

Elliott Simpson
Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
Aviation Safety, WPR

Date: February 21, 2022

Subject: WPR22FA101

Contact: Andrew Belden

Mr Belden is a trained lifeguard.

He was inside a boat about 75ft-100 ft from the end of a dock within the bay.

He heard what he initially thought was a drone, then a split second later realized it was too loud.

He ran outside and watched for 3-4 seconds what appeared by color to be a police helicopter coming down. He had never heard a helicopter that loud before because it was so close.

It banked hard and hit the water with a large splash.

He immediately took off his clothes and ran to the nearest dock to the crash site and dived into the water.

Within between 30-60 seconds of impact the pilot floated to the surface. He looked shocked and expressed concern for the co-pilot, stating that he was still in the helicopter.

Mr Belden attempted to move the pilot to another small boat, but he was too heavy, so he told the Skipper of the boat to hold him. He asked for a pair of fins, and was given them, along with the pilot's spare air bottle. The pilot stated there may be 4-5 breaths left in the bottle.

He headed out to the helicopter and dived in multiple times; visibility was about 20 inches.

He pulled a door handle 90° and it opened. He thought he found a leg, but it was a tactical bag that came loose. He asked the pilot where it came from, he replied that he should go to the other side of the helicopter.

Fire crew began to arrive, but they did not have the resources he needed such as a mask or flashlight. He was offered a window punch.

By this time the spare air bottle was empty. Once more fire crew arrived, they found the co-pilot half out of the left window and his leg appeared to be stuck on something, although he was already unbuckled. They pushed him back in, and then he came out easily. He was not breathing but did not show any signs of trauma. His helmet was on.

He estimates it took about 20 minutes to remove the pilot after the time of the crash.

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Contact: Jimmy Strack, Newport Beach Fire Department

After arriving on scene, he found Andrew Belden who has lifeguard experience, already in the water.

Mr Strack got into the water to assist. There were multiple people by this time in the water, all diving under and kicking each other with no results finding the co-pilot.

He then tied a rope around the tailboom of the helicopter and attached it to the lifeguard truck to pull it closer to the shore. They pulled it clear, and now with a flashlight they could see the co-pilots helmet. The left door was closed, but the window had broken out. It was hard to see the co-pilot because his uniform was the same color as the water, but they eventually saw him half out of the window.

They pulled him, but his leg was stuck, so they pushed him back in and moved his leg and he came free. He was not tangled, but rather hung up on something within the structure.

The co-pilots helmet cord and seatbelt were already disconnected, and nobody reported disconnecting them him during the recovery. His flight suit and helmet were on.