# Sikorsky Archives News

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## Sikorsky to Go — The Field Service Representatives



*Sikorsky S-76 and S-92 Field Service Reps tie global operators to the Customer Service Center in Trumbull, Connecticut.*

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Contact us at [iisha@snet.net](mailto:iisha@snet.net) 203.386.4356

Sikorsky Field Service Representatives (FSRs) have long traveled the world to share technical expertise with customers and return operational insights about helicopters at work. They deployed with US forces in the Second World War, Korea, Vietnam, and recent conflicts, and they remain the primary point of contact for the company's military and commercial customers. "The FSRs don't actually do maintenance on the aircraft," said Sikorsky Global Sustainment Director Joe Eltman. "They advise and train and provide technical oversight." He offered, "The real strength they bring to the equation is they are a direct liaison back to Sikorsky design engineering."

FSRs – Tech Reps -- help maintain multi-sensor Seahawks in Saudi Arabia, armed Black Hawks in the UAE, and life-saving S-76s in Japan. They support oil industry S-76s and S-92s from offices in Norway, Scotland, Nigeria, Australia, Canada, and Brazil. To far-flung customers, Sikorsky FSRs are the face of the company, and Military Field Service Operations Manager Tim Harrison observed, "It's one thing to have the technical qualifications to guide the customer. The talent to be the ambassador of Sikorsky is something else."

The first company Technical Agent was James L. Sanders, a former Navy machinist mate who joined Sikorsky Aero Engineering Corp. on Long Island in 1926. In 1932, he was "mechanician" and co-pilot for the S-38 amphibious sesqui-plane Silver Wings that took socialite Margery Durant on her Air Popularization Tour of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Sanders was named in the purchase agreement when Hollywood aviator Howard Hughes bought his S-39 amphibian in 1934. He returned to become an engineering representative and mechanic in the Sikorsky Service Department when helicopters entered production and was named first manager of the Service School in Bridgeport.

With first deliveries of the Sikorsky S-47 (U.S.



*Sikorsky's first commercial success, the S-38 was backed by Technical Agent James Sanders.*

Army R-4), test pilot and Service Department Manager Les Morris wanted engineers to go into the field. Army R-4s were first deployed in the Far East, and engineer Arnold Podolsky set off for China in the winter of 1944. However, in 1946, then-Department manager Arnold Day began recruiting Technical Representatives from the Sikorsky flight hangar and shops. Between 1946 and 1950, Tech Reps were assigned to support R-4, R-5, R-6 and S-51 helicopters with the Marine Corps, Army, and Air Force, and Los Angeles Airways in the U.S. and with Westland Aircraft in the UK.



*Sanders deployed with Navy HO3S-1s for plane guard operations in the North Atlantic.*

Field mechanics Stewart Hill and Miles Roosevelt went to sea in 1946 with Pilot Jimmy Viner to fly

a company S-51 from the carrier USS Franklin D. Roosevelt. Their proof-of-concept deployment made seven rescues at sea. In 1948, Sanders deployed with four S-51s (Navy HO3S-1s) for carrier operations in the North Atlantic. Their success convinced the Navy of the value of the helicopter for “plane guard” duty around carriers and utility missions at sea.

Marine Observation Squadron VMO-6 took S-51s (HO3S-1s) to war in Korea in 1950, and Sikorsky News in October 1951 spotlighted ‘Korea’s ‘Copter Doctor’ when Tech Rep Harry Nachlin returned from his 13-month deployment. Nachlin joined Sikorsky in November 1943 and worked in the flight hangar readying R-4s for flight test. In Korea alongside Marine maintainers, he kept hard-flown S-51s and later S-55s (Marine HRS-1s and Air Force H-19s) operational. He recalled, “There was no time to do anything for the aircraft during the day except to gas and oil them. During



*Tech Rep Harry Nachlin supported Marine Corps S-51s in Korea.*

such periods, the maintenance, including 30- and 60-hour checks, had to be done at night. Working outdoors as we did at Kimpo, this often had to be done between blackouts, or by flashlight when we couldn’t run our generators.” Nachlin shuttled between Korea and Japan during the war to solve technical and supply problems for Marine and Air Force units. He returned to a series of assignments in the U.S. and abroad, including installation of dipping sonar in the S-55 (HO4S), introduction of the S-58 (HSS-1) with the Navy, and delivery of S-55s to India.

