



Tester



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Test gets real as communication system aids in saving a life

A new wireless communication system, managed by the Air Combat Electronics program office (PMA-209) at Pax River and undergoing testing in Arizona, proved crucial by assisting a Navy corpsman in a real-life rescue mission over the Labor Day weekend.

Developed by the Telephonics Corporation of Farmingdale, N.Y, the Aircraft Wireless Intercommunications System (AWICS) was installed on a Marine Corps HH-1N Huey helicopter for operational testing at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, when the base received a call from the Border Patrol Search, Trauma and Rescue (BORSTAR) requesting assistance with rescuing an injured hiker.

"BORSTAR were first on-scene but due, to the difficulty of the terrain, they requested our help in rescuing an injured hiker," said Co-pilot Maj.

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Natalie Beede. "They contacted our command post, who ultimately dispatched us to the scene."

After receiving the call, the AWICS-equipped Huey, running the latest software load, immediately deployed to the rescue site, located more than 80 miles from MCAS Yuma.

"The terrain was very rough and mountainous, and there wasn't a landing zone anywhere nearby," said Capt. Sean Mitzel, the helicopter pilot. "The environmental condi-

tions were nasty, wind turbulence was strong, and the patient was located in a bowl with very steep terrain on three sides. Once we got below the ridgeline, we were able to hold our hover with a lot of work and constant power adjustments."

According to Mitzel, Petty Officer Second Class Michael Skelton, a hospital corpsman, tried to conduct a litter rappel into the site but, after stepping on the skids, found the wind was too intense to rappel with the litter.

"We brought the litter back in the aircraft, and a special cloth litter, designed to wrap around the patient, was sent down with me," said Skelton. "After I rappelled down to the patient, I assessed her injuries, put her in full cervical-spinal immobilization, stabilized her for possible hip or lower leg fractures, administered oxygen and prepared her for the hoist out."

He continued, "While I was on the ground, the helicopter circled the site and I used AWICS to maintain constant contact and pass valuable information between us added Skelton. When I was ready for the hoist out, I determined that the litter would be required to safely lift the victim out."

The crew decided the best way to insert the litter would be, said Mitzel, "To lower a belay line, pull in the rappel rope, and hook the litter to both so that Skelton and Staff Sgt. Michael Deleree would have better control of the litter to keep it from flying like a kite. All of this coordination was possible through using AWICS."

When everything was ready for the hoist out, the helicopter made another approach over the rescue site and lowered the litter. "The patient was set, Skelton let us know he was ready, and we began a dual litter hoist, the patient in the litter and Skelton on the rescue cable, with an in-flight recovery," said Mitzel.

With the hiker and corpsman safely on board, the helicopter flew to El Centro Regional Medical Center, where the hiker received follow-on care.

"Without AWICS, this night-time rescue would have been much harder if we had to rely on just hand signals or flares," said



A Navy corpsman equipped with Aircraft Wireless Intercommunications System (AWICS) radio (in the red circle) readies himself to rappel from one of two AWICS equipped Marine Corps HH-1N Huey helicopters during a training exercise near Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz.



U.S. Marine Corps photos

A Navy corpsman practices a dual litter hoist from one of two Aircraft Wireless Intercommunications System (AWICS) equipped Marine Corps HH-1N Hueys near Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz.

Mitzel. "AWICS gave us the means to communicate in real-time with all the players making the rescue a smooth event."

AWICS, is currently installed on the C-2B, the MH-60S, the CH-46E, and the HH-60H

and is completing testing on the MV-22B and the HH-1N. Additional aircraft planned to receive the system in the future include the CH-53D/E, MH-53E, C-130T, KC-130J/T, UH-1Y and P-3C.