

Final Approach

interviewed by Skip Robinson



Photo courtesy of Paul Bradley

I completed my helicopter flight training and became a flight instructor in helicopters. Working and building time, I held multiple jobs that sent me all across the country performing instruction, firefighting, and utility work. I knew that I wanted a job in law enforcement also performing search-and-rescue missions. Henry-1 fit all the molds that I wanted in my career.

V911: TELL US MORE ABOUT THE HENRY-1 PROGRAM.

PB: The Henry-1 program is unique. We hire a professional pilot that is well versed in vertical reference flying, with the ability to work with crews, work under pressure, and a clean record. We also hire

professional medics. These medics must have two years of experience performing as a paramedic with numerous patient contacts, the ability to deal with stressful medical situations, the ability to swim, and of course a clean record. We also bring on a deputy from within the Sheriff's Office; one who has been a deputy for some time, has the ability to swim, work with crews, work under pressure, and of course, also has a clean work record. Finally, we have a well-equipped helicopter that has speed, ability to lift a lot internally and externally, cargo space, and is a proven aircraft. Our Bell 407GXP fits this bill. You put together the four above — pilot, rescue TFO [tactical flight officer], rescue medic, and the Bell 407 — and you end up with Henry-1, which can do some incredible missions: law enforcement, rescue, EMS, and firefighting. We train like we rescue, we rescue like we train. We have been able to successfully make our rescues easy or even routine by sticking to our training motto.

V911: WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF YOUR MOST MEMORABLE RESCUES?

PB: If I look back, I can almost remember each one. But the one that's the easiest to remember was the one in May 2013 where we rescued nine first responders over 200 miles outside our normal response area.

While on a 30-minute call back from home, we were paged out with a request for a "night cliff rescue" in the area of Crescent City, a place I was not familiar with. The three of us — rescue TFO and rescue medic — all arrived at the hangar about the same time asking the same question, "Where is Crescent City?" Once we realized Crescent City was over 200 miles away, we had a few considerations. First was our fuel status upon arrival. We were able to at least arrive in the area, but would be empty and unable to perform the rescue. Considering the location and it being late at night, an FBO being open was going to be an issue. After making a few calls and securing a fuel stop with an FBO, we satisfied the fuel issue.

Two, the weather was not the best. Weather reporting is very slim in our coastal areas, and receiving accurate weather is not something we are fortunate to have — which means sometimes we will accept a flight to only end up turning around. We had a report of local area fog but [it was] high enough to safely navigate underneath. This report came from the U.S. Coast Guard, so I was confident the weather satisfied us going. Making it to the coast was vital [to] getting out of the mountainous area. If we could not achieve that task, we agreed to return home.

Three was our SMS [safety management system]. Given all that was involved, our SMS needed a higher level of approval, considering fuel, weather, and not to forget our duty time, which was going to be exceeded in a couple of hours. We documented a plan for staying after the rescue and not returning home until the next day. [We decided we would] evaluate ourselves after completing the rescue, to determine if returning home was a safe option. This plan was vital to getting approval for us to go.

Now the mission. Initially, we were told [there were] nine people stuck on rocks surrounded by the high tide. Our first question was, when does the tide go out and can they walk out? The answer was not for another seven hours. The second question was, is anybody injured? The answer again was no, but the people needing rescuing were first responders that were initially on a rescue three hours earlier while the temperatures in the area were 75 F. The current temperature now was around 48 F,

PAUL BRADLEY PILOT, HENRY-1

Paul Bradley is a longtime pilot for Henry-1, the Sonoma County (California) Sheriff's Office helicopter unit that is one of the busiest rescue helicopter programs in the U.S. The unit is particularly renowned for its technical long-line rescues, in which the pilot uses vertical reference techniques to fly a rescuer and victim at the end of a long line. We asked Bradley to tell us more about his background and experience with the program.

VERTICAL 911: HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH AVIATION, AND WHAT LED YOU TO HENRY-1?

PAUL BRADLEY: I got into aviation at a very young age as it was in my family. My grandfather was an aviation mechanic in World War II and my grandmother was a pilot in World War II. They helped spark my interest in aviation. I performed my first flight lesson in an airplane at the age of 13. I performed my first solo on my 16th birthday. I joined the United States Marine Corps at 24 and became a crew chief on a CH-46. This continued to fulfill my interest in aviation. Once I left the military,

and they were all soaked from the waves, and two of them were experiencing hypothermia.