## Forward Locations

Air Force helicopter maintainer and future Sikorsky Archives President Dan Libertino attended S-55 (H-19) school in Bridgeport in 1953. He recalled, “In June, we were scheduled to go to Saigon [Vietnam] and await H-19s that were being donated to the French Air Force. It was there I thought, ‘I’d really like to be a Tech Rep.’ I was only 22 years old.”

Back from Vietnam and discharged from the Air Force, Libertino approached Sikorsky with military letters of recommendation. “Unfortunately, they said I was too young.” A call from pioneering S-55 oil operator Petroleum Helicopters in Grand Isle, Louisiana offered both overhaul experience and a path to a civilian Aircraft and Propulsion license. After two years in the Gulf of Mexico, and with permission from PHI management, Libertino joined Sikorsky and spent six weeks in S-58 school to become a Tech Rep. “Most of the people were all ex-mechanics from the Air Force, the Navy, and later the Army. We were interviewed for our ability to talk about the S-55 or S-58 -- our communications.”



*Backed by Tech Rep Dan Libertino, World Wide Air Services used S-58s in Papua New Guinea.*

In 1957, Libertino was assigned to World Wide Air Services Ltd., then under contract to fly S-58s

in New Guinea on behalf of the Australasian Oil consortium. He helped assemble three helicopters in Port Moresby and then traveled by Catalina flying boat, Beaver floatplane, and dugout canoe to a forward operating camp with tar paper huts for drilling crews and construction workers. With the S-58s in place, oil exploration equipment was broken down into 4,000 lb loads at a base-camp on the Kikori River for the helicopters to fly sling loads into jungle clearings cut by native workers. Liberto noted, "Except for a few people who worked on the rig, everything we carried was external loads." Sikorsky News reported two S-58s flying in 100°F heat interrupted by fierce thunderstorms airlifted a million pounds of cargo in 45 days. Liberto recalled no special technical problems. "Maybe from all the hovering, we were getting loose or popped rivets on the vertical tail."

Liberto left New Guinea for India to introduce S-55s, but at the end of 1957 found himself in snowy Germany to support US Army S-55s and S-58s (H-19s and H-34s) at Hanau. "I became the Tech Rep covering Sikorsky helicopters in the northern part of America's Zone of Occupation." Liberto oversaw more than 100 Sikorsky helicopters. Liberto's last stop was San Diego as the Field Service Representative working side-

field, recalled Liberto, "It was a constant flow of engineering expertise at North Island, looking at problems no one had seen before."



*CH-53A FSR Ed Sullivan had his office on "Main Street" at Phu Bai in Vietnam.*

The buildup of US forces in South Vietnam again drew Field Service Reps into a combat theater. In 1967, United Aircraft Bee-Hive magazine listed nine Sikorsky FSRs deployed in support of S-58s (Marine CH/UH-34s), S-61s (Air Force CH-3Cs and HH-3Es), S-64s (Army CH-54As), and S-65s (Marine CH-53As). Ed Sullivan started his Sikorsky career in 1966 as a technical writer in spares operations, became a logistics service representative in 1968, and arrived at Phu Bai in the Republic of Vietnam in 1969 as a CH-53A Field Service Representative with Marine Squadron HMH-462. A plywood "hooch" on "Main Street" served as an dormitory and headquarters for FSRs Willie Hill, Joe Elkins, Al Aventi and Ed Sullivan. Sullivan recalled, "We shared 'facilities' with squadron personnel living on the same 'block.' Meals were provided at the officer's mess while hangars, the supply warehouse, and AIMD [Aviation Intermediate Maintenance Department/Engine] shops were a short



*The Marines took the S-65/CH-53A to Vietnam in 1967.*

by-side at North Island with the US Navy class desk officer for Sikorsky helicopters. "They had S-55s, S-58s, S-61s, later S-65s. I would tour the base, go through all the overhaul shops." Fleet experience fed lessons back to Stratford. "We were ahead of what Sikorsky was seeing from the

walk to work. . . We had long workdays six days a week, with Sundays off but always ‘on call.’”

Marine maintainers did all the hands-on work, but Sullivan caught rides between bases to get parts. “They’d change a gearbox. If they didn’t get it. . . I’d be the guy chasing the replacement gearbox.” One excursion gave the FSR a taste of combat. “I actually ‘manned’ a .50 Cal machine gun in the window of a squadron aircraft while the two crewmen retrieved and loaded aircraft mishap debris into our ‘53 in the middle of a Vietnamese farm field. Gunnery Sergeant Bob Evans, who eventually worked for the Sikorsky H-53 ILS [Integrated Logistics Support] Team in Stratford, ‘locked and loaded’ the machine gun and told me to just pull the trigger if the locals on the tree line watching shot at our aircraft! It wasn’t until we lifted off that I thought, if the guys on the tree line watching would have shot, they’d have been firing at the machine gun!”

