

# **ARMY VETERAN FOLLOWS OWN “MARCHING ORDERS,” SEAN CASEY GOES GLOBAL WITH HELICOPTER PARTS BUSINESS.**

 **By Curt Cultice**

**G**rowing up in Rochester, New York, Sean Casey always had a passion for the military. By time he turned 30 years old, he had finished his tour in the Army, having served as an Abrams M-1 tank gunner with stints in Germany, Bosnia, and Croatia.

Ready for a change, he applied his high-tech skills in the private sector, before dabbling in real estate; a career which ended with the unexpected market crash in 2008. However, his experience, connections, and a business-savvy sibling would soon boost him into the realm of exporting.

One day, Sean got an unexpected call from his brother, Daniel, who was running a helicopter tour company and repair facility in Oxnard, California. Daniel asked Sean if he would like to partner in his business.

“Daniel was a pilot and mechanic, and he appreciated my sales and marketing skills in real estate, which were easily transferable, so I thought, why not partner up?” Sean says. “Well, as it turns out, one thing led to another.”

The collaboration proved successful, and the two eventually sold the business. Then, in 2011, they got wind of an opportunity to supply parts for Robinson Helicopters. Shortly thereafter, they founded their own company, Rotorcorp LLC, with Daniel handling the technical aspects, and Sean the sales.



*Sean Casey, Owner and President of Rotorcorp, LLC*

## GOVERNMENT



Helicopter parts ready to go: Rotorcorp has over 1500 customers in 45 countries.

Based in Atlanta, Rotorcorp soon became one of the world's largest suppliers of replacement parts for Robinson-made helicopters. As an authorized Robinson company, Rotorcorp sources its parts from Robinson parts manufacturers in Indiana and Pennsylvania. Small and lightweight, Robinson helicopters are used both commercially and for personal use—customers include private individuals, fleet operators, and maintenance shops.

But how did Rotorcorp ride the tailwinds of federal, state, and local export assistance to burgeoning global market sales?

### A Helping Hand from the Federal Government and Its Partners

After quickly ramping up their helicopter parts business in the United States, the Casey brothers set their sights on vast international opportunities.

"There are some 13,000 Robinson helicopters worldwide, 60 percent of which are flown in countries outside the United States," Sean says. "So, we understood from day one that we needed to be global, with the ability to ship the parts to wherever the helicopters were located." By 2015, Rotorcorp's first foray into exporting resulted in sales to

Russia and South Africa, but sales soon slowed at the time due to economic and political factors.

"We weren't discouraged, because we knew that geographic diversification was key, there was global demand, and we had a good product," Sean adds. "We just needed help in improving our export readiness, with a focus on the mechanics, the best markets to target, and our export marketing strategy."

So, it was good timing when a friend recommended the nearby University of Georgia Small Business Development Center (SBDC), part of a national network of SBDCs administered by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

"The SBDC proved to be a touchstone for exporting, helping us prepare the financials and forecasts," Sean says. "They directed us to an array of federal government export resources which we weren't fully aware, but quickly saw the value."

According to Sean, export financing is the company's "credit and cover." Securing SBA 7(a) financing loans, the firm extended credit to foreign buyers with credit insurance from the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM Bank) to

protect his company in the event of non-payment. These were financial building blocks that strengthened inventory and created an economic platform for exporting.

"The loan package's 60 to 90-day open account was a big step for us," Sean says. "We're a cash and carry operation, so it set the table for us to process more frequent and bigger orders and made it easier for our customers to pay."

Heeding advice, Sean also participated in the SBA Emerging Leaders Program, which he says, gave him the information to align his company's resources into a strategic exporting growth plan, helping pinpoint where to go, and how to get there.

Meanwhile, Sean made another stop to a key export agency: a visit to the U.S. Commercial Service office in Atlanta. The U.S. Commercial Service is the trade and investment promotion arm of the U.S. Commerce Department's International Trade Administration (ITA). This global network includes experienced trade experts in more than 100 U.S. cities and over 80 international markets that helps companies export and pursue international business opportunities.

"We took a deep dive into Rotorcorp's export strategy," says Dina Molaison, senior trade specialist with the U.S. Commercial Service in Atlanta. "We also shared information about valuable tax-saving incentives for companies that export significant sales volumes. Many companies are unaware of programs such as the Interest Charge Domestic International Sales Corporation (IC-DISC)."

The U.S. Commercial Service also gauged the appeal of Rotorcorp's website to learn how the company's products were perceived by potential foreign buyers online. This service, a website globalization review gap analysis, helped determine what web improvements were needed.

