



# Not for the fainthearted

**E**mergency rescue helicopter work is a team game that puts dedicated crews into difficult and complex situations.

While the aircrew is responsible for the retrieval and management of patients, it is the pilot's skill at the controls that makes the mission possible says Mark Kempton, Base Manager of the Brisbane EMQ Rescue helicopter.

"Much of our work demands very precise flying in very difficult conditions," Mark says.

"You can be flying at night, through cloud, in rain, with lightning going off around you and can't see a single thing. At that time you are totally reliant on your instruments to tell you that there's not a mountain right in front of you."

Even a typical rescue operation can involve maneuvering the helicopter inside highly confined spaces.

"Frequently we'll be tasked to retrieve a person who has fallen off a cliff face or is trapped on the ledge of a mountain," Mark said.

"During such a rescue, the rotor blades of the helicopter may be only three or four metres from a large tree or the cliff face itself.

"If the pilot does not stay steady on the controls and the aircraft moves

slightly in the wrong direction, an entire helicopter can be destroyed in an instant and so can everyone on board."

EMQ Rescue helicopter pilot David Given says the most important thing for him to remember in complicated situations is to stay calm.

"You can't be tense when you're in a hover and you're winching – you've got to be relaxed. Once you start tensing up you risk over-controlling the aircraft. If you stay calm you can think a lot better."

Mark agrees, saying highly skilled pilots are those who can maintain a presence of mind.

The success of each mission hinges on the ability of the crew to effectively carry out what is often regarded as a series of routine checks. A system that also ensures the pilot receives crucial information about what is in their surroundings.

"During a winching exercise for example, pilots require incredible skill to keep the aircraft in a rock-steady hover," Mark explains.

"But that rock-steady hover is based around what the winch operator is telling the pilot he can see.

"If we're out to sea and there's a lot of movement in the water, the pilot is physically moving the controls but he is

ultimately reliant on what the aircrew officer is telling him."

This can prove immensely difficult in circumstances where a great deal is happening in a short space of time.

EMQ Rescue pilot Phil Frost insists, "Often you need to be able to switch off from the other things that are going on around you, so that you can concentrate purely on the flying."

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