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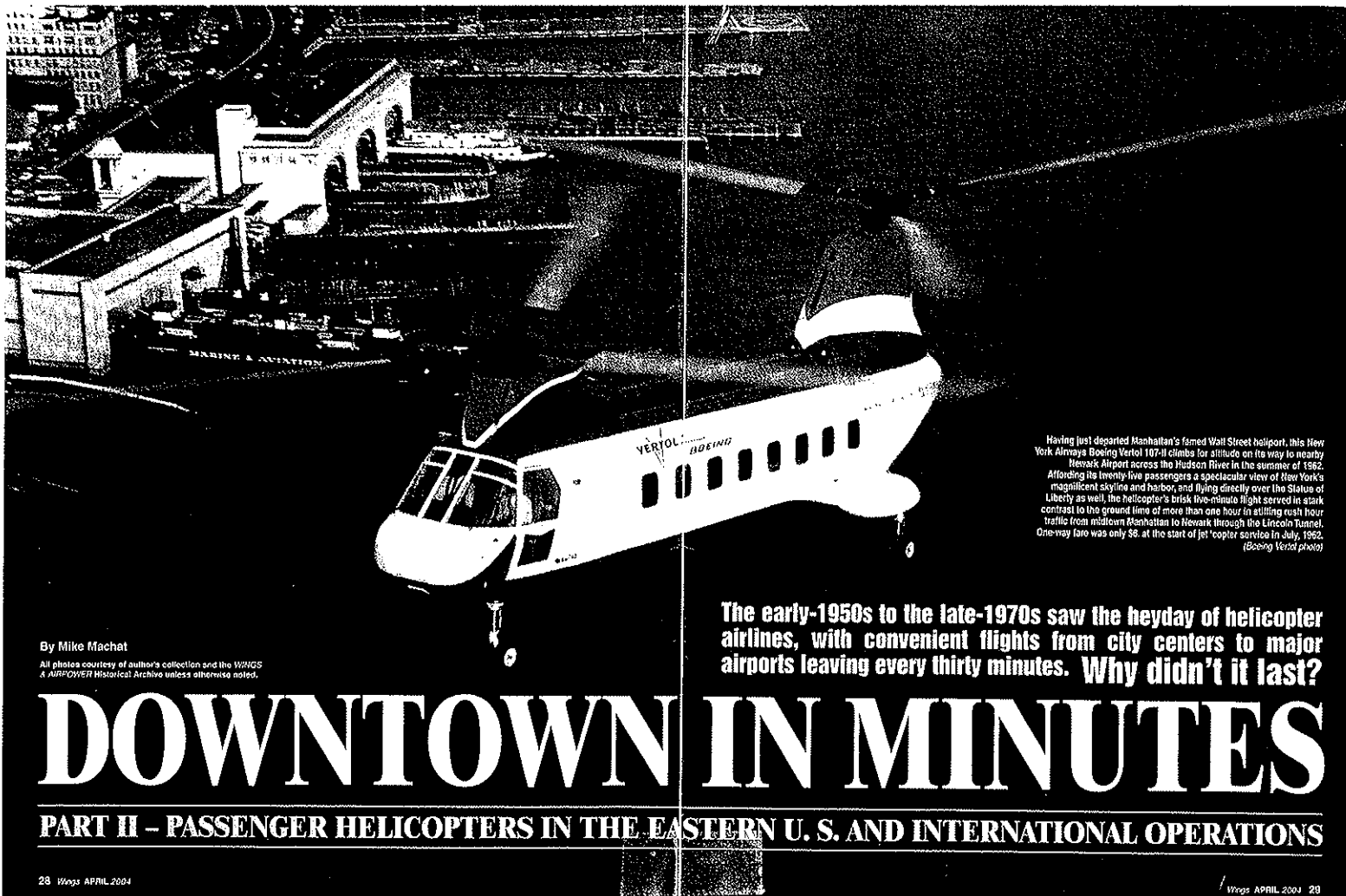
By Mike Machat

All photos courtesy of author's collection and the WINGS & AIRPOWER Historical Archive unless otherwise noted.

The early-1950s to the late-1970s saw the heyday of helicopter airlines, with convenient flights from city centers to major airports leaving every thirty minutes. Why didn't it last?

DOWNTOWN IN MINUTES

PART II - PASSENGER HELICOPTERS IN THE EASTERN U. S. AND INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS



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IN MINUTES

STERN U. S. AND INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS



Below: Although experimental rooftop Air Mail service by autogiro had first been demonstrated in Philadelphia, Johnny Miller, the pilot of this TWA KelleTT KD-1B 'giro', performed an effortless pickup from the rooftop of Chicago's main Post Office, and then delivered the mail sacks to their destination at Midway Field in minutes. This event took place during National Air Mail Week in May 1937, where hundreds of demonstration 'stunt flights' as they were called back then were conducted to commemorate America's new and somewhat futuristic Air Mail service. Eastern Air Lines inaugurated formal rooftop Air Mail service with the 100-mph KD-1 in Philadelphia on July 6, 1939, and this operation became the first scheduled rotary winged service in the world. From such humble beginnings sprang America's first helicopter airlines.

