Introduction

[Helicopter rotors spinning]

Chris Bailey: Now, the HART program is bigger than just North Carolina. The HART program has become the national standard, the national term, and–and we all work hand-in-hand together from Tennessee to Texas to South Carolina to Pennsylvania. And a number of other states have done HART programs, um, [unintelligible] not only what's been built here but what's been built as a nationwide standard. We all work hand-in-hand, um, to work together when–when the call comes in.

[Helicopter sounds fade]

[Pause]

[Theme music]

Kirsten Barber: You're listening to the NCDPS Safety Scoop, a podcast that dives into the stories of the people, programs and resources within the North Carolina Department of Public Safety. Each episode, we'll give you the scoop from department personnel on how NCDPS enhances the safety of the people of North Carolina.

[Theme music stops]

Season 3 Episode 7

Kirsten: For those who enjoy the great outdoors, North Carolina has a lot to offer. Whether hiking, rock climbing, trekking about woodlands or streams or maybe just chasing waterfalls, the possibilities may seem endless. But these activities do come with their fair share of risks, and when a dangerous or maybe even perilous situation happens out in the wild, who do you call? In extreme situations, the Helicopter Aquatic Rescue Team, or NC HART, can be deployed. Members of this elite team are spread across the state and have specialized skills that can be used in swift water or flood rescue as well as high-angle rescue situations.

Started in 2004 by a small group of innovative North Carolinians, the group celebrated its 20th anniversary earlier this year. Now comprised of more than 30 technicians from across 12 different agencies, the NC HART team provides life-saving missions across our state and beyond. In this episode of the Safety Scoop, you'll hear from several long-standing members of the team. First, I'd like to introduce Chris Bailey, one of North Carolina Emergency Management's

emergency services coordinators. Chris oversees the NC HART program and has years of experience with emergency response.

Chris: So, uh, my name is Chris Bailey. I am one of the emergency services coordinators, uh, for North Carolina Emergency Management. I have been, uh, with the Department of Public Safety or North Carolina Emergency Management for coming up on 10 years now, and one of my primary responsibilities as an emergency services coordinator is the program manager for the North Carolina Helo-Aquatic Rescue Team, or NC HART, as it gets referred to most commonly.

Kirsten: Well, you've established what HART stands for…

[Chris clears his throat]

Kirsten: …but what purpose does it serve in our state?

Chris: The North Carolina Helo-Aquatic Rescue Team, or NC Hart, it is a multifaceted, multi-discipline program that is comprised of, uh, North Carolina Emergency Management, the North Carolina National Guard, North Carolina State Highway Patrol and multiple fire, uh, and rescue EMS agencies from around the state that have all partnered together to basically create this program. Everybody brings something a little different to the table, and its primary purpose is to provide that helicopter response and bring somebody from a–a place of bad to a place of not-so-bad. That's the best way to–to tell you. It's not to compete with your ambulance. It's not to provide advanced life support-style care like–like you see with–with all of the EMS agencies out there, the–the air EMS agencies. Our job is to provide that technical rescue expertise with the firefighters, uh, on government aircraft, either the National Guard or the Highway Patrol, and take somebody from a bad place in the woods where they–they've fallen and injured themselves and they–and it's an extended carryout to get somebody out, or take out multiple people from, um, a hurricane flood response and take them off the–the roof of their house or–or inside of–in a bad area and move them to a place of–of not-so-bad and provide them, um, with some basic care, uh, in the–in the process.

Kirsten: So, I'm curious: you're using a term, "not so bad." Is there a reason behind that?

Chris: Yeah, so, we in most cases, and I use the word "not-so-bad." We say that in the way of a hurricane. Okay? So, in most cases, we are going to pick a family, individuals, um, and in most cases, they're off of their–their home. And–and we are going to take them off of their home, and we are going to move them to an area that is dry. Okay? We're–we're not going to necessarily fly them to the hospital because they may not need any care from the hospital. But we're going to move them to a–to an area where there may be a shelter. So, we may take them to a designated landing spot, and then the local emergency managers there or local, uh, first responders there would then move them to a–to a

shelter-style area or a place that is warm where they can be fed and get dry clothes.

