


# Making the

## CSI Aviation, long-time management and logistics firm, starts Part 135 operation with King Airs

by MeLinda Schnyder



**P**ick an airframe – from a Boeing 737 to a Cessna 172 – and it’s likely CSI Aviation, Inc. has experience with it during the company’s 37 years as an aviation management and logistics company serving government and civilian customers. When CSI decided to expand as a Part 135 operator two years ago, that intimate knowledge simplified the purchasing decision. “It was a pretty easy answer to what airframe we wanted for the required missions,” said Thomas J. Dunn, senior vice president of Business Development & Marketing. “The King Air is a phenomenal airframe, and the capacity and capability in hot, humid and high elevations fit our needs really well.”

# Move



CSI Aviation's King Air B300 is one of two King Airs owned by the company. The aircraft are based at Albuquerque International Sunport with a flight department that includes five pilots, a dispatcher, a director of maintenance and a chief inspector. (PHOTO CREDIT: RON ELLEDGE)

Adding the Part 135 certificate and purchasing two Beechcraft King Air aircraft is the latest expansion for a business that started by facilitating charter flights and has transformed into a global operation solving complex aviation requirements for air charter services, aviation logistics and program management.

## From bus charter to air charter

Allen Weh, a career Marine Corps Reserve Officer with undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of New Mexico, was organizing bus charters for collegiate football teams when one of the schools asked if he could help them charter an airplane.

He discovered a market for coordinating athletic air charters to transport NCAA football teams to away games, and CSI formed in 1979.

Weh continued to use his military and business contacts to grow the charter business from its headquarters in Albuquerque, New Mexico. "Our charter skills steered us into government contracts and that led to more specialized programs within the government base, actually managing an entire program instead of just managing an individual charter. That led to aircraft leasing, setting up ground handling and other specialized services," said Marc Ramthun, CSI's senior director of Sales.

Through nearly four decades in business, CSI now offers a laundry list of capabilities that generally fall into the segments of transportation, logistics and management. Often they take on complex projects that involve every segment. CSI customers include Fortune 500 corporations, federal agencies, hospitals and medical service providers, athletic organizations, the film industry and other industries such as energy and oil and gas. CSI has provided products and services to dozens of federal entities for more than 20 years and was the first aviation management company to obtain a long-term contract through the U.S. government's General Services Administration Federal Supply Schedule program.

Weh, who retired a colonel after active service that included three wars, remains CSI's CEO. He has built a team that combines commercial aviation experience and military experience, both veterans and current military. About 40 percent of the 40 employees are veterans, representing each branch of the military.

"The uniqueness for our company versus others is that we are extremely diversified while being small. We're

global and we operate at all levels of aviation," Dunn said. "We do everything from Part 121 program management to Part 135 program management and, now, our own organic-based 135 operations built around the King Airls."

## Blueprint for a flight department

CSI won a contract about 12 years ago that required the company to provide medical flight services. After a decade of contracting aircraft and coordinating these flights for commercial and government customers, CSI decided to acquire its own aircraft.

"We really began to see a need for additional medical flight service providers," Ramthun said. "With New Mexico being a rural state, there were numerous flights in the state last year using fixed wing aircraft. We saw this high demand first-hand and, it was a natural fit for us to expand to provide medical flight services in our own state and the surrounding region."

Moving from being a program manager to starting its own flight operation was an easy transition, Dunn said. "We're currently managing over 10 large Part 121 aircraft – 737s and MD83s – basically running an airline with ▶

## CSI Becomes OEM with Seeker Light Observation Aircraft

In 2014, CSI Aviation, Inc. acquired Seabird Aviation, an Australian company that manufactures SB7L-360 series light observation aircraft known as Seekers. CSI owns Seeker Aircraft, Inc. and its wholly owned subsidiary Seabird Aviation Australia Pty, Ltd. Seeker Aircraft, Inc., oversees the manufacture, distribution and support of Seeker models worldwide with headquarters in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The Seeker has a distinct design featuring a high, fixed wing with a rear-mounted pusher engine and forward crew seating in a helicopter-like cockpit that allows for 270-degree visibility. The two-seat aircraft is purpose-designed to make cost-effective surveillance missions. In addition to excellent cockpit visibility, it offers short takeoff and landing capabilities, seven-hour aloft endurance, easy maintenance in the field and is easily configured to accommodate surveillance and sensor equipment.

In June, the FAA and the Australian Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) issued Normal Category Type Certificates to the Seeker series, allowing the company to sell the Seeker for commercial operations in addition to individuals for personal use. The company expects a dramatic increase in North American sales. Seekers operate around the world, including military missions in the Middle East, wildlife management operations in Africa and low level observation flights to assist ground surveillance by the New Mexico State Police.

CSI says Seeker aircraft offer surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities similar to helicopters but at a fraction of the acquisition and operating costs. Previously it was only manufactured in Australia, but this year Seeker Aircraft, Inc. began a partnership with Erickson, Inc. of Portland, Oregon, for the North American manufacturing operation. The plane sells for under \$500,000.