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When you look at a map of New York City you'll see three major airports (one being located geographically in New Jersey) that form a triangle around Manhattan's famous skyline known worldwide since the first skyscrapers were built there in the Art Deco era of the late-1930s. Another man-made entity first created in that magical time period was the helicopter, credited in this country to Igor Sikorsky who flew a pioneering machine in 1939 called the VS-300, the world's first practical helicopter, from his small design and development facility in Stratford, Connecticut, some 40 miles from Manhattan. Little did anyone dream that Sikorsky's novel flying machine would one day connect those three airports by air, becoming the salvation of millions of travelers who would have otherwise been stranded on traffic-choked highways, bridges, or in tunnels under the Hudson and East Rivers.

Moreover, it would have been utter folly to predict that one day a helicopter would actually land atop one of those towering buildings in mid-town Manhattan and disgorge its passengers into a luxurious restaurant with a scintillating view of the helipad and the surrounding splendor of the New York Metropolitan area. In actuality, it was only 26 short years from Sikorsky's dream to the reality of scheduled passenger helicopter service from the roof of New York's magnificent Pan Am building! How fitting also, that this monumental structure belonged to one of the proudest names in American history, that of Juan Trippe's Pan American World Airways – "*First across the Atlantic...first across the Pacific...first around the world*", as their famous advertising slogan used to say.

Today, the giant logo atop that building reads "Met Life", and Pan Am, along with other proud names such as Eastern, Braniff, and TWA, is gone forever. Another airline gone forever is New York Airways, a small carrier that enjoyed growth and prosperity during the post-war years, but whose fortunes declined with the advent of deregulation and after suffering some notable and tragic accidents. Unlike the aforementioned airlines, 'NYA' as it was proudly known, flew only helicopters. From 1953 through 1979, however, NYA carried hundreds of thousands of travelers either commuting between airports, connecting with arriving or outbound flights, or simply enjoying an aerial sightseeing tour over the world's most bustling metropolis.

From Small Packages to Passengers

The slogan on every New York Airways timetable simply states "The First Helicopter Airline". Technically, it wasn't. A short-lived experimental helicopter passenger service inaugurated by British European Airways in June 1950 carried up to three people at a time in small Sikorsky S-51s between Cardiff and Liverpool, England, but the service was short-lived. A larger, faster, and more modern conveyance was required to make passenger helicopters a realistic money-making endeavor, if that were even possible. Hence, New York Airways lays claim to the more accurate title of "World's First Sustained Helicopter Airline", upon which any passenger could book a flight, show up at the airport, board on time, and be deposited at the various destinations listed in the timetable.

NYA was actually the third U.S. helicopter airline, receiving its CAB (Civil Aeronautics Board, later transformed into the FAA) operating certification in December 1951. Carrying only mail between the three major New York airports and a few outlying towns, NYA began scheduled service on October 15, 1952. The aircraft of choice, as it was for fellow U.S. helicopter airlines Los Angeles Airways (see *March 2004 AIRPOWER*) and Helicopter Air Services of Chicago, was Sikorsky's new seven-passenger

It would have been utter folly to predict that one day a helicopter would actually land atop one of those towering buildings in mid-town Manhattan and disgorge its passengers into a luxurious restaurant!

sky bus, the S-55, a large utility helicopter then in service with the U. S. Armed Forces in Korea, being used there for transport, medivac, and air-rescue operations. The S-55 could be flown by a single pilot and at a comfortable cruising speed of 100 mph.

The concept of actually carrying passengers aboard helicopters was as novel in the early-'50s as the helicopter itself. People were still getting used to seeing flying machines coming to a complete stop in mid-air, and then settling hummingbird-like onto a rooftop or shoreline helipad. By comparison, today's helicopters have become an accepted part of modern everyday life. (Two passed overhead as these very words were being written – one a law enforcement chopper; the other minutes later a Life Flight rescue bird.) Nevertheless, this newfound convenience was both good news and bad, in that it saved valuable time, but came at a cost that wasn't cheap when measured in 'then-year' dollars.

When compared to the slick and luxurious crop of contemporary executive helicopters, the S-55 was a relic. Its single 600-hp Wright R-1340 radial engine was literally bolted to the front of the passenger cabin, and produced enough noise and vibration to numb passenger's ears and put their legs to sleep on any flights longer than ten minutes. Luckily, that was about the average duration of any New York Airways' flight. The trade off, of course, was that passengers could be whisked between airports in minutes instead of the nearly-



Above left: The novel idea of passenger helicopter service originated in Europe with British European Airways in June 1950 (see February 2004 WINGS), but SABENA Belgian Airlines is credited with flying the world's first international passenger helo service in September 1953 with its new seven-seat Sikorsky S-55s.

Above right: As good as the S-55s were initially on routes from Belgium to France, Germany, and the Netherlands, it was the newer and larger Sikorsky S-58 that truly established SABENA's helicopter service as a world class operation. Carrying twelve passengers at speeds of 110 mph, the S-58s entered service in 1957.