So, a lot of times in the day-to-day response, what we refer to as the blue sky rescue, out in the mountains, uh, which tends to be where it's most common here in North Carolina, we will–we will take a helicopter, and we'll launch that helicopter, and we will perform a rescue maybe out in, like, the Linville Gorge out in Burke County, very common place for us to do a rescue. And we will–we will pick that person off of the–off of the cliff or off of the–the area where they–where they are stranded, and we will fly them to a designated LZ where they will either have local EMS there standing by with an ambulance, uh, paramedics, or they may have an air ambulance system there, another helicopter parked in the LZ waiting to take that individual to a hospital. We don't typically fly them to the hospital because we don't provide advanced-style care on these airframes. They don't have that capability on the aircraft. What HART brings to the fold is–is the technical rescue expertise. These firefighters, uh, and–and rescue personnel are highly trained in technical rescue. That's what they specialize in within their agencies. So, that's kind of what that means.

Kirsten: Thank you for going through that. And I'm going to take a guess: is LZ Landing Zone?

Chris: It is, thanks.

[Both laugh]

Chris: Yeah, that was a good guess.

Kirsten: So, before we get too far, let's meet additional members of the team. The next two guests are people who have been with the program for the last decade or longer. Because he knows them far better than I do, I'm actually handing it over to Chris for introductions.

Um, so you have nominated some other individuals for me to speak with. I was wondering if you could just briefly introduce the team members that our listeners are going to hear from next.

Chris: Yeah, so, uh, so I'll start with, um, CW5 Mike Young. Mr. Young is a member of the State Aviation Officers, the staff of the North Carolina National Guard. He's been, uh, instrumental in the program. As a current pilot, he flew, um, he flew a number of National Guard helicopters in addition to–to fixed-wing aircraft that the National Guard have. He's been instrumental in, uh, in the program with the National Guard, um, from its start. Um, multiple people have as well, but he's been dialed into it, uh, from the start of the program.

And, uh, and Chief Bobby Cooper, he is our lead technician, lead HART technician, uh, in the–in the western part of the state. He has, uh, been with the program since the original INDOC in 2004. He has been here since essentially

day one of this program, and, uh, and since it, uh, came to, you know, came to actual fruition, I guess. He is still with it today and a huge part of the success and the development and where it sits, uh, where it sits now.

Kirsten: Let's meet CW5 Mike Young.

Mike Young: I'm, uh, Chief Warrant Officer Five Mike Young. I'm the state standardization officer at the State Aviation Office right now, and, uh, I've been with the HART program, pretty sure it's been between 13 and 14 years. It's been quite a while. My role with the HART program is currently what… Let me start off by saying that I used to be a aircraft operator. I–I'd fly the helicopters, and I'd–and I'd execute the missions. Now, I–I've transitioned more to a role of Emergency Management will give us the mission, and we'll look at it in the, uh, in the [unintelligible] and decide, yeah, it's, uh, it's more of a UH-60, or it's more of a 72 mission, and we look at which aircraft we–and crews we need to–to send to do that particular mission. It may actually be a resupply mission where we–we transport water, food, medical items for individuals that–that are in a–in a bad way after a–a storm.

It doesn't even need to be a storm, though. We will, um, get calls in the middle of the night, weekends, during the week, it–it doesn't really matter. If somebody is out, say, they're hiking, they fall down and injure themselves, the, uh, local emergency management folks, they send a team out there, mostly first responders, to locate them and evaluate the situation that the individual is in. And sometimes, if it's–if it's a real difficult spot to get the individual out of, they'll call us in, and we'll get a crew together and, uh, work with the HART techs that are instrumental in this program, and we'll take them out there, push them down. They'll, uh, finish packaging the individual for transport, and then we'll take them out.

