

November 20, 2024



Bristow's Newquay Search and Rescue team scoops prestigious award for perilous rescue

LONDON, 20 November, 2024 — Bristow Group Inc. (NYSE: VTOL), the global leader in innovative and sustainable vertical flight solutions, takes great pride in sharing that Winch Paramedic, Carlton Real and Winch Operator, Jason Bibby of Search and Rescue (SAR) helicopter Rescue 924, based at Newquay, U.K., are recipients of the 2024 Billy Deacon SAR Memorial Trophy.

Bibby and Real were presented with the award by Vice Admiral Sir Tim Laurence at the Air League's Annual Reception Ceremony at the House of Commons London on 19 November 2024, recognising outstanding performance in dangerous circumstances during a rescue in 2023.

They were joined at the ceremony by Captain Jörg Brunner and Captain Debdash Bhattacharya who were piloting the aircraft during the rescue.

Presenting the award, Vice Admiral Laurence applauded Bibby's and Real's "Superb skill and teamwork in the most difficult of circumstances, when precision and communication were key."

Bristow's UK SAR Director, Graham Hamilton said: "The crew's actions that day are testament to their professionalism, determination, and teamwork. Without their commitment to saving and protecting lives, the outcome could have been very different. We are enormously proud of them, just as we are of all the men and women who contribute to saving lives across the U.K., every day."

On the evening of 22 May, 2023, the team were tasked to reports of a man and a woman who had been cut off by the tide and swept into a cave, where they became trapped by rough seas and breaking waves.

Arriving at the scene just six minutes after take off, the helicopter crew were met by a challenging and confusing situation. They couldn't see the trapped pair although the local Cliff Rescue Team (CRT), who had been attempting to reach them, could hear their cries for help from inside the cave.

The CRT floated a line into the cave and suddenly the man appeared in the water at the mouth of the cave, gripping onto the rope in the rolling surf.

The CRT began pulling him towards safety, but the relentless, pounding waves dislodged his grip and he lost the line. Seeing the situation suddenly escalate, the helicopter crew, who were hovering overhead, swung into action.

Winch Paramedic Real was lowered towards the man, but the nearby cliffs, thrashing surf and poor conditions made the safe winching operation a difficult task for the whole team. The man was being tumbled around, vanishing from view only to reappear in a different location. But with calm and careful teamwork, the crew were finally able to position Real close enough to make contact with him.

But the sea conditions meant Real was being repeatedly engulfed by the waves and submerged in the surf, making it impossible for him to attach a rescue strop to the casualty. Real's only option was to grab hold of the man and, when he had a firm grip, the helicopter began to tow them both out of the waves toward calmer waters.

However, the waves continued to batter and pound the two and, despite all his efforts, Real's grip was broken. Thankfully the man was washed close to the CRT, who managed to grab him and pull him to safety on nearby rocks.

But the event was far from over.

On being winched back to the aircraft, Real, clearly exhausted and suffering from inhaling sea water, was provided with oxygen. As he tried to regain his breathing, reports from the CRT came in that the casualty was deteriorating rapidly and needed to be rushed to the hospital. Without consideration for his own condition, Real immediately volunteered to be lowered down again to bring the casualty onboard so he could be flown to the hospital for emergency care.

Real carried out a textbook winch transfer, and soon the man was enroute to the hospital. Real was also assessed by the team and, clearly in need of medical attention, he too was transferred to an ambulance on arrival at the local emergency department.

The crew of Rescue 924 were replaced at the scene by another helicopter, however the remaining casualty couldn't be reached and, as their cries stopped, rescuers feared the worse. It wasn't until several hours later, as the tide receded, that they were able to reach her. Thankfully she was still alive and was rapidly flown to the hospital to be treated for hypothermia.

Summary from the award nomination:

"The crew of R924 was on-scene for 42 minutes during which they operated with multiple agencies in a physically demanding and emotionally charged environment where lives were clearly in peril. They demonstrated exemplary airmanship, crew-co-operation, tenacity, and skill while maintaining an overview of the situation.

Handling pilot for the rescue and Aircraft Captain Jorg Brunner, flew the aircraft in difficult crosswind conditions, responding accurately to the numerous changes in hover position demanded by the erratic movement of the casualties in the highly dynamic surface environment. He made carefully considered captaincy decisions throughout which balanced the needs and effectiveness of his crew against the demands of an evolving situation.

Captain Debdash Bhattacharya's role in maintaining an overview of aircraft safety and in managing the communications with multiple agencies was key in allowing the rest of the crew to focus on the winching evolutions.

Jason Bibby's management of a complex winching evolution in a confined area with a limited view of the oncoming waves was faultless. His measured and calm approach allowed the aircraft to be placed accurately over the ever-changing surface in order to allow the Winchman to maintain a physical hold of the casualty during a critical period that led to his rescue.

Winchman - Paramedic Carlton Real retained the power of veto throughout the rescue and demonstrated the level of professionalism and courage beyond that which we have come to expect of those who regularly put themselves in harm's way to help others. The true measure of his bravery and selflessness came to light when, despite his own considerable physical distress, he drew on whatever reserves he had left to lift the casualty from the rocky bluff at the request of the CRT. Furthermore, his focus on tending to the casualty during the transit to the hospital, effectively ignoring his own debilitated physical condition and high levels of exhaustion, demonstrated his mental fortitude and dedication to his medical craft."

Information about the award

The Billy Deacon SAR Memorial Trophy is awarded for meritorious service during SAR helicopter operations.

Sponsored by Bristow Helicopters, the trophy was established in memory of Mr. Billy Deacon, winchman for Bristow, who was tragically lost while carrying out his duty on behalf of the HM Coastguard search and rescue (SAR) helicopter based at Sumburgh in Shetland in 1997.

It was in November 1997, that the merchant vessel Green Lily got into difficulties in extreme weather conditions, hurricane force 12, with 15 crewmembers on board. With the vessel foundering, five crewmembers were taken off by the Lerwick Lifeboat, a feat honoured by the coxswain receiving the RNLI'S Gold Medal, its highest award for gallantry, often referred to as the lifeboatmen's VC. As the Lifeboat was unable to recover the rest of the crew, and with the Green Lily very close to the rocky shoreline, the remaining crew had to rely on the SAR helicopter for rescue.

In mountainous seas, Billy was winched down to the deck of the vessel. Once on board he placed the remaining crewmembers, two at a time, in the rescue strops and they were all winched to the safety of the helicopter. As the helicopter was in the process of recovering Billy, who was alone on the deck and with the ship now on the rocks, he was washed overboard and engulfed by the waves.

In recognition of Billy's outstanding courage and bravery in the most severe and demanding conditions, he was posthumously awarded the George Medal.

About Bristow Group

Bristow Group Inc. is the leading global provider of innovative and sustainable vertical flight solutions. Bristow primarily provides aviation services to a broad base of offshore energy companies and government entities. The Company's aviation services include personnel transportation, search and rescue ("SAR"), medevac, fixed-wing transportation, uncrewed air systems and ad hoc helicopter services.

Bristow currently has customers in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, the Dutch Caribbean, the Falkland Islands, India, Ireland, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Spain, Suriname, Trinidad, the UK, and the U.S. To learn more, visit our website at www.bristowgroup.com.



Winch Operator Jason Bibby and Winch Paramedic, Carlton Real (centre with their award), together with Captain Jörg Brunner (far left) and Captain Debdash Bhattacharya (far right), who were piloting the aircraft during the winning operation.



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