CHRONOLOGY OF COMMERCIAL HELICOPTER OPERATIONS

July 6, 1939 – First scheduled commercial rotary wing service, Eastern Air Lines Kellett KD-1B Autogiro, Air Mail from Philadelphia, PA to Camden, NJ.

October 1, 1949 – First permanently scheduled commercial helicopter service, Los Angeles Airways Sikorsky S-51, Air Mail throughout Los Angeles, CA.

July 1, 1947 – First overseas commercial helicopter service, British European Airways Bell 47D, Air Mail between London and Northern cities throughout England.

June 1, 1950 – First scheduled passenger helicopter service, BEA Westland Sikorsky S-51, with passengers between Cardiff and Liverpool, England.

August 21, 1950 – First international helicopter service, SABENA Sikorsky S-55, Air Mail from Brussels, Belgium to Maastricht, Holland.

July 8, 1953 – First sustained scheduled passenger helicopter service, New York Airways, Sikorsky S-55 between all three major New York area airports.

November 12, 1956 – Most frequency of scheduled passenger helicopter service, Chicago Helicopter Airways S-55s, with sixteen daily flights between Midway and O'Hare.

June 1, 1961 – First turbine-powered passenger helicopter service, SFO & Oakland Helicopter Airlines, Sikorsky S-62 between San Francisco and Oakland.

March 1, 1962 – First twin-turbine passenger helicopter service, Los Angeles Airways Sikorsky S-61L, between Los Angeles Int'l. Airport and area cities.

July 2, 1962 – First twin-turbine, twin-rotor passenger helicopter service, New York Airways Boeing Vertol 107, between Manhattan and all three NY area airports.

December 21, 1965 – First landing on a skyscraper's rooftop heliport, New York Airways Boeing Vertol 107, Pan Am Building in midtown Manhattan.

(Does not include passenger helicopter service with AEROFLOT in the Soviet Union.)



Above: SABENA's first S-58 route was from Brussels to Paris, a service that gained attention during the 1958 World's Fair held in Brussels. The 'copter here is lifting off from the Brussels heliport with three of the airline's eight S-58s seen on the runway behind. Note extended engine exhaust stack and flotation gear fitted to the main and tailwheels.

Below: Nice ground study of the S-58 on the ramp in Brussels. Augmenting the convenience of inter-city service was the ability for passengers arriving from overseas on SABENA and other leading world airlines to connect to Paris, Cologne, Rotterdam, or other European cities by helicopter without leaving the airport.





Classic inflight shot of a Chicago Helicopter Airline's Sikorsky S-58 flying over that city's famous lakeshore skyline, circa 1959. Beginning as Helicopter Air Services (HAS) with a single Air Mail run from downtown Chicago out to Midway Field flown by a Bell 47D, Chicago Helicopter Airlines evolved to passenger service between Midway and O'Hare airports flying their new S-55s beginning in November 1956. CHA then rapidly built new routes including flights from Meigs Field near downtown to Midway and O'Hare, and nearby Gary, Indiana. Service with the larger S-58s began in June 1957, and three new turbine-powered S-61s were ordered in 1962. By that time, however, the impact of Chicago's new freeway system combined with the focus of jet-age air travel at O'Hare rendered the need for helicopter service to Midway as almost obsolete. The finishing blow came with the end of the CAB's government subsidies to helicopter airlines, and CHA finally ceased scheduled operations in December 1965. Note S-58's novel fixed entry stairs below the forward and aft cabin doors. Single engine exhaust duct was located on left side of the nose to avoid ingestion of exhaust gases into the cabin when doors were opened on the ground with the engine running.





Above: With its three major airports separated by the bustling New York metropolis on the ground, yet only minutes away by air, the New York area seemed like a most logical place for inter-airport helicopter service. In January 1953, newly-formed New York Airways bought four new Sikorsky S-55s for \$150,000 each, and after a series of successful route-proving Air Mail flights, began scheduled passenger service in July of that year.



Left: The S-55s had originally been certified to carry Air Mail only, and a natural extension of the helicopter's utility was as a small package service. Airline management struck a deal with Emery Air Freight, and the helicopter once again proved lucrative by shaving off valuable minutes of travel time speeding small packages around the New York metropolitan area. These utility services were soon expanded to airports and helipads out in the suburbs including White Plains, NY and Stamford Connecticut to the north, and New Brunswick and Trenton, New Jersey to the south. Service was also proposed to Rockville Centre, Long Island, but that never transpired.

Right: In June, 1956, New York Airways began passenger flights with its new twelve-passenger Sikorsky S-58s. A new dedicated heliport was built on the Hudson River shoreline adjacent to the famed ocean liner piers on Manhattan's west side, and S-58s began flying from the West 30th Street Heliport to all three major area airports, plus scheduled routes to White Plains, Stamford, and Teterboro, an executive airport west of the city. Baggage allowance per passenger was 40 lbs. for domestic flights; 66 lbs. for First Class international, or 44 lbs for Tourist Class international.