Kirsten: Thank you for going through all that. I think it really gives everyone a nice perspective of your role and your teammates' roles when it comes to a mission. So, you said 13 to 14 years ago is when you started on with the HART program, so take us back to that time and what really interested you in taking part of HART.

Mike: I like supporting the, uh, local people here in North Carolina, and it means a lot to be able to support them. It–it's always interested me in doing rescue hoist work. I think it's just a valuable, uh, asset that we've got.

Kirsten: Now that we've met a member from the National Guard side, let's switch over to the civilian side of things and meet Fire Chief Bobby Cooper. And so, Bobby, can you give us just an idea of your role with HART and how long you've been with this program?

Chief Bobby Cooper: So, I started in 2004 with the first, uh, INDOC class that we did. I'm–I'm currently the, um, the lead tech for the Western Group which basically means that, uh, anytime a mission comes in, I'm the one that, uh, will kind of coordinate the

techs. We'll–we'll get a conference call and listen to what the–what the mission is, and that's–that's everybody. All the key players involved get on that conference call, and we decide if it's a viable mission for us. During that same process, I'm also reaching out to techs to see who's available to go on the mission. And then on a day-to-day basis, uh, I help plan all the training that we would do, monthly training, and I help plan and coordinate all that.

It's just a whole lot of other ancillary duties, um, that–that's part of it. Um, different meetings that we go to, um, uh, equipment. We do equipment inventory twice a year. And then there's also just, uh, if one of the platforms, either the Highway Patrol or–or the Guard has something going on and they need some techs to come do some, uh, one-off training, then they–they call me and we–we coordinate that, too. So, it's–it's actually a pretty involved, uh, position.

One of the questions I've been asked before is, "How did you–how did you hear about the program?" And–and this was back when before email was really even that big, and it was a fax about a helicopter rescue class that I thought sounded interesting. And I signed up for the class and got in that–in that first INDOC class, and–and so I was–I was one of the first team members. So, I'm one of three original team members that are–are still on the team. So, I've–I've been in it for just right over–just at 20 years now.

Kirsten: Wow, that is very interesting that you, uh, bring up the fact about, uh, receiving a fax notification about the class. Some people might not even know what a fax is.

[Both laugh]

Chief Cooper: That's what we have to tell some of the younger guys now.

Kirsten: With NC HART operating in the state for 20 years, I wanted to learn more about the early days and how it has changed over the years. Chris is first up for the history lesson.

Let–let's kind of go through a little bit of the history, if we can, of HART. So, how did this team originally come about, and how has it evolved over the years?

Chris: Oh man. So, originally, the–the conversation more or less started with a–with a handful of individuals with some good ideas. It started back in, uh, I want to say, probably around 1998-99 where it was discussed. And it was truly putting technical rescue-trained firefighters on a North Carolina National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk. From between 1999 and 2004, um, there was, uh, some training in a lot of kind of handshake agreements, in a way, and not a bad way, but–but things were kind of developing. This program would really never been–been sought out throughout the country. A green helicopter, in the case of the–the Army or the National Guard, has always put green-suiters, Army personnel, on those airframes to do these rescues, to do rescues. That's what they're–that's

what they do in a combat situation. So, putting a civilian personnel on a military aircraft to conduct a rescue in the state of North Carolina with essentially civilian personnel, there you can only imagine the level of complexity that that–that had to be, you know, uh, thought through for that to really become a program.

So, multiple smart people have, uh, basically helped write this program or write what, uh, HART became, uh, is kind of a standard, and it was work through the National Guard, North Carolina Emergency Management, obviously nat–the National Guard Bureau and the Army, uh, with DOD to basically get this–this program essentially blessed. And in 2004 was the first what we refer to as INDOC or Indoctrination Training where we took our–our first handful of technicians, um, and they went out and basically trained to do this on a helicopter. And–and at the time, that's what they did. They were truly, um, individuals on a helicopter that provided, you know, they sat in the seat onboard the aircraft until it was time to go do the rescue. They got hoisted down; they–they, you know, did what they needed to do with the individual requiring care; they hoisted them back up to the aircraft and they sat in the seat, and then that was it. So, it was–it was very much, uh, here's your–your National Guard personnel, and here's your EM personnel and here's your–your first responders, your technicians, and it was–it was very divided. Um, well, that is no longer the case. That has since evolved, um, into what the program is today.

