AviTrader
AVIATION NEWS PUBLICATIONS
avitrader.com Edition #134
March 2025

MRO 360°

Expendables and Consumables

A look behind the curtain



Minimising Errors
Human Factors in Aircraft Maintenance

Big changes ahead
Future Trends in Aircraft MRO

VAS Aero Services
Interview with the CEO, Tommy Hughes



VAS Facility in Boca Raton, Florida
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VAS Aero Services

An interview with the Company CEO, Tommy Hughes

VAS Aero Services is a wholly owned subsidiary of Satair, an Airbus company. The company is a leading provider of aviation parts and services, and in an industry marked by constant change, VAS stands out for its stability and reliability as a global resource for innovative, tailor-made solutions. The company provides a portfolio of services that address the industry's logistics, warehousing, programme management, and sourcing needs, and as a leading provider in the aftermarket, delivers unmatched inventory distribution services to major Airlines, OEMs, and MROs.

Tommy Hughes has been the company CEO since 2015 and is a seasoned professional with over 30 years in aviation and aerospace. He leads the company's strategic direction and operations, and in 2022, facilitated VAS' acquisition by Satair, a wholly owned subsidiary of Airbus.

We were recently fortunate to catch up with Tommy and he was kind enough to spare us some time to help us get to know a little more about the company and the state of the MRO environment.


Tommy Hughes, CEO VAS Aero Services

AviTrader MRO 360⁰: Can you tell us about your company's core business?

Tommy Hughes: VAS Aero Services (VAS) is a leading provider of aftermarket services in the aviation industry and a highly experienced provider of nose-to-tail Used Serviceable Material, with more than US$4bn in engine/airframe/component assets currently under management. We source, warehouse, and market aftermarket components across a broad range of aircraft and engine platforms and provide related logistics and programme management services to airlines, MROs and OEMs around the world.

VAS maintains state-of-the-art warehouses as well as a global sourcing and sales network. Our business and operations footprint covers North America, the UK, Europe, Southeast Asia, Australia and China (through the expansion of Satair Chengdu, a powered-by-VAS USM end-of-life facility).

With over 45 years of experience, VAS has one of the largest portfolios of any provider of quality aviation assets in the aftermarket. The company became part of the Airbus Group of companies in 2022 when VAS was acquired by Airbus's Satair subsidiary. We now operate as a wholly owned, independent subsidiary of Satair.

How do you see the aviation parts market evolving over the next five years?

I see a larger role for Used Serviceable Materials (USM) over the next several years. OEMs have signed big multi-year deals to supply new aircraft. This likely will limit resources for manufacturing new replacement parts. That leaves an opening for third-party USM parts suppliers such as VAS. Deliveries on the new aircraft in the sales pipeline are years away, so keeping current aircraft flying and producing revenue

will be the key to profitability for many operators near term. And that plays to VAS' strengths in lifecycle management, aircraft transition and teardown, and USM parts sourcing and distribution. As we look ahead, we like what we see.

What are the biggest challenges currently facing the aircraft parts supply chain?

Global supply chain disruption continues to be a challenge. It often leads to shortages and delays in obtaining critical parts, which plays out as maintenance delays and increased downtime for aircraft. I expect this issue to continue to plague the industry for the near term. That's why, from the airline and MRO perspective, it's critical to have a close relationship with your parts and materials supplier. Parts shortages bring on another challenge: visibility into parts availability. Researching the marketplace for needed parts can be slow and painful, especially for those airlines or MROs that may not have the capabilities or resources to thoroughly and continually monitor and assess industry-wide inventories. Again, this underscores why partnerships with third-party suppliers are so important. With our overarching view of the aftermarket, suppliers such as VAS know what is available, where, when, in what condition, in what quantities and in what price range. Our market intelligence helps ensure that our customers have access to the parts and materials they need, at a properly valued price.

How does your company manage inventory and logistics to ensure timely delivery?

We are firm believers in investing in IT infrastructure. With over one million parts in stock, automated inventory tracking has become an essential element of our business. Our ability to know the precise condition, location and availability of parts is key to delivering parts on time and on budget. In the aftermarket, you cannot know enough about your customers' needs or your own capabilities to meet those demands. Todays CRM and ERP systems grant us that critical view and allow us to exceed customer expectations.

What role does technology play in your operations, and are there any innovations you're particularly excited about?

VAS has invested over US$30 million in dedicated IT infrastructure and enhanced capability for aftermarket business solutions. Our customised SAP system seamlessly integrates with customers' systems for aftermarket programmes, automated quotations, inventory management and programme management. Customers are able, at a glance, to see inventory availability and order needed parts and material. All parts are certified air-worthy and include the proper documentation, provenance and history so clients know they are receiving verified, flight-ready material. With warehousing strategically located in the US and Europe, and through our alliance with Satair, we can deliver parts rapidly, increasing TAT and reducing AOG… all thanks to our investment in IT infrastructure and automated order processing.

What are the key trends shaping demand for used aircraft parts?

Supply-chain-disruption induced parts shortages, the growing backlog of orders for new aircraft and the increasing emphasis on sustainability are all driving the increasing demand for USM parts.
We're certainly seeing greater need for replacement parts as lessors and airline operators are keeping aircraft in service longer due to the large backlog of new aircraft deliveries. That insight led us to acquire twenty-six A320 aircraft, seven Airbus A330 ex-China Southern Airlines aircraft and increase our teardown business with the Dr. Peters Group to now include eight A380 aircraft.
These aircraft acquisitions mean, of course, that for some years to come VAS will have access to a greater supply of quality, certified used parts for distribution across our global aftermarket customer base to support the maintenance needs of A320s, A330s and A380s that continue in service.
Harvesting and redistributing the used serviceable material from these aircraft means that those parts will have a continuing, useful life as replacement parts. By reclaiming and recycling those parts, we're saving the energy needed to produce new parts and the subsequent carbon emissions created in the process.

Where do you see your company in five to ten years, and what are the key priorities to get there?

With forecasts for continued growth of both passenger and cargo air transport, the industry's future looks bright, indeed. It will impact all aspects of the aviation business, including aftermarket parts supply, repair and logistics. How can we as a company participate in and benefit from that growth? That's a question we continually ask ourselves. A few years ago, VAS undertook a long-term strategy development program. It required a bold look in the mirror and asking some tough questions to determine where we want to be as a company. As a result of that process, we realised that to succeed we needed to invest more in our business infrastructure and in our people. And that's just what we did. We expanded opportunities for our associates, provided mentorships and beefed-up training. And we sourced state-of-the-art IT systems that would allow us to operate more efficiently, more proactively, more productively.
Doing so propelled us to where we are today, among the leading USM parts suppliers in the world. Surviving and thriving for the next five to ten years will require more of the same. There's no standing still, so you'll find VAS investing in facilities, people and the latest technology – deploying innovative logistics systems, recruiting and rewarding top-quality employees, harnessing the power of AI, enhancing our aircraft transition management capabilities and doing whatever it takes to be the leader in aftermarket trading, re-distribution of assets, and programme management reporting.