Above: One of New York Airway's five new twin-rotor Vertol 44Bs cruises serenely past the midtown Manhattan skyline on its way from LaGuardia to Newark Airport in 1959. This new, faster, and more powerful helicopter entered service with NYA in April 1958, and carried fifteen passengers in true airliner comfort – a feature lacking in the earlier more spartan interiors of the Sikorskies. Based on the U.S. Air Force Piasecki H-21 Shawnee troop carrier, the V-44B was powered by a single 1,425-hp Wright R-1820 Cyclone engine, cruised at 100 mph, and could carry a payload of 3,200 lbs. up to 75 miles. Seen below parked on the 150th Street apron at New York International (Idlewild) Airport in 1960, this V-44B shows its special flotation gear to best advantage. These devices, coupled with the helicopter's watertight hull, ensured adequate passenger safety considering the vast amounts of water covered on typical NYA routes. (Photo via Airline Transport Products)



Right: Passengers connecting to other airlines were met rampside by a NYA bus that whisked them away to their respective terminals in minutes. Note upper and lower 'clamshell' passenger loading door. A unique feature of this helicopter was the use of fluorescent red-orange Day-Glo paint for the NYA titles and rotor tips.

Below: Luxurious passenger cabin was fashioned after the propeller plane airliner interiors of that time, offering more comfortable padded seats, larger curtained viewing windows and a separate baggage area for the V-44B's fifteen passengers, compared to the bench seats and quasi-military interiors of the S-55 and S-58.



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one-hour driving time on New York's various 'expressways', which were anything but during rush hour. More significant was the travel time from Idlewild on Long Island to Newark across the Hudson, regardless of traffic conditions. Flights took only 21 minutes by S-55, while crawling along by car could take nearly two hours when traffic was congested on Manhattan's many bridges and tunnels.

As good as the S-55 proved to be, its passenger capacity soon became a limiting factor. NYA once again looked to Sikorsky, with the solution being a larger, faster, and much improved 'copter called the S-58 that carried twelve passengers and cruised at 100 mph. Originally developed for Navy anti-submarine work, the S-58 brought new capabilities to the skies over New York. Its four-bladed main rotor offered a smoother ride than the three-bladed S-55, and its more powerful 1,525-hp Wright R-1820 engine provided a larger safety margin for hot summer operations at near-gross weights. Beginning in June 1956, S-58 routes were expanded to include the cities of White Plains, NY and Stamford, CT, and true inter-urban helicopter service was now a reality. By 1957, flight frequencies had ramped up to an amazing 65 flights per day.

Sikorskies with a Foreign Accent

Across the Atlantic, another helicopter airline was making the same transition from S-55s to S-58s, but this company offered a subtle marketing twist. You could board



the helicopter in one European country, and land in another! The first international routes flown by passenger helicopters belonged to the Belgian airline, SABENA. Beginning in August 1950 with a single mail run from Brussels to several northern cities in Belgium using a Bell 47D, the airline then expanded to passenger operations in September 1953 (the same year as NYA) with four Sikorsky S-55s flying from Brussels and other Belgian cities to destinations in France, Germany, and the Netherlands. The S-55s operated successfully on these long-range routes until March 1957 when they were replaced by a fleet of eight larger S-58s. Unlike New York Airways' five or ten-mile commuter flights, SABENA's 'copters covered stage lengths of more than 100 miles.

According to *A History of the World's Airlines* by noted author R.E.G. Davies, SABENA helicopters had carried their first 100,000 passengers by June of 1957. By 1960 with the advent of intercontinental jet airliner service to Europe, SABENA's helicopters took on a new role in augmenting European air travel. With passengers connecting from other U.S. and European airlines, SABENA could offer more convenient and more economical point-to-point thru-service by helicopter than could be flown

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Above: New York Airways entered the jet age with sleek, modern 25-passenger Boeing Vertol 107-II twin-turbine helicopters. Capable of 150 cruising speeds and a 1,700-fpm rate of climb, the '107 brought exciting new capabilities and performance to passenger helicopter operations. The aircraft seen here, N6674D, was one of five originally purchased by NYA in 1960, and survived for nearly four decades in various types of commercial operations. After its 9,000 hours of airline services ended in 1968, it was purchased by Columbia Helicopters in Portland, Oregon in 1972 to be used in a variety of applications including external cargo carriage, 'heli-logging', and aerial fire-fighting. By 1993, this venerable machine had logged 40,000 flight hours – one of the highest times ever achieved by a rotary-wing aircraft, and that mark was raised to 50,000 hours by early-1998. Sadly, N6674D was lost in a fatal crash near Yellowstone National Park on August 30, 2001 while flying in support of a 25,000-acre wildfire near Helena, Montana.