Kirsten: Bobby provides his insight on what it was like as a civilian technician in the early days of the program.

Chief Cooper: Uh, it's–it's–it's changed tremendously. When we first started, it was–it was a relatively new thought. They'd been working on the program for about 10 years. And so, when we started out, the military was still kind of new to this. They weren't real sure how it would work out. And basically, when we got in the helicopter, we–we didn't talk. We didn't say anything. We–we basically did whatever they told us to do. And now, it's–it's–it's evolved to the point to where we're–we're part of the air crew. They listen to us just like they do any other military air crew, and if we have suggestions on–on how to approach a mission or something that we need to look at or something that we need to watch out for, they're–they're very responsive to that. I mean, they still have–have their own process they have to follow, but like I said, it's changed the point to where we are considered part of the crew now.

Kirsten: After the first INDOC class in 2004, the program continued to build off its few resources and team of a dozen technicians. Chris continues.

Chris: In 2008, uh, we rolled into the second indoctrination class. We brought on more technicians. The program grew. More hoists were added to the National Guard helicopters. It became, uh, a–a bigger program. Back in about 2009-2010, the Highway Patrol integrated into the program with short-haul operations with the Bell 407. 2012-ish time frame, the National Guard brought in the, uh, LUH-72A

Lakota. Um, that is a hoist aircraft, so light utility helicopter. They brought that into the fold. We brought on additional technicians, uh, around that time period not long after that in 2015. And then here in 2023, we brought in the LUH-72 Bravo. It's just a basically a more advanced version of the Alpha version. And then most recently, the Bell 429 hoist helicopter with the State Highway Patrol in 2024.

So, um, the program has certainly evolved from, you know, a couple of Blackhawks and good ideas. Now, we're upwards of 30-plus technicians and, uh, I'd say, anywhere between 30 and 35 technicians, uh, amongst 12 different agencies. And then you add in the National Guard, uh, that maintain the Blackhawks and the Lakotas, um, they–they crew them. They staff those aircraft. And then you have the Highway Patrol, the crew and staff, not only at the–at the time when they joined that one Bell 407. Now they have four Bell 407s short-haul capable and the additional 429 they just got brought into the fleet, uh, here within the last, uh, few months to do hoist operations. So, it's a–it's a pretty–pretty, like I said earlier, it's a–it's a very multifaceted, multi-discipline program that comes together as one and, really, it–it doesn't work without all the partners in it.

Kirsten: Here's Bobby again.

Chief Cooper: An interesting thing about the program, too, as far as in how it's evolved, is that the original concept was geared towards the wide-area flooding events. So, when we have the hurricanes that affect a large portion of the state, they put us on standby for those–those type of weather events. But then after we get–really got started, we really noticed more of a single incident mission response. We still do the storm standbys and responses, both in our state as–as well as other states. We've been to South Carolina several times. We've been–went to Texas for Hurricane Harvey back in 2017, uh, flew two Blackhawks down there. So, it's, uh, it's really evolved in that sense that there's a lot of different things that we do.

Kirsten: Early on, um, communications challenges b-between the–the different teams that were participating in this. Um, any insight of how, um, that gap was bridged and how these partnerships have flourished over the years of the HART program?