The one thing we pride ourselves on is not to let the mission drive the crew. Anybody that is flying EMS, law enforcement, rescue, etc. all know that is the truth — don't let the mission drive the call. We all would be lying if we did not admit that sometimes knowing the mission justifies our purpose in going, but at no time can you let it drive the call. The three of us discussed and understood the task, but consistently discussed that our mission would only exist if we could safely make it to the scene, and that alone was going to take the three of us continually evaluating ourselves.

As planned, we departed flying our first leg, stopping for fuel 1.5 hours after departure. The fuel stop was literally on the coast about 60 miles south of the rescue. The fog was about 600 feet [above ground level], and we had decent visibility below, especially using NVGs [night vision goggles]. We flew the coast to the scene and within moments located all nine first responders frantically waving on the rocks pretty much 30 feet or so from the cliffs,

surrounded by the ocean. Once we determined the rescue portion was going to be somewhat straightforward, we needed to locate the LZ [landing zone]. The LZ was about three miles north of where the rescue was going to take place and where we would be setting up.

About two minutes after landing at the LZ, I flew the crew to the scene, dropping them off to do the triage. Because we use vertical reference and a static line with a strength of over 10,000 pounds, we were able to remove two victims along with one rescuer for a total of three people at a time. We took the two hypothermia patients first, flying them to the LZ. We continued this until all first responders and crew were back safely at the LZ. This entire rescue portion only took 15 minutes.

After the rescue, we quickly loaded our gear and headed back to the airport where we originally got fuel before the rescue. Once we landed at the airport, we had another discussion about our SMS. We were on the border of our duty time, but excited from the rescue so pretty much wide awake. We discussed "get-home-it-is," and the safety hazards associated with that. We eventually decided to

fly to the next closest airport which was 70 miles away, and re-evaluate from there. End of the story, we flew to that airport, evaluated, and then flew back to our home base successfully.

V911: WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES INVOLVED WITH THIS TYPE OF WORK?

PB: The biggest challenges I believe are keeping yourself in the game. It is very easy to get caught up in any call that we do — law enforcement, rescue, or EMS. Being able to manage the rapid changes at a moment's notice can also be a challenge. Most challenges are somewhat easy to figure out, but sometimes we end up overhead a scene that requires immediate attention. In our industry we all want to help catch the suspect or rescue the victim. Making sure that the cockpit remains a cockpit sometimes can be a challenge to manage.

For example, an officer-involved shooting. While sitting at the hangar, we heard a deputy yelling [over the radio], "Shots fired, I've been hit." Hearing those words and knowing that officer caused our adrenaline to spike in a way I will never forget. We took off and headed in his

Henry-1's Bell 407 has speed, ability to lift a lot internally and externally, cargo space, and is a proven aircraft, Bradley said. **Skip Robinson Photo**





direction with about 10 minutes to go, listening to him fight on the ground through the radio. I noticed I kept trying to go even faster than I already was, but was already at Vne [never-exceed speed] and power limits. I started to get frustrated I could not go faster. All I was doing was staring at the gauges, not looking outside. It was at that

time I realized the call itself was flying the helicopter and dictating my emotions and piloting, and [could make] me do something stupid or even worse, dangerous.

After a brief moment, I was able to bring myself back to where a pilot should be, flying the aircraft. Slowing myself emotionally down, thinking about us and the

helicopter helped bring safety and CRM [crew resource management] back into the helicopter. All three of us don't remember the beginning of that call because we were so caught up. Being a routine pilot with a regular crew means nothing when it comes to safety. It doesn't matter how much flight time a pilot has, "nobody is exempt from making mistakes." We discuss calls like this regularly just as a reminder. We have an awesome job, but emotions need to be understood and protected from the cockpit's CRM. Fly expeditiously, and fly smart.

V911: WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR YOU?

PB: I am very excited for the future. I look forward to hopefully a lot more flying. My son currently flies a Bell 407 at the same airport as me working for a charter company. I hope to continue to fly with him and see him continue on within the industry. I also have a two-year-old daughter who I cannot keep away from the airport. She loves airplanes and helicopters just like me and my son. I look forward to growing with them and having a family that enjoys aviation as much as I do. 🍷

This interview has been edited.