Below: In happier times, a group of passengers is personally escorted to a waiting BV-107 by Mr. John Sloane, New York Airways Director of Passenger Services at New York International Airport in Spring of 1963. NYA operations were located at the American Airlines Terminals at both Idlewild and La Guardia after helicopter airlines were mandated by the Civil Aeronautics Board to team-up with trunk airlines. Note the 'copters integral baggage container shown extended aft of the tail. (New York Airways photo via Jon Proctor)





These new helicopters were unmistakable in the skies over New York wearing their bright red-white-and-blue color schemes. Powered by twin 1,250-shaft-hp General Electric CT58-110 turbine engines, the BV-107 could carry a 9,350-lb. payload (more than twice that of its V-44 predecessor) nearly 300 miles nonstop. Its cabin was equal in size to the Douglas DC-3, carrying 25 passengers in comfort and style. The Boeing Vertol 107 was also used for search-and-rescue by the Royal Canadian Air Force, as well as the Swedish and Japanese air forces and navies.

Operations with the new Vertols jumped to 75 flights per day, and NYA's suburban destinations of White Plains, Stamford, and now Teterboro, New Jersey were served with a multitude of convenient commuter flights tailored to beat morning and evening rush hour traffic. With air fares from \$5 to \$9 in 1961, the helicopter still provided an attractive alternative to trains, buses, taxis, or even private vehicles over these same routes IF (and it was a very critical 'if') time was of the essence. It's an equation that is still valid today - just ask anyone who ever paid \$5,000 to cross the Atlantic in 3-1/2 hours on the Concorde!

Twin-Rotor Twin-Jet

Just as the Vertol 44 had raised the bar for passenger helicopters in 1958, a stunning new machine entered service with New York Airways in July 1962 that offered jet-age comfort and performance while carrying twenty-five passengers at speeds of up to 150 mph. This exciting new aircraft was the Boeing Vertol 107 jet helicopter, a commercial derivation of a new military transport chopper called the CH-46 Sea Knight. With a passenger cabin the same size as a Douglas DC-3, the BV-107 was truly a rotary-winged airliner that came of age just as most of the world's airlines were making the long-awaited transition to all-jet fleets. Painted in a bright bold red-white-and-blue color scheme and flying more than 150 flights per day, NYA's fleet of five BV-107s could be

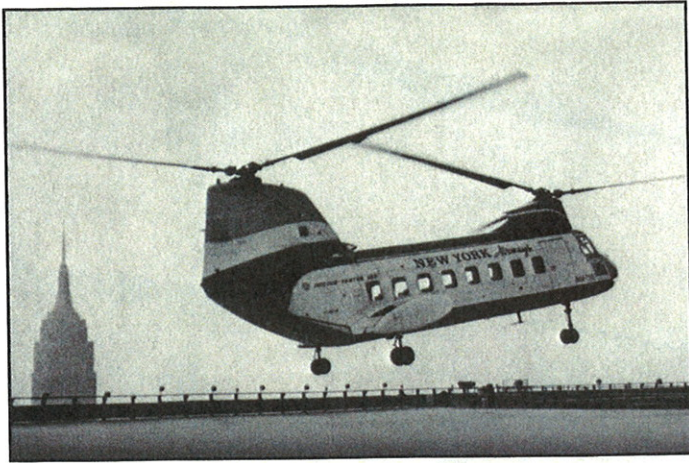


seen flitting back and forth over the city at night like fireflies at a picnic.

With jet age performance also came jet-age improvements in both navigation and all-weather passenger operations. Unlike Los Angeles Airways' that flew in sunshine at least 300 days per year, NYA pilots had to contend with rain, fog, and winter-time conditions for a significantly larger portion of their flight hours. Back in the days of the S-55, NYA flights operated strictly under Visual Flight Rules, with a minimum ceiling of 500 ft. AGL (above ground) and one-mile visibility enroute (1/2-mile at airports). NYA 'copters also had to follow specific routes over parkways and open areas in the event of a forced landing, with neither the S-55 or S-58 being designed for flotation in the event of a water landing,

although V-44s were equipped with special landing gear-mounted flotation equipment (see photo on page 34).

By contrast, the BV-107s were equipped with new Decca Flight Track Monitors coupled to the helicopter's integral



Graphic example of differences in the prototype and production versions of the BV-107-II. Prototype (right) first flew at Boeing Vertol's Philadelphia, PA manufacturing facility in April 1958, and featured a single large nosewheel, round cabin windows, and single-pane cockpit windows. Production version (left) shown here landing atop the Pan Am Building in mid-town Manhattan was fitted with smaller dual nosewheels that offered more stable handling while taxiing, large rectangular picture windows at each seat location for better passenger visibility, and sturdier bracing on the cockpit windows.

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stability augmentation system. After a stringent certification process by the FAA in 1964, these devices allowed the first-ever IFR flights with passenger helicopters, resulting in tremendous cost savings by not having to cancel revenue-producing flights because of inclement weather. To show how dramatic this capability was, NYA noted that 13-percent of its daily flights had been cancelled due to weather during the first six months of 1963. In IFR operations, minimums of 100 ft. and 1/4-mile visibility were now possible. NYA officials estimated that IFR operations would result in a reduction of more than \$950,000 in requested government subsidy costs.

