On June 21, 2011, Martin J. Pociask, vice president and curator for Helicopter Foundation International (HFI), interviewed George Edward “Ed” Newton, Jr., at his Boonton Township, New Jersey, home for ROTOR magazine and as part of HFI’s Heritage Series preserving the history of helicopter flight. Part I of this story, which covered Ed’s early years, military service, and work for Keystone Helicopters, ran in the Spring 2012 issue of ROTOR.

HFI: After you completed your Army service in 1973, you worked for a while for Keystone Helicopters in Westchester, Pennsylvania. Why did you eventually leave Keystone?

Newton: I had an opportunity to move back to New Jersey, where my wife, Dorothy, and I grew up. A company in New Jersey called Interpace Corporation had purchased a Bell
206L, and they were looking for two pilots. They had hired Jack Childs, who had formerly flown for Executive Air Fleet on a Bo 105, as their chief pilot.

Jack and I had previously met: he would fly his helicopter down to Keystone for maintenance, and we would go out to lunch and talk about the flying characteristics of the 105. I think because of that relationship, Jack hired me to fly with him as another captain on the Bell 206L for Interpace.

**HFI:** Interpace ran into some financial difficulty, didn’t they?

**Newton:** Yes. They were a small, diversified company. They manufactured concrete pipe, had a china and glassware business, and also a plumbing and home air-conditioning manufacturing business. We would fly to various manufacturing plants in the northeast part of the United States, and of course most of our flights were back and forth between corporate headquarters in New Jersey and New York City.

In the late 1970s, when the economy started to turn down, mostly due to the oil embargo, it appeared that Interpace’s aviation department was going to be terminated. An opportunity came up with a company called Allied Chemical right there at the airport at Morristown, New Jersey, where we were operating. They were purchasing a new Sikorsky S-76A and needed a crew of three. Jack and I both applied, and we were hired in April of 1980.

The other pilot who was hired was Bill Rio. The interesting thing about Bill’s background is that he was trained as a civilian pilot and he owned his own helicopter company in Danbury, Connecticut. He owned a Bell 206B and a number of Bell 47s and used these helicopters for flight instruction, sightseeing flights, charter flights, frost control, and power-line patrol. Although he was a civilian-only pilot, after flying with him, I was immediately comfortable because he was a good pilot.

**HFI:** How did you like flying the Sikorsky S-76A?

**Newton:** That was the Cadillac of the corporate helicopter community at the time. It was a wonderful helicopter. The people at Allied Chemical had never flown or operated a helicopter prior to this, and they immediately took to it like a duck takes to water. It proved very useful in transporting company employees and customers to not only New York City, but also to the company facilities within range, which included Richmond to the south and Canada to the north. So we utilized it at a pretty high rate.

**HFI:** Allied Chemical went through several name changes.

**Newton:** Initially it was called Allied Chemical when I went to work for them in 1980, but the chemical moniker became a bad name in the early 1980s so they changed the name to Allied Corporation. And then Allied merged with the Signal Company and became AlliedSignal. In the late 1990s, we purchased Honeywell and found out through market testing that Honeywell’s name recognition was much higher than AlliedSignal, so they just switched the name from AlliedSignal to Honeywell.

**HFI:** The Allied Chemical helicopter was used primarily to transport employees and customers. How was it accepted by the passengers?

**Newton:** Transporting employees and customers was the primary job of the Allied Chemical helicopter in the early 1980s, and it was accepted very well by the employees at the company. When we acquired the Bendix Corporation in the mid-1980s, we started utilizing the helicopter to test avionics. I had the opportunity to test and demonstrate such avionics as weather radar, radar altimeters, and a traffic collision avoidance system. We even worked with the microwave landing system, though the Federal Aviation Administration didn’t go with that approach system.

The last program we worked on was an enhanced ground-proximity warning system (EGPWS), which we actually test-flew in conjunction with Sikorsky in 1999. It was approved by the FAA in early 2000.

So EGPWS in helicopters, which I think is one of the best avionics systems you can install, was approved way back in 2000, and people still aren’t using it in their helicopters. I think it should be a mandatory installation on every helicopter sold right now. There has never been a controlled flight into terrain accident in a helicopter with a Honeywell EGPWS system.
EGPWS that’s been operational.

**HFI:** Ed, you’re also rated for fixed-wing?

**Newton:** Yes, I obtained my fixed-wing single- and multi-engine and instrument ratings when I was in the Army down at Ft. Rucker. I happened to parlay that into type ratings while I was working for Honeywell. I have a type rating on a Falcon 50, Falcon 900, Falcon 2000, and Jetstream 4100. So it was a great career at Honeywell.