Chief Cooper: Yeah, so, it initially was, um, it was more the–the civilians getting on the military aircraft that was–that was new to a lot of the military world, and they just weren't used to that. They weren't used to working w-with civilian groups. Our Guard unit out of Salisbury with–with the Blackhawks, their–their mission is actually a, uh, they're, um, uh, a gunnery unit, and also, they do a lot of Special Forces training. They fly some of the Special Forces around to different missions, uh, so they're a transport agency. So, when it came to doing rescue, that was–that was new to them, as well, um, and they had not been involved in that. So, they had to learn that aspect of it, and then–then they basically had to learn that they could trust us that we were subject matter experts in the rescue

realm. And–and once they–they realized that and realized that we could provide a lot of information to them on the–on these missions, then that–that really opened up our–our lines of communication, not only on mission, but also in our trainings, how we develop training, uh, what we train on, training locations, um, all that's part of it.

Kirsten: The number of rescue missions that the NC HART team executes understandably varies from year to year. Chris shared that the team can receive a dozen or more requests a year, and the team may do between four and ten blue sky rescues, or rescues that do not involve inclement weather. Of course, severe weather, especially during hurricane season, can impact these totals. The number of missions they can execute also depends on the availability of resources and technicians. So much goes on behind the scenes to account and prepare for the unknown. Since this HART program is one of several in the nation, I wanted to get our guests' insight on what value they thought this program brought to the state and why it's important. Mike starts.

So, Mike, why is it important for a program like this to exist in North Carolina?

Mike: It's, uh, especially while we're one of the hurricane states in the country. It–it's important to support the citizens of North Carolina. We, uh, that's what the National Guard was, uh, was established to, uh, to do, and–and we do a–we do a real good job of doing that, I believe.

Kirsten: Bobby, what makes HART so important, and why is it a vital resource for the state?

Chief Cooper: Well, again, one of the key things is–is that it is a–a partnership, like I said, with North Carolina Emergency Management, Highway Patrol, uh, North Carolina National Guard and then all the, uh, civilian fire and rescue and EMS agencies that are–that are involved, and–and everybody working together. So, we–we do—twice a year—we do get that leadership group together just to kind of get an update on the–on the program and what's going on. But having all those agency–partner agencies working together is really key to that.

Kirsten: As it was stated earlier, technicians for NC HART are selected from local first response teams across the state. However, not just anyone can join. Chris shares the requirements and what it takes to earn a NC HART patch on the sleeve of your flight suit.

Chris: So, they–they have to be with a–with a, uh, government agency, so our technicians range from Raleigh Fire Department, Charlotte Fire Department, Gaston EMS, Henderson County, we can go down the list there, but they–they are affiliated with a fire department or a, uh, EMS agency or an EM agency. They have to have a technical rescue background. They also have to have swift water technician, so they have to have swift water qualifications. Once they have that, they would essentially go to a tryout. We have a grade sheet criteria. If they met the criteria, depending on how many slots we had available, we would go back

and we would… They'd be graded, essentially, and then they would get an opportunity to be invited into INDOC training.

INDOC's when they would basically go to about a week-long course and–and train with the current technicians, with a group of our instructors. They would train them and–and essentially get them prepared. They'd go to the helicopter. They'd do a lot of the rescue stuff in a training environment to see how they perform, and if they make it through that, then they would become a technician. Now, with that all being said, those technicians, um, or those candidates we should say, they have to be sponsored by their agency. So, their agency has skin in the program as well. All of our 12 agencies, like Charlotte Fire Department, Asheville Fire Department and so on, that we have an MOU between North Carolina Emergency Management and those agencies that, basically, you know, we–we work with one another to–to support the NC HART program. So, it's not just somebody, you know, anybody that's part of any department can just go out and–and volunteer to be part of HART. They actually have to have the support of their agency, of their fire department, et cetera, to be part of the program.

Kirsten: Mike, when I spoke earlier with Chris, he told me about how, really, whenever a mission is started, it's a "ready, set, let's go" for everyone to come together, get settled and briefed and then head out to a rescue or supply drop or anything of that nature. How do you keep yourself ready to go or your skills honed to be ready in case you are called upon?