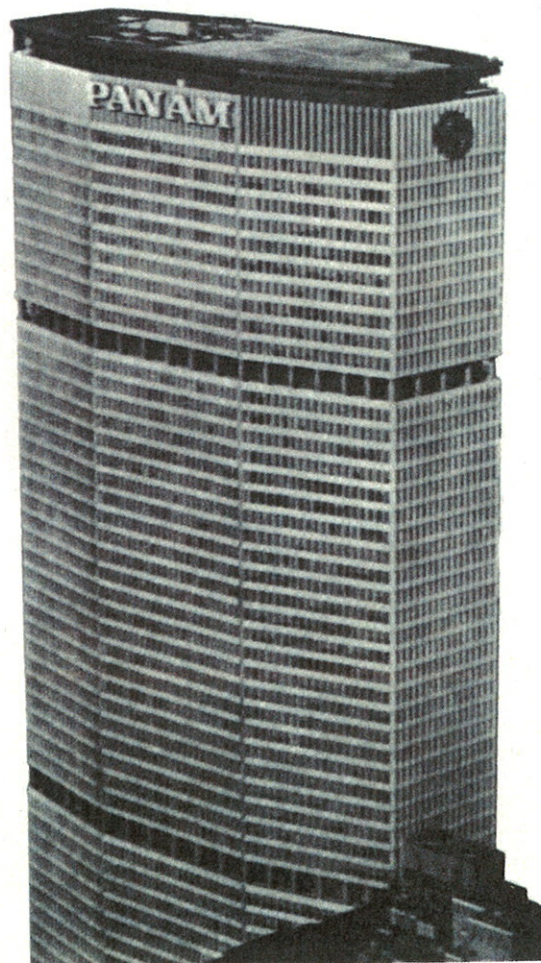
Despite a tragic accident at Idlewild in October 1963 (see sidebar, page 40), NYA jetcopers continued flying, and added a novel new service to their list of accomplishments. For the first time in a major city, helicopters would be allowed to operate from a rooftop heliport on one of New York's tallest skyscrapers – the 59-story Pan Am Building, and on December 21, 1965, the first NYA flight landed on the Pan Am building. For a one way fare of \$7, Pan Am passengers could board the 'copter in Manhattan, and then dash out to Kennedy Airport to meet their 707 flight to anywhere in the world. Conversely, businessmen flying into New York could be in downtown Manhattan within only one hour of landing at Kennedy.

Return of the Single-Rotor Sikorskies

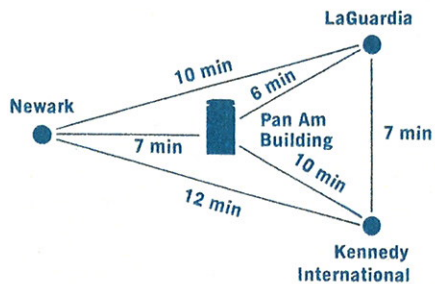
Sikorsky's marvelous new S-61 entered service with L.A. Airways in March 1962, beating NYA to the title of first twin-engine turbine-powered passenger helicopter operators by just three months. The S-61 carried 28 passengers in a roomy comfortable cabin powered by the same GE T58 turbines that propelled the BV-107. In April 1964, New York Airways took delivery of three S-61Ns to fly lucky passengers on sightseeing rides over the 1964-1965 New York World Fair. Additional commuter service was added in June from the TWA terminal at Kennedy Airport, with flights operated jointly by NYA and TWA. As active as all these helicopters were, the valuable CAB subsidies that helped keep America's helicopter airlines afloat since the beginning were soon coming to an end, and on April 11, 1965, the Federal axe finally fell.

Two U.S. flag airlines both headquartered in the New York area came to the rescue, however, when both Pan American and TWA acquired New York Airways stock holdings in June 1965. In exchange, Pan Am retained helicopter service to its building in Manhattan and TWA gained helicopter service to its ramps at the three major NY airports. Although it was a win-win situation, NYA's ability to maintain profitable operations strictly flying helicopters was steadily dwindling. By the summer of 1969, the four remaining '107s were permanently parked in an outlying area of LaGuardia Airport, the airline's home base, eventually being sold to a helicopter logging operation in Oregon. Flights continued, however, with 20-passenger de Havilland (Canada) DH-6 Twin Otters, mirroring similar arrangements with L. A. Airways in California.

To continue offering passenger helicopter service to New York area residents and airline passengers from around the world, NYA resur-