I retired on October 1, 2008. I worked there for 28-and-a-half years, and it was a varied and enjoyable career. I flew with and worked with a lot of great people. When Jack Childs retired in 1997, I became chief pilot.

We hired Ed Ferguson who had just been released from another company when they downsized their flight department. Ed is another great pilot whom I flew with a lot at Honeywell. We also had an exceptional maintenance department. George Seidel was the crew chief on the helicopter and all the maintenance guys were really dedicated people, so it was a really pleasant place to work.

**HFI:** In addition to corporate flying, what other work did you perform for Honeywell?

**Newton:** We demoed all their products, which was interesting. For example, in the early 1990s when we were demonstrating a traffic collision avoidance system (TCAS), most helicopter pilots would say, “Oh, I can see and avoid anything I need to when I’m flying.” However, we proved to them through demonstrations, particularly during hazy August days in the New York metropolitan area, that TCAS would point out an intruding aircraft a lot sooner than they could see it.

We demonstrated all of Honeywell’s avionics products. That was a lot of fun because we changed people’s minds as to how these new products could contribute to the safer flying of their aircraft.

**HFI:** Tell us about your organizational involvements.

**Newton:** One of the first organizations that I was involved with was the Eastern Region Helicopter Council. It was formed in the late 1970s. I, along with others, helped write the charter and bylaws of the organization. I was vice president of the council in the mid-1980s. It continues today, representing the helicopter industry in the New York metropolitan area on a local and state level.

**Newton:** I worked on various committees of HAI. My involvement included serving on the Fly Neighborly, Flight Operations, and Heliport committees. When I decided that I could give a little bit more to the organization, I ran for and served two terms on the Board of Directors for HAI. As a member of the board, I served as board liaison to the Flight Operations and Technical Committees and the ad hoc Committee for Helicopter Emergency Response. I also served on the Board of Directors Executive Committee as assistant treasurer, treasurer, vice chairman. For the 2006–07 term, I served as chairman of the board.

At HAI, I got to meet a lot of people worldwide while working with other committee members. The chairmen who preceded me — Jim Church, Elling Halvorson, Roy Simmons, and Tim Walberg — were great role models for the position. I thank them for their dedication to this organization. There are scores of others, both on the board and on committees, whom I enjoyed working with. Their generous giving of time, energy, and knowledge made my term of office pleasurable.
Libby Meade, HAI’s former executive vice president and corporate secretary, and her husband, Ken, kept me on track during my tenure with their advice and counsel. They are wonderful people and great friends, and I thank them.

**HFI:** You were also involved with the National Burn Victim Foundation.

**Newton:** In addition to HAI’s committees, I was a charter member of the National Burn Victim Foundation, which was an organization set up in northern New Jersey to assist burn victims. We branched out, and we had a section of the organization where corporate helicopters would be used in case of emergency. For example, after 9/11, we actually launched some helicopters to fly down to Philadelphia to pick up plasma and blood donation bags. Unfortunately, we found that there weren’t really many injuries in the World Trade Center destruction — they were mostly fatalities.

**HFI:** You are also involved with Helicopter Foundation International (HFI).

**Newton:** Yes, HFI is a great organization to help preserve the history of the helicopter industry, and for its scholarships for pilots and mechanics. I’ve been active in reviewing applications as part of the Scholarships Awards Committee for pilots and mechanics. During HELI-EXPO®, I have chaired the Maintenance Mentoring Program. Even though I’m a pilot, I do have an extensive maintenance background.

It really is a joy to meet these young men and women who are attending a maintenance school and looking to have a career in the helicopter industry. I think HFI is an organization that has to be continued because it helps feed qualified young people into our industry.

**HFI:** As chairman of HAI, your primary focus was promoting safety and economic opportunities and placing more emphasis on the “I” in HAI. Can you speak to those topics?

**Newton:** Well, I think any chairman of HAI has to have safety as his primary objective. (See the profile on page 34 of HAI’s new chairman, Chris Erickson, for his thoughts on safety.) As I became HAI chairman, Matt Zuccaro started out as president of the association. He and I developed a plan where we would concentrate on trying to raise the bar for safe flight operations in the helicopter industry. So I think any chairman, when he comes on board with HAI, should review the ongoing processes that HAI is working on to improve helicopter safety.

When I first started flying in the late 1960s (1969 to be exact), there were a lot of engine failures and tail rotor failures. Either you had experienced an engine or tail rotor failure or you knew someone who had. I think a lot of credit has to be given to the airframe and engine manufacturers and the great strides they have made to improve the reliability of helicopters. But still, there are too many accidents in the industry.