Mike: That's an excellent question. And I, uh, currently I'm not flying, uh, and executing the missions anymore. I'm–I'm in a–in a different role, but we stay ready by completing monthly training events. The training events are–they're quite complex, and they're established between Emergency Management, the HART techs, the, uh, the crews of the–of the aircraft. And they–they all get together, and they decide, yeah, this is what we want to accomplish each month. And we go to different locations in the state to work on those difficult, uh, tasks. The m-matrix that we use to decide if our training is–is up to the standard that it needs to be is by, uh, after executing an actual mission, we debrief, and as long as we're saying that the training that we're doing is–is more complex than the actual mission, then I believe we're doing the–the right thing for the–for–for the citizens of North Carolina and the people that we help.

Kirsten: Though they go through a rigorous selection process, members of the NC HART team are volunteers. While working their day-to-day jobs, these individuals must be ready to deploy if needed, but most calls don't happen during business hours. Rescue requests typically come in overnight or on the weekends. So, between training and executing missions, these members put in countless hours to make sure they are ready for any situation. I wanted to get an idea of what a mission was like from start to finish. Chris provides an example.

Chris: Everything starts at the local level. A HART mission is a state resource. It's approved by multiple people within the agency, not just Emergency

Management, but also the Highway Patrol and/or the National Guard, depending on the airframe that is utilized to go perform the rescue. With that, it's all going to start at the local level where the local emergency manager's going to make a call, um, whether that's to the 24-hour Operation Center, the 24-hour watch here at North Carolina Emergency Management or they may call their area coordinator directly, uh, with North Carolina Emergency Management. Either way is–is fine. And that's going to start the process. They're going to call, and they're going to say, "We have got a 25-year-old male who has fallen 200 feet while rock climbing in the Linville Gorge and currently got local, uh, responders inbound to him, but they're–they're still, uh, they're still getting to him on scene. It's a very technical rescue. It could take probably 8 to 9 hours in a–in a pretty extreme austere environment to get this individual off where he's located, and if we can do that, if it's possible, we'd like to request a–a HART mission to help us with ex-extracting this individual."

So, with that, the watch is going to–going to spin up. The recorder is going to spin up. We'll get all the players essentially on a conference call. A local EM will essentially brief us or the area coordinator will brief out basically the situation, the scenario, um, on that conference call. We'll have a represen–we'll have multiple representatives from EM. We will also have a representative from SHP Aviation, National Guard Aviation, usually it's the state aviation officer or his or her designee, and we will have one of our two lead HART techs from–from either location, uh, the east or the west, 'cause we got two essentially duty stations that we operate out of. We'll run through the call, we'll decide whether or not it's a viable mission (so, in this case, it's going to be a viable mission), and we will then, uh, begin the process to roster technicians, decide on the airframe that's quickest to respond. Usually, the response time is typically 2 hours to get a crew, um, if they're not there at the facility. Usually, our missions do not happen at 1:00 in the afternoon, they usually happen 8, 9, 10:00 at night, uh, and on the weekends, a lot of cases, so we don't always have crews sitting at the facilities. Um, so, it usually takes about 2 hours to get blades turning, and from there about an hour-ish, hour to get on station, depending on where the aircraft is coming from.

The technicians, uh, are strategically located around the state, so sometimes the technicians will get picked up by the aircraft. If we can launch the aircraft faster, we'll launch the aircraft and we'll pick the technicians up along the way, um, if it's quicker. Sometimes it's quicker to bring the technicians to the aircraft, and they'll launch all together, just kind of depends. That's a case-by-case basis depending on the situation. We'll have an event talk group assigned. We'll head to the–the area. We'll map everything out once the mission's a go, once the mission's approved, it's viable. We'll work through some of the logistical items. We'll head to the–the site. We'll perform the rescue. We will then land. We will offload that individual to the locals, um, you know, the local fire, local EMS, and they will then take, uh, take control of patient care from that point, and our portion of it is complete. Uh, our aircraft will then depart and head back home. Now, that's kind of that's–that's really a high-level–a high-level run-through of a HART mission. Sometimes it can be super complex, and so they can take a little

bit longer sometimes so we can get a good determination. And that is a–that is a blue-sky NC HART mission.

