

Helicopter logging – Part 3

A Pilot's Life at Risk

Helicopter tree sawing is inherently hazardous. A helicopter operating at a height of around 30 metres can quickly get into serious trouble if the wind changes unexpectedly or if the aircraft suffers a technical failure. In emergency situations, the pilot can release the saw, reducing the suspended load and often restoring control of the helicopter.

Jukka Salmela recalls one such incident:

"There was one occasion when the wind suddenly changed direction while Timo was flying. He managed to recover the situation by guiding the saw against a tree, which also helped stabilise the helicopter."

For Timo Ylittervo, however, changing wind conditions have never been the greatest concern. In 2015, he nearly lost his life because of a technical failure.

At the time, Ylittervo was working for Heliwest Oy, carrying out a reconnaissance flight in Corsica. The purpose of such flights is to identify future tree-trimming sites and any potential hazards before sawing operations begin.

On board with him was a 21-year-old passenger who had flown in a helicopter only twice before. During the flight, the helicopter suddenly lost engine power. The aircraft fell from a height of approximately 30 metres, crashed into the ground and caught fire.

The young passenger suffered a fractured skull and permanent brain injuries.

Ylittervo fractured his spine and spent eight months recovering at home. The spinal injury also caused damage to his nervous system.

After leaving hospital, he returned to work in the mountainous terrain of Corsica. Flying no longer felt the same.

"When I returned, memories of the accident came flooding back. I was alone in the helicopter, and for the first time in years I felt afraid while flying. Returning to the crash site forced me to confront the trauma the accident had left behind."

The most likely cause of the accident was later believed to have been a fuel leak.

A Powerful Marketing Tool

Jukka Salmela considers the helicopter saw to have been Verkonrakennus Oy's most significant innovation. This was not primarily because of the income generated by vegetation management work, but because of the enormous attention the machine attracted.

The helicopter's long boom fitted with multiple circular saw blades was an extraordinary sight, generating widespread media interest. As a result, Verkonrakennus Oy gained access to major electricity network projects even during Finland's severe economic recession of the early 1990s.

The publicity created by the helicopter saw also helped the company promote its other services. Employees throughout the organisation took part in marketing and frequently featured the saw in promotional material. International projects and cooperation with government authorities soon became part of the company's everyday business.

As Salmela summarises:

"Even if helicopter sawing had never earned us a single cent, it was the key that opened every door. It enabled us to expand internationally and secure major projects despite the recession. Helicopter sawing was our spearhead."

<u>Mitä Verkonrakennus Oy:sta seurasi?</u> Verkonrakennus Oy:ta ei koskaan varsinaisesti lakkautettu, mutta erilaisissa yritysliitoksissa se oli lopulta purettava. Yksinkertaistettuna Verkonrakennus Oy:sta seurasi: Verkonrakennus Oy 1990-1996 → Suomen Voimatekniikka Oy 1994-2003 (tässä liitoksessa mukana Vattenfall Oy, TVO Teollisuuden Voimansiirto Oy, Fortum Sähkönjakelu Oy jne.) → Länsitec Oy 1997-2002 → Eltel Networks Oy 1999 → Linjanraivauksia suorittavia yrityksiä on nykyäänkin vain muutama Suomessa. Helikopteriavusteisia työmenetelmiä kehitellään edelleen. Uusimpana ideana on lintupallojen asennus.	<u>Millä tavoin Suomi kehitti latvasahausta?</u> Eltel Networks Oy ja Forest Oy kehittivät vuonna 2003 Heligrip 220-latvasahan, joka oli uusi helikopteriavusteinen raivausmenetelmän suurjännitejohdoille. Laitteen giljotiiniterä katkaisee rungon tiettyssä kulmassa, ja maanomistaja voi käydä kaatamassa hänelle sopivana aikana katkaistut puut. Ideana on tehdä johtokatu puuvarmaksi. Verkonrakennus Oy:n Jorma Ahvenlampi sai latvasahaan myös patentteja.
	<u>Miten Paimio liittyy tähän kaikkeen?</u> Verkonrakennus Oy työllisti 66 työntekijää, joista Paimiossa oli 40. Paimio oli Lounais-Suomen Sähkö Oy:n pääkonttori, Verkonrakennus Oy:n pääkonttori, Länsivoima Oy:n pääkonttori, Länsitec Oy:n pääkonttori sekä Fortum Sähkönjakelu Oy:n pääkonttori. Myös Eltel Networks Oy:n yksi nykyisistä toimipisteistä sijaitsee Paimiossa.

This article is based on interviews with Jukka Salmela and Timo Ylittervo.

Jukka Salmela served as Managing Director of Verkonrakennus Oy from 1990 to 1996. By 2005, he had also served as Managing Director of Länsitec Oy and Fortum Electricity Distribution Oy (Paimio). He is now retired.

Timo Ylittervo worked as a helicopter pilot for Verkonrakennus Oy and its successor companies until 2013. He then helped establish Heliwest Oy, a company specialising in demanding helicopter operations for the energy sector. Thanks to its experienced personnel, Heliwest is regarded as Europe's most experienced helicopter tree-sawing company. Ylittervo continues to fly helicopter saw missions today.