

# Why We Fly ... Helicopters

by Eric Peterson, JAARS Helicopter Pilot

**W**e fly helicopters for the same reasons we fly airplanes, use boats on the open seas and rivers of the world, and maneuver rugged terrain with four-wheel drive vehicles. It's to reach the people of the world who do not have the Word of God in their language. In the July/August 2004 issue of the *Intercessor*, a Wycliffe publication for those who pray for us, it says that Wycliffe is currently working with 1,262 people groups representing 1.16 billion people. Our mission uses helicopters both overseas and in the United States in a support role to help reach these people groups with God's Word.

## Overseas

Overseas there is often not enough suitable land to carve out an airstrip. In these situations, a helicopter may be the only means of transportation into and out of an isolated village. This is the most obvious need for using helicopters, but there are many other reasons why we fly helicopters.

### To do surveys.

The helicopter makes it possible for linguists to do surveys to determine which people groups need a New Testament translation. The helicopter has the flexibility to land at almost any village. This allows the linguists to talk with the people, analyze what language is spoken, and determine how similar or different the language is compared to neighboring villages.

### To make initial contacts.

In early 1982 in the Philippines, we were praying about putting a translation team in the village of Lubo. There was a New Testament being done in a neighboring village, but the people of Lubo would not accept that translation because of social issues. They also had a price on the translator's head!

Finally the decision was made to go into Lubo with the helicopter *and* with this translator! This would be our first contact with these people.

*One of the people groups of the world without the Word of God.*



We prayed fervently that God would keep everyone safe. We landed the helicopter as quickly as possible; we didn't want to give them time to shoot at us before we landed!

God's grace abounded and He answered our prayers above and

beyond what we had asked. When we landed, we found the people friendly, all the officials we needed to talk with were gathered right there because of a funeral, and, most amazingly, they wanted a missionary in their village so they could have air service! God had opened the door.

### To bring in building supplies.

Many missionaries use helicopters to bring in supplies for their village homes. After we made contact with the Kalinga people of Lubo for translator Sherry Brainard, we flew 17 shuttles to the village to take the materials needed for her house. Some of the bulky and oversized supplies were brought in on a slingload, like



*Above: A water tank ready to be slingloaded to its destination. Below: The slingload is on its way.*





Left: Helicopters are often used for medevac and rescue operations overseas.

kitchen cabinets, a refrigerator, and a water tank.

**To evacuate people.**

We use the helicopter to do medical and rescue evacuations for translators if they have no airstrip or when the winds are too high to use their runway. One day we received an SOS over the radio from Bruce Grayden in Mallango, Philippines. His life was being threatened by dissidents; would we pray? Some time after that he called again; he and his family needed to be evacuated immediately. Our plane could not use the village airstrip because of high winds. Further, it was in the path of those coming to harm him. With the helicopter, we bypassed the problems, landed in the schoolyard, and rescued the Grayden family.

**To promote linguistic work.**

The helicopter is sometimes used to transport officials from other countries. They like to view the work of our translation teams to determine whether they want us to do linguistic work and Bible translation in their own countries.

**To fly in people for New Testament dedications.**

Many guests usually attend New Testament dedications. For the Apayao Ifugao New Testament dedication in the Philippines, a place with no airstrip, it took 27 shuttles to take all the officials and interested

people in and back out. The effectiveness of the Scriptures in the heart language of the Apayao Ifugao people was dramatic. We praise the Lord that there are several villages now where there is at least one believer in every home.

**In the United States**

Now we have the Robinson R44 Raven II helicopter at JAARS. Just like its predecessor, the Hiller UH12E4 which was operated until May 2004, we will use it for the evaluation of new applicants and

initial training of pilots for field service. And for helicopter pilots returning from overseas for furlough, they will receive recurrent training in the R44.

The helicopter also fills a large niche in the United States by recruiting new Wycliffe members through Missions at the Airport programs. These programs account for about 90% of the helicopter's use in the U.S. They traditionally take place at airports where there is an airstrip for our Helio Couriers and Cessna 206s to take off and land. But by using just the helicopter, organizers become creative: Missions at the Airport are now held at soccer or baseball fields, church parking lots, and sometimes even hay fields!



We use helicopters overseas in many support and humanitarian roles to help those already working in 1,262 people groups to bring them God's Word. And we use helicopters in the United States to instruct pilots and to recruit future support workers and translators so that new people can get involved in helping give the three hundred and eighty million people still waiting,<sup>1</sup> the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup>July/August 2004 *Intercessor*.



Right: When only helicopters are used, Missions At The Airport programs in the U.S. can become creative!