

**Belfast, Northern Ireland**  
**SD3 Operators Conference**  
**Ben Hinkle**  
**June 2000**

In June 2000, I attended the Shorts Bros. Operator's Conference in Belfast, Northern Ireland with Paul Markowitz (USFS). This meeting was held for corporations and government's currently operating Shorts aircraft (SD3 Shorts 360, 330 and Sherpa Aircraft) to gather information on operators needs



and desires as well as future maintenance requirements. Belfast is where the aircraft are manufactured and where a great deal of the support for maintenance and spare parts comes from. The BLM currently has two aircraft, while the Forest Service has 5 airframes, all but one used for the Smokejumpers and logistical support. In all, 16 operators representing various countries attended, as well as a large number of vendors such as Pratt & Whitney (engine manufacturer), Hartzell (propellers), and a wide variety of other suppliers of aircraft components and parts.



The conference was held outside of Belfast in the small enclave of Templepatrick. A small community, Templepatrick was a great place to hold this event. It was both quiet and beautifully set in the rolling hills of Northern Ireland.

Shorts, now a subsidiary of Bombardier Aerospace of Canada, began the conference by reviewing the companies history. As a result of buying the rights to manufacture the Wright Flyer (from the Wright brothers), Shorts Bros. claims to be the first aircraft producer in the world. While no longer manufacturing whole aircraft, Shorts produces almost everything else: from composite rudders for



737's; engine cowls; thrust reversers for both Airbus and Boeing; fuselage assemblies for Lear Jet and Regional Jets that Skywest (Delta Connection) uses, as well as the ones Horizon Airlines will use. More importantly, Shorts will continue to manufacture spare parts and provide engineering support for the Sherpa well into the future.

During the conference many operators expressed concerns about mandated inspections, costs of spare parts and overall support by Shorts and Bombardier Aerospace. Each vendor made presentations on their products and support. All operators were given opportunities to ask questions and seek information. Working groups were formed for specific areas such as maintenance database tracking, parts support, and other pertinent issues. From the maintenance side, all the operators expressed concern over more frequent than necessary aircraft inspections on low utilized aircraft. The original inspection programs were for high flight time airlines and now that most of the Shorts fleet is in the freight business, where flights are usually limited to once in the morning and once at night, most operators feel that inspection times should be spread out more. For the BLM and Forest Service, this means that the four day inspection in the middle of fire season could be eliminated.

Being a pilot, the most important information for me came from the Shorts training department and several of the Shorts operators. I was able to acquire information on standard operation's procedures for several of the operators and found that we have been moving in the right direction for our interagency Sherpa program. Also, Shorts expressed an interest in providing recurrent training support for our annual training. They also expressed a desire to help provide crew-training manuals to meet our needs.



Our trip to Belfast was very productive and we came away with many new ideas on maintaining and supporting our fleet aircraft as well as improving our training and procedures for pilots.

Ben Hinkle

Smokejumper Standardization Pilot

National Aviation Office / BLM