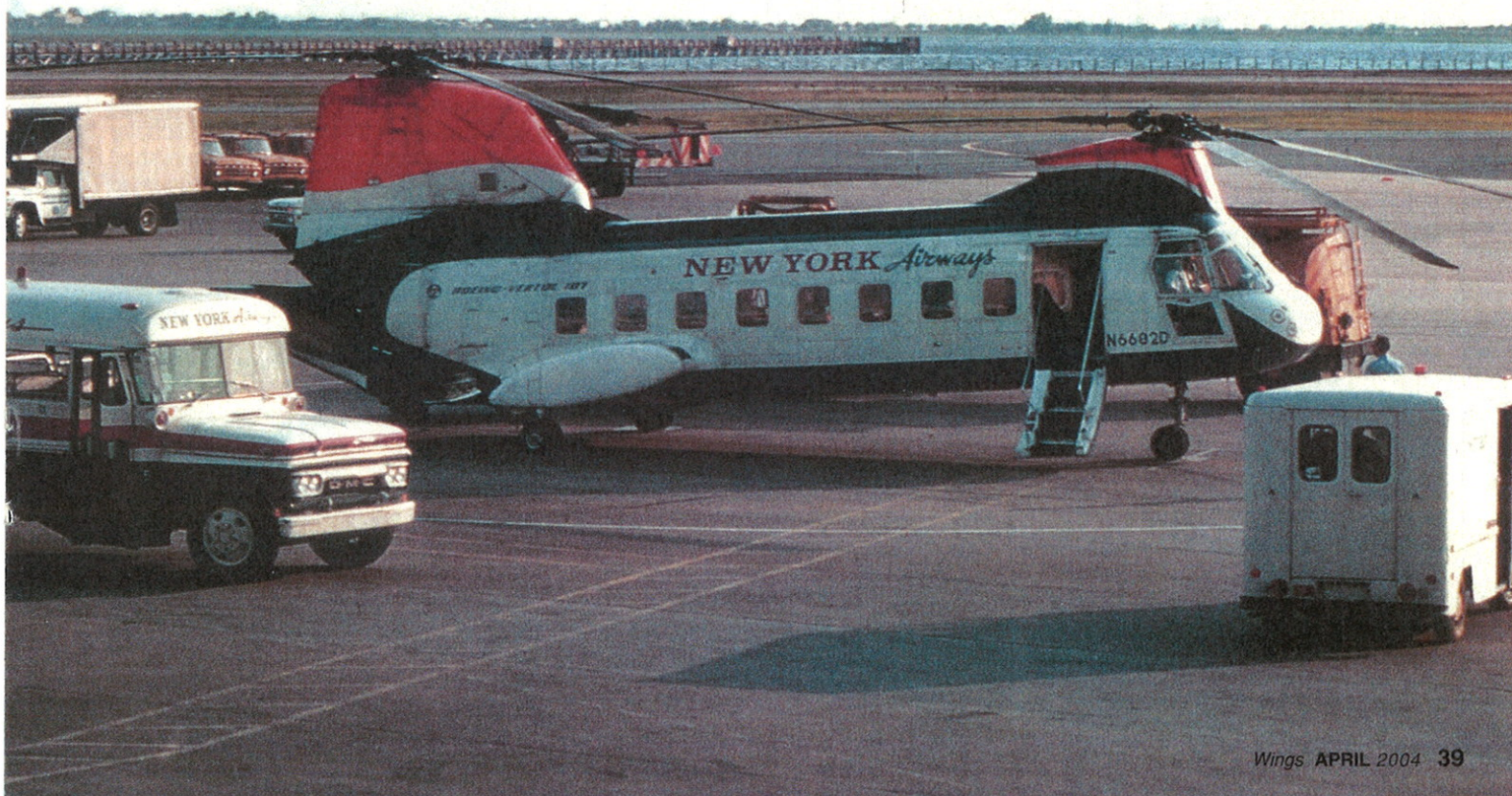
Right: Stunning telephoto shot of the 'King Kong of helicopters', an S-61 departing the Pan Am building's rooftop heliport in 1977. Operational reliability was exceedingly high, with only 25 'mechanicals' (cancellations due to equipment problems) out of 43,000 scheduled departures in 1976. The 102-story Empire State Building looms in the background. (*Air Transport World photo*)



Below: With the advent of rooftop service to the Pan Am Building in 1965, New York Airways' operations reverted to the Pan Am terminal at John F. Kennedy Airport (renamed from Idlewild on December 24, 1963) allowing 'through service' for Pan Am passengers flying to or from international cities directly into Manhattan. (*Photo via Air Transport Products*)

rected flight operations between Kennedy, LaGuardia, and Newark with four S-61Ls in 1971. Called 'Sikorsky Mark IIs', these aircraft offered a new '30-30 Service', or 30 seats every 30 minutes to any NY airport. On Feb 1, 1977, NYA was granted an operating permit for resumption of service to the Pan Am building, which was extremely well received with more than 80,000 passengers being carried systemwide from February through May. Then, at 5:30pm on May 16th, tragedy struck when the landing gear of an S-61 boarding passengers on the Pan Am Building collapsed, causing the ship to tumble over on its side, killing four people on the roof, a pedestrian on the ground below, and injuring a dozen others. (See page 40 for details.)

With the immediate suspension of its operating permit, NYA was restricted solely to inter-airport service, which continued with S-61s until all flight operations were suspended for the last time in April 1979. Despite a valiant attempt at resurrecting the proud company in 1984 under the name 'New York Helicopter', flying turbine-modified S-58Ts and French Aerospatiale Dauphines between the airports and a new heliport located at the base of the World Trade Center, profitable operations ultimately proved elusive, and the game was over for helicopter airlines in New York. After nearly three decades of dedicated service, New York Airways in all its permutations had finally become another sobering chapter in the aviation history books. 🍷



THE ACCIDENTS

Mirroring the fate of Los Angeles Airways on the west coast, New York Airways suffered a series of tragic accidents that eventually led to a loss of confidence in the helicopter as a viable means of passenger transportation. Unlike many of the world's worst air disasters that happen in remote mountains or in the dead of night, helicopter crashes always seemed to occur in broad daylight witnessed by hundreds if not thousands of onlookers at airports or in the very neighborhoods where they crashed. Here now is a summary of the NYA accidents.

