

Safety First

2009-May : Newsletter



Helicopter 1: Despite the volume of significant work done by the helicopter community, we are relatively small in numbers in comparison to other industries having a similar impact on the world. To add to our isolation, most of the important aspects of our work are so specialized, the bulk of our operations are so far from common knowledge, we remain mostly a mystery, even to those for whom we work. Whittle these numbers down by further specializing the field to law enforcement aviation and we are left with only a handful of people in the world who truly understand the intricacies of safely operating law enforcement aircraft.

In Langewiesche's famous book, *Stick and Rudder*, he points out that, "To tell a pilot to play it safe is to tell him nothing, nobody wants to crack up; the question is: just exactly what are the dangers, and how does one deal with them?" We do not need to be told to fly safe as much as we need to know (or Helicopter 3be reminded) how. And we need to hear it from people who have "been there and done that." I am convinced that the answer to these questions can be found in the collective knowledge of the experienced law enforcement crews in our elite community. This newsletter is an attempt to tap that vast resource. For too long have we been isolated, keeping our questions and answers to ourselves for lack of an avenue to direct them towards.



I will be using information and short articles from flight crews and mechanics throughout our region to put together this newsletter. I do not have all of the answers; no single person does. But as a group, we do. My aim is to have discussion and information relating to current issues affecting safety for all of us. Topics could include anything Helicopter 4affecting safety including, but not limited to, flight operations, training, maintenance, administrative issues, budget effects on operations and training, and accident reviews.

I am asking for short articles, inquiries about current issues, survey ideas, etc. The articles do not need to be magazine length; 200-400 words would be plenty. If you do not enjoy writing, I will be glad to write it if you send me an outline or call me with the information. If you have a question but no answer, I'll submit it in the newsletter or try to find someone with the answer. If you want the names changed to protect the innocent, your information will be safely anonymous. Your input on the newsletter format is welcome.

Everyone working in a law enforcement aviation unit has something to add to this newsletter. The success of this project is directly proportional to the amount of participation from the law enforcement aviation community. The product of that success is simply helping make sure we all go home safe at the end of the shift.

"128 ALLIGATORS, 129 ALLIGATORS...DID YOU HEAR THAT?"



Helicopter 2 Most of us train for an "unplanned offsite landing." We have emergency procedures training, carry survival equipment in the aircraft or on our person, and maybe have a written response plan. Usually when we do have to set down unexpectedly, we're not too far from civilization and everyone knows where we are. But, what if that isn't the case? Florida is home to vast expanses of swamp and sparsely populated forest. What if the engine takes an early retirement over one of those areas?

Peter Rogers is the owner of Ocala Helicopters and is a reserve pilot for both the Gainesville Police/Alachua County Sheriff's Office and Marion County Sheriff's Office aviation units. Although he was flying his company helicopter, the events that took place in July 2005 should make any law enforcement pilot sit up and take notice. Peter was flying a contract flight surveying alligator nests in the Ocala National Forest. While orbiting a nest at 350ft AGL, he had a sudden loss of power and couldn't maintain altitude. Peter made a forced landing in the only open area he could find, which was still deep swamp. After landing, the helicopter began to sink in the snake and alligator infested water. He and his passenger climbed on top of the cabin as the aircraft sank halfway into the swamp.

And there they sat. No ELT, no cell phone signal, no radio reception. Fortunately Peter's wife noticed he was late and called the Sheriff's Office (would we all be so lucky?). Eighteen hours passed before Peter was located by Marion County's crew and an airboat could be directed in. Pete had quite a bit of time to think about what he had, and what he wished he had. He recently gave me a list of those items, which we used to update our survival gear. Most was common knowledge, but his experience offered a unique insight on a few items:

More Water. Although he had four bottles of water, they were insufficient for 18 hours in the swamp in July. He suggested that water purification tablets would be a good option if you don't have room for a sufficient amount of water. Peter also stated that an overlooked point for planning how much water you'll need is the fact that the stress or injury from the incident will increase your and/or your crewmember's water intake.

Food. Pete suggested putting several snacks in the kit if more substantial food is too bulky. Currently, we have two "MREs" (meals ready to eat) in each helicopter's survival kit.



Cell Phone. If you have the kind of cell service that works only when you're touching a cell tower with one hand, it will not be much help in a remote forced landing. Also, check with your cell phone company to see what their policy is on giving out your triangulated location to search and rescue personnel. Some will not release it without a court order.

Flares. Peter suggested bringing at least six. He had some that did not fire.

Flashlight. Peter's flashlight was used to signal the search helicopter. Remember that an LED flashlight with a blue tint to the light will be almost invisible to anyone looking for you using NVGs.

Mosquito Repellant. Peter suggests packets of repellant wipes for an onboard kit.

Rope. Peter and his passenger had to set up camp on the roof of the helicopter and secure equipment.

Portable Radio. Peter was unable to use the radios in his helicopter to communicate with the search aircraft.

Peter added, "Once you survive the crash, you experience a lot of different emotions, second guessing all your decisions. It is important to remain positive and keep busy planning and preparing for your survival and rescue. It is very remarkable how quickly the time passes by; one hour turns into three and three turns into 18."

When I see Peter now, he and his helicopter are overflowing with survival equipment and supplies. We joke with him, asking when he's going to strap a Jon boat between the skids. But truth be known, if I have an emergency landing in a remote area, I hope Pete and his swamp survival kit are there.

I wish to thank Bryan Smith, pilot for the Gainesville Police Department, for contributing this article.

Please send any comments or questions to safety@alea.org and I will include them in the next newsletter.

Remember – Safety First!

Keith Johnson

Safety Program Manager