The Seeker fleet. CSI owns Seeker Aircraft, Inc., which manufactures SB7L-360 series light observation aircraft known as Seekers. (PHOTO CREDIT: EDGAR CHAPARRO)





CSI Aviation formed in 1979 as an air charter broker and has grown into a global operation solving complex aviation requirements for air charter services, aviation logistics and program management. They expanded to become a Part 135 operator in 2014, when they purchased a King Air 200. They added a King Air 300 in June 2016. (PHOTO CREDIT: CSI AVIATION)

these aircraft,” he said. “We manage everything about those flights. Most are flying five days a week, eight hours a day and we procure all the fuel, set up all the ground handling, coordinate all the international permitting, provide crew rotation and travel, and manifesting. So this is second nature to us.”

CSI acquired its first King Air 200 in 2014 and added a King Air 300 in June 2016. Both are capable of medical flight configurations and are also used for corporate and government missions, including passenger and cargo transport.

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Assistant Director of Operations John Fishburn leads a flight department based at Albuquerque International Support that includes five pilots, a dispatcher, a director of maintenance and a chief inspector. "All of our pilots are either in the military now or retired military pilots, with an average of 2,000 hours in the aircraft," Fishburn said. "We have a lot of military and civilian experience in the King Air aircraft."

The 1986 King Air 300 has 8,500 hours and is equipped with Garmin G750/650. It is CSI's primary medical services configured aircraft. The 2001 King Air 200 has 3,200 hours and is Garmin G1000-equipped.

While the King Air 200 gives the team maneuverability, the King Air 300 expands their reach to the entire U.S. "The 300 has longer legs than the 200 and we can go up to 14,000 pounds," he said. "The more powerful engines allow us to climb over weather." A recent flight transporting two corporate clients from Albuquerque to Angel Fire was perfect for the smaller King Air. "The airfield at Angel Fire is 8,360 feet. The King Air performed excellent during the RNAV GPS 17 approach to Angel Fire, which is in a valley surrounded by mountains up to 13,161 feet. The King Air was an excellent aircraft to get in due to the narrow and short runway," he said.

For medical flight missions, the King Air aircraft are equipped with Spectrum Aeromed patient configuration and patient loading system, Spectrum Aeromed installed IV poles, stretcher bridges and custom medical equipment mounts. The King Air 200 operates weekly missions transporting local doctors and medical equipment to outlying rural communities for scheduled clinics.

"The King Air is the ideal aircraft and has the performance needed to operate in this area of the country," Fishburn said. "New Mexico presents unique challenges for aviation. We have unexpected weather conditions, mountainous terrain, remote airfields and short



CSI Aviation of Albuquerque, New Mexico, chose to start its own Part 135 operation with King Airs because of their capacity and capability in hot, humid and high elevations, as well as their flexibility to handle corporate shuttles, military missions and medical services flights. (PHOTO CREDIT: EDGAR CHAPARRO)

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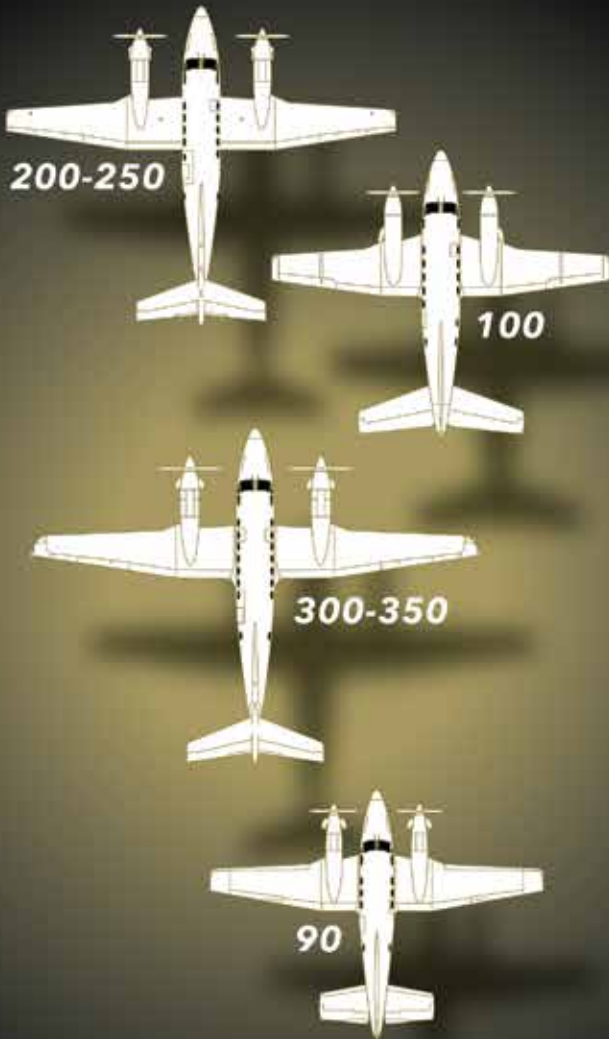
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CSI Aviation won a contract 12 years ago that required the company to provide medical flight services. After a decade of contracting aircraft and coordinating these flights for commercial and government customers, CSI decided to acquire its own aircraft for scheduled and emergency medical services flights throughout rural New Mexico. (PHOTO CREDIT: CLARISSA DUBOIS)



CSI Aviation's King Air B300 is fully equipped with Spectrum Aeromed equipment. Medical services flights are operated with two pilots, one flight nurse, one paramedic, the patient and typically one to two family members. (PHOTO CREDIT: CLARISSA DUBOIS)

runways in many rural airports. Single-engine climb capabilities are important when flying in and out of these high-elevation airports – so we invested in safety and performance with the King Air.” **KA**