The saga of ship N6673D began on Monday, July 17, 1962 when just two weeks after entering service, news of the first New York Airways BV 107 accident hit the local newspapers. Luckily, no one was injured. While on the run from Newark to Wall Street, an access door on the craft's forward rotor pylon flipped open inflight just off the lower tip of Manhattan. A small piece of insulation was ripped from the inside of the door in the windblast and was ingested into the number two (right-hand) engine inlet, quickly 'fodding out' the GE T58 turbine engine. Suddenly flying with only 50-percent power, the helicopter gently settled towards the East River, but because it was built for amphibious operations, the craft stayed afloat until rescuers could safely offload all 19 passengers and three crewmembers.

Six weeks later on August 30th, history repeated itself when a second NYA BV-107-II landed in the East River near the Brooklyn Navy Yard after experiencing rotor transmission problems while on a flight from Newark to LaGuardia. Since both accidents happened on a weekday in front of thousands of New Yorkers looking down from the forest of skyscrapers at river's edge, the veritable blitz of media coverage was hardly a good way to make a favorable first impression on the traveling public. To remedy the engines' debris ingestion problems, two conical fine-mesh screens were affixed to the fronts of the air intakes. (See photo at bottom of previous page.)

Tragedy finally struck when N6673D crashed at Idlewild on Monday, October 14, 1963 while taking off for the 12:30 flight to LaGuardia. As the craft was climbing through 100 ft., the rotor transmission gear failed, causing the overlapping 48-ft.-long rotors to collide out of synchronization. The number two engine then departed the aircraft and a four-ft.-long section of the

FINAL ** 5c New York Mirror

WEATHER: Variable cloudiness, with afternoon high in 80s.

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Rescue 22 On Copter In Bay

STORY ON PAGE 3



rear rotor blade flew off, throwing the big 'copter out of control and plunging it to the ground killing its three passengers and three crewmembers. The rotor blade fragment flew almost a quarter of a mile before landing on the roof of a nearby American Airlines maintenance hangar, narrowly missing a parked car with an airport employee inside.

Although more than one million NYA passengers had been carried safely since the beginning of passenger operations in July 1953, the image of the burning helicopter lying on its side at Idlewild was indelible for most New Yorkers. Killed in the crash were Capt. Frank LaTurco, New York Airways' Chief Pilot, and Co-Pilot Joseph Giambatista who had been married for only one week to NYA's former Chief Stewardess. During

the investigation, it was discovered that LaTurco had reported mechanical trouble shortly before takeoff.

Despite this tragedy, NYA resumed service after conducting thorough maintenance inspections on the remaining four 'copters. BV-107-II flights began from the top of the Pan Am Building in December 1965, and continued successfully until the end of their service in 1968. Eight years later, helicopter service to the top of the 59-story skyscraper was re-established with larger and more powerful Sikorsky S-61Ls, and it seemed like New York Airways was once again flying high. Passenger loads were extremely high with more than 1,600 people being carried on peak travel days, and the company had never been more optimistic about its future. Then, on Monday, May 16, 1977, tragedy struck New York Airways for the second and final time.

With its engines running while boarding passengers for the 5:40pm flight back to Kennedy Airport, an attachment bolt in the right-hand landing gear strut sheared off, causing the gear on that side to collapse and the helicopter to flip over on its right side. The spinning rotor blades hit the roof's concrete surface and shattered like shrapnel, killing four of the boarding passengers and a hapless pedestrian on 42nd Street 870 ft. below. Many more people waiting to board and in the street were injured. NYA's operating permit was immediately revoked by the city, and Pan Am Building rooftop helicopter service ceased forever. Although flights eventually continued from the Wall Street heliport, the end of the company was looming on the horizon.



Above: The celebrated 1964-1965 New York World's Fair was nothing less than a mass audience peek into the future. Picture phones, supersonic airliners, space travel, and computerized robotic homes and cars were allegedly just on the horizon. Completing this dazzling picture of progress were the 'jumbo' Sikorsky S-61 passenger helicopters that operated daily from the rooftop heliport above the restaurant located in the Port of New York Authority Building. Additional service operating in conjunction with TWA flew passengers from their bird-like 'Trans World Flight Center' terminal at JFK to the Fair in just four minutes time.

Below: New York Airways' Sikorsky S-61L cruises over Manhattan on its way from Newark to LaGuardia in the summer of 1976. Garish 1960s red-white-and-blue color scheme had given way to the newly-fashionable 'Euro White' motif being applied to international airlines' jumbo jets at the time, with an all-white fuselage and only a simple logo and title on rear fuselage. Round structure in foreground is Madison Square Garden, with Empire State Building at left, and East River in the background.