Although a lot of the accidents are attributed to pilot error — that’s a pretty wide net to cast. My feeling is that the accident rate has to be attacked by making the managers or owners of every company responsible for their operations. They are the ones who have to be held accountable if there’s a helicopter accident. They have to set the tone and cultivate the safety culture within their company for that company to operate safely. The result will be an improved safety record within the industry.

Since my tenure as chairman in 2006–07, HAI has continued to attack this issue. I give kudos to those members of the HAI staff, the Federal Aviation Administration, the National Transportation Safety Board, and the other people in the industry who volunteered their time to improve the safety record. It’s been improving. It is a slow incremental change, but I think we’re moving in the right direction.

To your point on improving the “I” in Helicopter Association International, I felt that there were areas where we weren’t helping operators worldwide and that we could improve upon that. Matt and I decided to explore what problems helicopter operators were having worldwide.

We came to find out they were having a lot of the same problems in their countries that we are having here in the United States. By joining forces with an organization in their country or even just a company in a different country, we can add our expertise to improve safety and help them overcome bureaucracy and regulations that are totally ludicrous. I think HAI has continued to do that, and I’m happy to see it.

Ed posed with AgustaWestland and Honeywell executives at HELI-EXPO 2008 in Houston. As chief pilot for Honeywell, Ed accepted a new AW139 on behalf of the corporation
HFI: HAI is proud to have benefited from your leadership. Do you have any advice for the men and women who are considering a career as a helicopter pilot or maintenance professional?

Newton: As I’m getting older, I find a lot of young people are coming up to me and asking me for advice. The first thing that I tell somebody is, if you’re going to work, work at a job that you enjoy. In other words, you should be able to wake up in the morning and want to go to work. If you’re waking up in the morning and you don’t want to go to work, then change jobs and find a field of work that you do enjoy! Do it early so you can move up in your field of choice, and it’ll benefit you financially in the long run.

So if you’re not happy working in the helicopter industry, leave it. If you still want to stay in aviation, then go over to the fixed-wing side because there are a lot of opportunities there also. However, if you are in the helicopter industry and you do like it, take advantage of the opportunities that are presented to you to better yourself. There’s plenty of opportunity out there for people to advance themselves within the helicopter industry by taking advantage of various educational courses and schools.

HFI: You have been energetic as an advocate for the industry. What is your focus for the future?

Newton: When I retired from Honeywell in October 2008, I wanted to travel. I wanted to take my wife, Dorothy, to places that I’ve been to and experienced, so we’ve traveled quite a bit. Then an opportunity presented itself to instruct for RotorSim, which is a partnership between CAE and AgustaWestland, instructing in the AW139 simulator. So I am currently a part-time simulator instructor pilot and examiner in the AW139.

I’m really enjoying instructing right now. I find that it’s bringing me back to my roots when I was an instructor pilot back in the Army, which was the most enjoyable portion of my Army career. My goal is to try and pass on the knowledge that I’ve gained over my more than 40 years in the helicopter industry and more than 12,000 flight hours. Perhaps by doing that, I can help lower the accident rate.

One of the best things about working for RotorSim is interacting with the other instructors, whether they are ground instructors or flight instructors. They share the passion that I have to teach the pilots who are going to be flying the AW139 the proper techniques to fly that helicopter safely.

Being an instructor is a part-time, post-retirement job, but I’m enjoying it more than I thought I would. I really enjoy meeting the international students that come through, and I really enjoy working with the staff. They really are a great bunch of people. Hopefully the student, when he or she comes to learn how to fly the AW139, will go away thinking that they are better for the work they have put in.

HFI: What do you do for fun?

Newton: Dorothy and I travel a lot. We enjoy Europe, the Caribbean, and visits with friends around the country. We attend the reunions of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, which are held at different cities in the United States. [Editor’s Note: The 2012 reunion of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association begins July 31 in New Orleans. For more information, visit http://www.vhpa.org/news.htm.]

It’s a great opportunity not only to visit with fellows whom I served with in Vietnam but also to see the United States. You get to see this great country of ours from a different perspective. In addition, both Dorothy and I have large families, and we spend quite a bit of time with them.

I also have my own limited liability corporation, and I do contract flying on the AW139. I’ve been performing acceptance test flights of brand-new AW139s right out of the factory in Philadelphia for companies whose pilots are not checked out in the helicopter.

HFI: Ed, we greatly appreciate the time you’ve taken share your experiences with the readers of ROTOR magazine and the future people working in the helicopter industry. Do you have any final words?

Newton: I’d like to end the interview by thanking the staff of HAI and HFI. They are a wonderful group of men and women who do a tremendous amount of work to benefit the industry. I enjoyed working with them when I was on the Board of Directors, and I salute them for the work that they are doing currently.  

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Martin J. Pociask is HFI’s vice president and curator.