## Crises and Contingencies

Ed Sullivan returned from Vietnam to a series of field service assignments, including a shipboard tour with Navy RH-53D’s sweeping mines from the Suez Canal in 1973. In June 1981, he arrived in Sigonella, Sicily to spend the next eight years supporting RH-53D Sea Stallions, CH-53E Super Stallions, and SH-60B Seahawks in the Mediterranean. He was part of the first FSR Team to support the minesweepers delivered to the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force and retired from Sikorsky in 2006. “I started in 1968 dedicated to CH-53A’s and finished up as an FSR supporting the S-80M-1 [MH-53E] in Japan.”

Dave Gearhart became a Sikorsky Field Service Representative in May 1967, just out of the Army as a maintenance instructor and having completed Sikorsky S-64 (Army CH-54) school in Connecticut. Another company course alongside Air Force maintainers learning the S-65 (military H-53) readied him for southeast Asia. “The first group of HH-53Bs had gone over to Udorn, Thailand,” Gearhart recalled I went over with

the second group and spent about 15 months in Thailand with the HH-53B.” He added, “We had a really good year. At that particular time, we had five aircraft, and in that one year we rescued 124 pilots that had been shot down over North Vietnam. We didn’t lose an airplane.”

Back from Thailand, Gearhart was assigned to the Israeli S-65C3 program and was in Tel Aviv when the first helicopter arrived. He said, “That’s when I really became a Tech Rep. Up to that time, if a part broke, you just told someone to change it. In Israel, if you had a bad transmission, you took it off, took it across the street, turned it upside



*FSR Dave Gearhart (blue jacket) was in Tel Aviv when the Israel Air Force accepted the first S-65C3.*

down, repaired it, and put it back on the airplane. When I left Israel, I could field-strip a ‘53.” Follow-on assignments attached Gearhart to the German Army supporting the CH-53G and to the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves in California with the CH-53A before he joined the Sikorsky logistics organization.



*S-65s will serve Israel until replaced by the S-95 Super Yasur around 2026.*

“I loved being a Tech Rep. It’s great, heady stuff to be on your own representing the company.”

Jim Kleinhuizen first encountered Sikorsky FSRs while working on RH-53Ds in 1971 as a sailor with US Navy minesweeping squadron HM-12. He joined the company in 1980 and retired after 33 years as an FSR embedded with Marine Squadron HMX-1 and the Executive Flight Detachment with Presidential VH-3 and VH-60 White Tops. Kleinhuizen logged operations at 615 locations including 78 outside the US and concluded, “Helping to write maintenance procedures, introducing new equipment and tools, being on call 24/7, being a mentor and sometimes even a father figure – all were very gratifying to say the least.”

Sikorsky FSRs were integral to US military contingency operations in many theaters. Vietnam veteran Neil Falcone started with the company in 1977 as a lab technician and worked for Dan Libertino on the S-70B Seahawk program in Owego, New York in 1980. “I credit him with my promotion,” said Falcone. On-the-job training taught FSR candidates helicopter systems by Sikorsky part number. Falcone explained, “A senior rep had to sign off to say you were competent to work on that system. When your jacket filled up, you were in line to be a Tech Rep.”

The education was valuable to Sikorsky and the Navy. Falcone noted. “For 35 years, if it was an east-coast Navy Hawk that was broken, and a fair amount on the west coast too, I was involved. I was appointed by the Navy as a member to three mishap boards and assisted as a technical advisor on six others. As a certified air crewman I accumulated over 3,000

hours on functional check flights to assist with in-flight troubleshooting or post-maintenance checks.” In the Persian Gulf in 1987, Falcone cross-decked from one Seahawk frigate to another by small boat or helicopter hoist. “I jumped around from ship to ship for about six months, helping people with their aircraft problems. . . As a technical assistant, you’re not part of ship’s company. Sometimes you’re sleeping in a cargo bay or hot-racking [sharing empty bunks] where you’d sleep.” Falcone recalled, “One of the ships I was on was attacked by a couple of Iranian vessels. I was locked in a section of the ship because I didn’t have a combat duty station. All I heard was the guns going off, and I had no idea what was going on. [My ship] apparently sank two or three boats.”