Kirsten: Now that we have the rundown of what it takes to complete a mission, let's hear from Bobby on what it's like to execute one. Um, so, I'm going to ask kind of an unusual question.

Chief Cooper: Okay.

Kirsten: This kind of response activity is not something that visitors or residents of the state of North Carolina may see, if not ever, uh, definitely not on a day-to-day basis. And, uh, while you guys train, um, you know, it's not open for the public to view. Can you give our listeners an idea of what it feels like—since you have been, uh, like you said, on the hoist before—what it feels like to be lowered out of that helicopter mid-air and to pick up an individual and lift them to safety?

Chief Cooper: It's really almost surreal what we get to do, the opportunity that we've been afforded in North Carolina. There's been helicopter rescue has taken place in this country for years. Uh, a lot of it was military-based. There were a few private organizations, especially out west, and then a few emergency services groups that have maybe a local sheriff's department that has a helicopter, something like that, and a few teams that, prior to us, that–that were doing some stuff with–with the military but it has grown so much in–in–in 20 years. Um, and–and the fact that it's not something that we really publicize. But the–the–the fact is that people that we rescue are not charged for our services. Um, that's–that's a–a service that–that's provided by the state through Emergency Management and–and the–the National Guard, uh, but there–there are no charge for–for any–anything that we do. Unless we go outside the state, and if we're requested outside the state, that's through, um, it's called an EMAC. It's an Emergency Management Assistance Compact, and that's a–an agreement between the two states, and still the individual doesn't get billed, but the state would get billed for… And they–they do it on–on a contract. That's, uh, a pretty amazing thing. And then just all the different, like I said, all the different elements working together, uh, s-subject matter e-experts from all these different organizations coming together really, really makes that work well.

Kirsten: It wouldn't be an episode of the Safety Scoop without me asking for success stories. All three of our guests have memorable missions to share that speak to the effectiveness and skill of this team. We'll start with Mike. So, Mike, I'd like to hear about a memorable moment or Mission while you were part of the flight crew for HART.

Mike: Yeah, I, uh, I have a pretty good mission. Um, one Saturday, um, we received a call. It was later, uh, in the afternoon, and a gentleman had rolled his four-wheeler, broken his back. It was going to take the ground crews a long time to–to transport him out, and it was going to cause him a lot of pain. So, the mission was approved. It was myself and Colonel Collins. We were flying on the mission. Uh, we had, uh, Jerry Gilliam was our crew chief. We picked up, uh, two rescue

techs in, uh, Raleigh which is where we're based, and we flew out to, uh, around the Linville Gorge area. We were wearing night-vision goggles. We, uh, we dropped off our rescue techs, hoisted them down to the site location after it took us a couple minutes to find him. More difficult at night to locate somebody in–in trees. They finished packaging him up in the, uh, litter. We hoisted him out, and it didn't, uh, it–it take too long. It was probably 10 minutes, maybe 15, for us to, uh, to get everything getting back in the, uh, in the aircraft. And then we just took him a couple miles over to a campground where we, uh, we moved in from our aircraft and put him in a, uh, MEDEVAC aircraft. And, uh, that was that. That was it. It was real rewarding and, uh, I'm definitely glad that we were able to do it.

Kirsten: Chris shares next.

Chris: Oh man, the most memorable one off the top of my head, we were working a winter storm across the state. We were activated here in the EOC, and there were two college, uh, gentlemen, and, uh, they went out hiking out in the western part of the state. The weather was moving in a lot faster. They were not dressed to hike. I want to say shorts and t-shirts and, you know, tennis shoes type of thing, and they were not going to make it out of there before the–the snowstorm hit. Um, the Highway Patrol, they were on scene with their–with, at the time, they had the–the OH-58, um, helicopter that was used as a, uh, as, uh, essentially a scout aircraft or a, uh, a, uh, FLIR-style aircraft. It had thermal imaging onboard the aircraft. And they use that for law enforcement missions, for–for tracking people if they needed to, criminals, that kind of thing, to support law enforcement activities. But they were out there, uh, on the search, uh, and they found these individuals. They found these two boys. They located them. They–they found them on–on FLIR, on the IR camera. And, uh, they stayed with them overhead.

