

Piasecki HRP-1 "Rescuer" / "Flying Banana"



History:

The Coast Guard acquired three HRP-1 twin-rotor helicopters beginning in November 1948 from the Navy. The unique "Flying Banana," as it was known, had a fabric covered fuselage. It was powered by a single Pratt & Whitney R-1840-AN-1 engine that drove both rotors.

All three helicopters were stationed at Coast Guard Air Station Elizabeth City along the North Carolina coast. At least one was assigned to the Rotary Wing Development Unit based out of Elizabeth City. Here they participated in numerous experiments, including on-the-water landings with newly invented flotation gear and the testing of various types of hoists, rescue baskets, and rescue harnesses. Most of this equipment was developed by then-CDR Frank Erickson and his men. He also tested helicopter landings on board the USCGC

Mackinaw in Buffalo, New York, including landing an HRP on the icebreaker's stern after first flying the helicopter to Buffalo from Elizabeth City. Erickson also participated in flood relief experiments in the Second Coast Guard District in 1949 as well, using HRP CG-111826. The experiments included testing various hoisting methods and equipment at various points along the Mississippi River, beginning in St. Louis, Missouri.

The first recorded search and rescue mission carried out by a Coast Guard HRP occurred on 31 December 1948. The SAR Office at Elizabeth City received a request to transport a fourteen-month-old baby girl, who was suffering from pneumonia, from Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, to the hospital at Elizabeth City. She was in a remote location on the Cape and timely assistance was needed. A local newspaper report noted:

"Within a few minutes, HRP No. 13 was in the air, piloted by Lt. David Oliver. Others in this rescue team were Lt. MacLane, co-pilot and the Coast Guard physician, Lt. Thometz. Within one hour and five minutes after the call was received by the Coast Guard, the helicopter had reached its destination and Mr. and Mrs. R. M. Daley, with their stricken daughter in their arms, were boarding the helicopter, bound for a safe arrival at the hospital. Thanks to the Coast Guard, the girl is alive today."

The station acquired its second HRP on 28 December 1948. Soon, three pilots were fully checked out on the helicopter: CDR William Lawrence, LT David Oliver, and LT Fletcher Brown. Another rescue soon ensued. On the evening of 27 January 1949, a Marine Corps F4U Corsair was reported down in a swamp that was 40 miles south of Elizabeth City. A newspaper account recorded:

"Within five minutes after the call came in Lt. Fletcher Brown had the HRP-1 Rescuer on its way to the scene. R. Parker, AD3, and R.E. Feiok, AD2, accompanied Lt. Brown on this mission. Pharmacist's Mate, 1st Class, W. A. Haines was also on hand in case the Marine pilot had any injuries. It was just about dusk when the HRP arrived at the scene of the accident. The terrain was too dangerous to attempt a landing, so the pilot hovered over the wrecked aircraft and the hoist was lowered, allowing the crashed pilot to be hoisted into the helicopter. The pickup was made within 28 minutes after the call was received at the Search & Rescue Office of the Coast Guard. The crashed Marine pilot, Captain W. F. Jacobs, was safely aboard the Coast Guard helicopter just approximately one hour after making his forced landing."

Many of the current Coast Guard helicopter rescue procedures in use today owe their development to Erickson and the HRP experiments he, along with the men of the Coast Guard's Rotary Wing Development Unit, conducted in 1949 and 1950.

CG 111826 crashed while landing at Lifeboat Station Chicamacomico, North Carolina on 23 February 1951, fortunately without loss of life. The helicopter was written off. The remaining two HRP's were returned to the Navy soon thereafter.

Photographs:



No caption; 19 July 1949; Neg. No. 204-5256; McDonnell Aircraft Corp photo; photographer unknown; On tarmac, warming up in front of a McDonnell Douglas hanger, pilot is CDR Frank Erickson.



"Piasecki HRP 'Tandem' helicopter shown at U.S. Coast Guard Air Station,

Elizabeth City, NC."; May, 1950; No photo number; photographer unknown; On tarmac, CG No. 111821 (note the HO3S-1G in flight above the HRP-1).



"HRP-1 helicopter hovering off ground, U.S. Coast Guard Air Station Elizabeth City, N.C., USCG No. 111821 commissioned Nov. 1948 decommissioned Dec. 1951, to Navy."; 30 January 1951; no photo number; photo by Philip A. Biscuti, PH, USCG.



"Showing Hoist & stokes litter arrangement, also flotation gear packed around wheels, Rotary Wing Development Unit, Eliz. City, N.C."; 1948; Photo No. 000F; photographer unknown; view is of port-side, showing Coast Guard improvements/developments.



No caption/date; Photo No. 000F; photographer unknown. Close-up of hoist & litter developed by the Coast Guard.



"HRP-1, San Francisco."; 1949; no photo number; photographer unknown; view of HRP-1 on tarmac, from forward looking aft on port-side; three unidentified individuals stand in front of cockpit.



"HRP-1G, CGNO. 111826, Landing Accident LBS Chicamacomico, N.C., 1645R, 23 Feb. 1951: General view showing final position of plane, rolling and uneven character of terrain, damage overall, and possible distortion of structure."; February 1951; Photo No. 1 (submitted with Aircraft Accident Report AAR 1-51 on HRP-1G CGNo. 111826 at CGAS Elizabeth City, NC).; photographer unknown.

Sources:

HRP-1 file, U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office Archive.

Arthur Percy, *U.S. Coast Guard Aircraft Since 1916* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991), pp. 251-253.

Gordon Swanborough & Peter M. Bowers. *United States Navy Aircraft Since 1911* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990-third edition), pp. 360-362.

