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TAKE-OFF THE HELICOPTERS (NZ) STORY

Author – *Gavin McLean*

Take-Off: The Helicopters (NZ) Story tells the story of the helicopter pioneers in New Zealand – the men and women who founded the country's first commercial helicopter operation fifty years ago and kept it flying, often against the odds.

Early helicopters were fragile, costly and commercially unproven when Helicopters New Zealand Ltd was formed in 1955 as a syndicate led by Alan Hubbard and Doug Shears. With an American business partner, they brought several Bell Model 47 helicopters to New Zealand, and proceeded to demonstrate the huge advantages of an aircraft that could land or hover anywhere to provide a work platform.

During these early days agricultural work was the mainstay but rapidly more uses were found to which the helicopter was ideally suited, such as fencing, stringing power wires, constructing power pylons and fire-fighting. In the rugged back country, helicopters rapidly proved their worth for search and rescue, pest control, mineral exploration, venison recovery and live deer capture. With the boom in off-shore oil and gas exploration in the 1960s, the helicopter was the ideal solution to the problem of servicing offshore oil platforms and drilling rigs. Later uses included support work for shipping, ski-lift construction and aerial topdressing, for which HNZ engineers invented and marketed special new equipment.

But more than this, HNZ went on to become an international business providing helicopters wherever they were needed in Australia, Asia and Antarctica. Much more than a company history, Take-Off also tells the whole story of the people who flew and maintained these machines, and the adventures they had.

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