Not all far-flung FSR adventures are military. Sikorsky’s customer support magazine *The Source* in August 2010 told of an S-92 of offshore oil operator Starllite Aviation grounded at a remote location 150 miles northwest of Windhoek, the capital of Namibia in southern Africa. Sikorsky Aerospace Services FSR Sean Whitman had responsibility for Turkey, Turkmenistan, Europe, and Africa. From Equatorial Guinea several hundred miles from Namibia, he assembled a team that analyzed data from the S-92 health and usage monitoring system, diagnosed the aircraft problem, formulated a support plan, and rushed replacement parts to get the helicopter flying again.

David McElhiney left the US Navy in 2008 and in 2010 became the FSR for S-61Ts operated by the U.S. State Department. He spent 10 months embedded with Carson helicopters converting retired Navy Sea Kings into their transport configuration. “In December 2010, we deployed the first two aircraft to Afghanistan supporting the Embassy.



*Sikorsky FSRs accompany Marine One – the Presidential S-61/VH-3D. (US Marine Corps)*



*Sikorsky FSRs were embedded with Carson Helicopters for the S-61T conversion program. (Carson)*

Seven months later, we transferred those two aircraft to Baghdad, Iraq, and started receiving eight more.” McElhiney went on to Australia with the first MH-60R Seahawks for the Royal Australian Navy and remains the MH-60R Air Vehicle FSR with the Royal Saudi Naval Forces.

Most Sikorsky Field Service Representatives today come from the US military, but the community includes skilled foreign nationals. Brazilian Fernando Brandao became an FSR in 1996 supporting commercial S-58Ts, S-61Ns, and S-76As, plus Brazilian Navy S-61 (SH-3D) Sea Kings. The Brazilian fleet now includes S-76C+ and C++ helicopters in offshore service and S-70B Seahawks in the Brazilian Navy. As the Sikorsky representative covering Brazil, Trinidad & Tobago, and Spain, Brandao also has responsibility for commercial S-76Bs and subsequently oversaw the S-70s of the President of Argentina, the SH-3s of the Argentine Navy, and the Black Hawks of the Chilean Army.

In 1996, Sikorsky News quoted vice president of Worldwide Customer Service Mike Blake regarding Field Service Representatives embedded with the US Army’s rapid-deployment 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). Blake said, “They are our special forces, our first line of service to our customer.” Sikorsky Worldwide Customer Service became Sikorsky Aerospace Services in 2008. Sikorsky Global Sustainment, part of Lockheed Martin Global Sustainment, today has about 100 FSRs and 30 mobile technicians on every continent but the Antarctic.

New Sikorsky FSRs for government customers are generally experienced military helicopter maintainers. “You have to identify those people and grow them into the position,” said Tim Harrison. Commercial program FSRs are either airframe and powerplant mechanics certified by the FAA or have an engineering degree. Joe Eltman explained, “We put them through a couple of formal training programs, one is for the aircraft they’re going to support. The other is we train them in the same systems we use at Sikorsky to document the technical questions in the field. Our systems allow them to answer all the technical questions that have been answered in the past. We have a database that tracks and monitors every question that has ever been asked on a Sikorsky aircraft.”

Commercial Field Service Reps are tied to the Sikorsky Customer care center in Trumbull, Connecticut. Military helicopter FSRs across the US services have no single data resource, but the same database documents the collected knowledge of Sikorsky engineering to support customers. Harrison observed, “They’ve got each other’s’ backs. There’s nothing they can’t accomplish.”



*Field Service Reps today receive S-70-specific training at West Palm Beach.*



*In July 2012, Sikorsky Field Service and Logistic Support Representatives gathered with the soon-to-be certified S-76D*

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Memberships and Donations enable us to continue the Archives mission of acquiring, managing, protecting and disseminating historical documentation associated with Igor Sikorsky and his legacy

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Sikorsky Archives was represented by Vice President John Bulakowski and President Dan Libertino and their wives Debbie and Linda at the Sacred Heart University Pioneer Scholarship Gala in April 2023.

Prepared by Frank Colucci and John Bulakowski  
with graphic art and layout by Jodi Buckley.



*“The ‘Squadron of the Flying Ships’ was created. . . All this happened during December, 1914. Before the end of that month, General Shidlovsky, with all of- ficers, enlisted men, planes, various equipment, automobiles and trucks, arrived at the new base near the village of Yablonna, some twenty-five miles behind the fighting lines. I went there at the same time, having been appointed to serve as technical advisor to the staff of the Squadron.”*

Igor Sikorsky — *The Story of the Winged-S*