“We recommended Sean add ‘we ship internationally’ to his website and install software that automatically senses the language of the customer’s web browser and translates it into the user’s language,” says Colleen Simons, now Pacific South regional director with the U.S. Commercial Service in San Diego. “Globalizing the website is one of the most important and impactful things a company can do to expand its export sales.”

Sean is thankful for the assistance he got from ITA’s U.S. Commercial Service: “Frankly, I got a lot of insight into things I hadn’t previously thought about from the U.S. Commercial Service, with good results,” he says. “The IC-DISC tax savings program helps our competitiveness by allowing us to direct more revenue toward sales of helicopter parts. We’ve greatly optimized our website for enhanced lead generation and user experience. Worldwide customers can more easily search for specific parts and advice, and our web presence is now the single most powerful tool for establishing trust and who we are.”

Sean also credits the website globalization as the precursor for his company’s entry and subsequent growth in eCommerce sales, which now account for about 30 percent of the firm’s overall business.

### Flying High in World Markets

Thanks to its exporting savvy, and the array of federal, state, and other export resources, Rotorcorp continues to bolster its bottom line by selling and shipping to all corners of the world. Exports now account for 60 percent of the firm’s sales, more than double from just a few years ago.

“We have some 1,500 customers in 45 countries, with Ecuador, Panama, and the Philippines as our fastest-growing markets,” Sean says. “These countries have a strong, vibrant, and

well-capitalized commercial fishing industry with a large infrastructure of helicopters, ships, processing plants, and distribution networks—a diversification which minimizes our risk in these markets.”

In markets such as India and the Middle East, Robinson helicopters are widely used in the military, national police and for general aviation, pilot training and private use. In other countries, helicopters serve as “flying pickup trucks” for the oil and gas industry in surveying and inspection, by power companies for finding breaks in high tension lines, and in forestry and mining for imaging and mapping.

After some seven years, Sean continues to “knock on the door” of the U.S. Commercial Service for trade leads, introductions to potential foreign partners, advocacy services, market intelligence, referrals, and other general export assistance.

For example, in 2022, Rotorcorp achieved a major export success in Uruguay, a new market for the company. In doing so, it leveraged key export assistance from the U.S. Commercial Service in Atlanta and U.S. Embassy in Montevideo as well as support from the U.S. Department

of Commerce’s Advocacy Center in Washington, D.C. This assistance introduced Rotorcorp to contacts at Uruguay’s Ministry of Interior and helped bring the firm into the competitive bidding process for the government tender. With the export transaction, Rotorcorp is supplying overhaul maintenance kits and engines for the Ministry’s fleet of Robinson R44 helicopters used by the National Police.

The recent success is yet another example of how the U.S. Commercial Service is helping Veteran-owned and other diverse businesses reach new export horizons, many of which are benefitting from the Global Diversity Export Initiative.

As for Sean, he is now the sole owner and president of Rotorcorp. Kicking back in his office chair at the end of the day, he reflects on the personal and professional rewards of running a “high-flying business”: “You know, expanding into the global sandbox with its customers has been fun. Exporting has sustained our company’s growth—had we been only domestically focused, we wouldn’t even be in business.”



Left to right: Sean Casey, Robinson Helicopter Company Lead Technician Pat Cox, and Rotor-corp employee, Tracy Jensen.

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*In 2021, Rotorcorp celebrated its 10th anniversary. The firm has since grown to 8 employees.*



Rotorcorp provides maintenance services through an authorized Robinson Service Center in Atlanta.

**ROTORCORP**

**Action Export Tips:**

- **Think globally.** “In the future, the vast majority of global economic growth will be outside of the United States,” Sean says. “With the maturing of new markets and a growing middle class of consumers, quality ‘Made in the USA’ goods will continue to be in demand. The rewards will go to those business who look at international markets.”
- **Don’t be afraid to make mistakes early on.** Says Sean: “Pay attention to where you feel you are at. In the beginning, there are things you may not be able to do like a mature company. It’s better to make any mistakes when your business is smaller, and the consequences are more minimal.”
- **Get help for the export challenge.** “It’s easy to get overwhelmed - take it one step at a time, and do it right by getting help early on such as financing resources from the SBA, EXIM Bank, and U.S. Commercial Service export counseling and customized services,” Sean advises. “We wanted to be sure to get the direct knowledge we needed.”

**Trade.gov, Your Key Resource**

For more on exporting, go online to [trade.gov](http://trade.gov), the federal government’s export portal. The site provides a wealth of educational, market, and industry information on exporting and foreign direct investment into the United States. You’ll also find details on U.S. Commercial Service office locations, customized services, and links to other key federal agencies and resources. ■



The Robinson R44 model, one of the most widely-used general aviation helicopters .