Uh, they, uh, started getting low, the Highway Patrol started getting low on fuel, and there happened to be a LUH-72 Lakota, one of the–the MEP aircraft. It's one of the multi-use aircraft. It wasn't a HART aircraft, per se, but it was a MEP aircraft that has a bunch of the FLIR cameras on board. And they came in and actually became, uh, the eyes and ears, uh, from the Patrol, when the Patrol went, uh, went low on fuel and had to go back to the airport to refuel. At that time, we realized that it was a viable NC HART mission. They were not going to get those boys out of there before the–the weather rolled in. We launched a UH-60 out of Salisbury, in front of the weather and, uh, ended up pulling–going out there and performing the rescue. It's actually all filmed. You probably can find it on YouTube.

They performed the rescue. We actually ended up pulling up the two boys and ended up pulling up the four mountain–four or five Mountain Rescue team members that actually went out there to locate them, um, because of where they were at. Pulled all five of the–the Mountain Rescue team members out, as well, and, uh, and then brought them back to the Asheville Airport, um, where they were–they were treated and taken care of. So, it–it really demonstrated

the–the capability of the program wasn't planned that way, but it was–it was really awesome to get to see all the agencies come together as one, uh, like we've been–like we've been doing it for years. So, uh, it was pretty exciting. That probably happened back in 2019, maybe? But that was one of the more memorable missions. It was really cool, uh, cool to see everybody came together, uh, as a program. Um, it didn't really matter what patch you wore on your–on your shirt or on your uniform, um, it was like we've been doing it for years.

Kirsten: And here is Bobby's story. Do you have a story that you can share with our listeners? And I know you have 20 years of experience to pull from.

Chief Cooper: Yeah, and I–I've–I've been on quite a number of–of different types of–of rescues. Um, I, one of the most memorable was actually not very far from my house, a place in Marion in Jackson County called Paradise Falls. We actually had two missions there within a week. Uh, the first one I was actually out of town, and the second one was a week later, and–and it was at night. And it was a, I believe it was a 20-year-old female that–that fell off of a waterfall and actually broke her back, um, and we went at night and–and got her out. She was a–a local college student, 'cause this was a–a popular spot for the college students in that area. And rescued her at–at night, got everybody out safely.

Again, she did suffer a back injury but about a year later, uh, WLOS which is the local news station out of Asheville did a–did a follow-up story, and–and interviewed her, and she was–she had recovered and–and doing very well. Uh, so, those are–those are the kind of things that, uh, that really make a difference. And–and it–that's–that's something that's pretty common in most emergency services is a lot of times you don't know the–the outcome of–of the people that you rescue in a situation like this or as a–as a first responder or firefighter that, you know, that you go to on any type of call, a lot of times you don't know the outcome of it. Just to hear an outcome like that, that's–that's a pretty neat thing t-to hear because not–not all of the ones that, the–the rescues that we do are, um… In other words there are some, we do do some recoveries of some body recoveries in certain situations, so to have a positive outcome on something like that and actually hear about it, uh, that's–that's always a really good thing to know about.

[Pause]

Conclusion

[Theme music]

Kirsten: This is the Safety Scoop, a podcast written, produced and edited by the NCDPS communications team. The mission of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety is to safeguard and preserve the lives and property of the people of North Carolina through preparation, prevention and protection with

integrity and honor. Follow the department on social media for a closer look at ongoing initiatives and resources. We’re on Facebook, X and Instagram at NC Public Safety. If you enjoyed today's episode, be sure to subscribe to the Safety Scoop on your favorite podcast app. I'm your host, Kirsten Barber. Thanks for listening.

[Theme music]