

Helicopter Logging – Part 2

Timo Ylittervo Takes the Controls

Pilot Timo Ylittervo joined Verkonrakennus Oy in 1992 to help install electricity poles along a new motorway. Having flown helicopters since the age of 17, Ylittervo was employed by Häkkinen Oy, from which Verkonrakennus had hired both the helicopter and its pilot. His skill in helicopter-assisted pole installation impressed the company so much that he was invited to try helicopter tree sawing.

Ylittervo was sent to Sweden to train as a helicopter saw pilot. The training lasted just under a week and included practising a variety of manoeuvres with both external suspended loads and the saw itself. Today, helicopter saw pilots typically complete around six times as many training hours as pilots did during the 1990s.

Former Verkonrakennus Oy Managing Director Jukka Salmela recalls that Ylittervo showed a natural talent for helicopter sawing from the very beginning. Even so, he remembers the first demonstration flight with mixed feelings:

"After just one hour of sawing, Timo was soaked in sweat and completely exhausted. Even from the ground, the operation looked incredibly demanding. Two years later, when an Australian television crew came to film helicopter sawing, I watched Timo after the flight again. He looked as relaxed as I do behind the wheel of my car on a quiet Sunday drive."

Ylittervo himself agrees with Salmela's description of that first experience:

"It was terrifying. It had been a month and a half since my training in Sweden, and I suddenly had to demonstrate helicopter sawing in front of representatives of the electricity company. But I quickly discovered what made the work so rewarding. If you enjoy a challenge, this is definitely the right job."

"Like Flying a Fighter Jet"

Until around the turn of the millennium, Timo Ylittervo was the only helicopter saw pilot in Finland. Across the Nordic countries, there were only three pilots performing this type of work during the 1990s. According to Salmela, even today it remains difficult to find pilots suited to the task.

"Professional pilots tend to have two very different opinions about this kind of flying, but very few are actually willing to do it."

So what makes helicopter tree sawing so demanding?

First and foremost, helicopter flying itself must be second nature. Throughout the operation, the pilot must concentrate entirely on the saw suspended beneath the aircraft. This creates particularly challenging working conditions, as the pilot watches the saw through the open

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doorway and cannot see the horizon. Instead, they must instinctively judge the helicopter's height to ensure that the saw never touches the ground.

Looking down through the lower window while sitting in a twisted position also places considerable strain on the body. As the now 59-year-old Ylitervo remarks:

"My back doesn't really cope with saw flying anymore."

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Sirkkeliyksikkö kulkee lyhyet matkat kätevimmin helikopteriin kiinnitettynä. Kun lähdetään kokonaan uudelle alueelle, kulkee 400-kiloinen polttomoottorisirkkeli uuden tilaajan alueelle autossa.

Ei kenen tahansa tunarin oksasaha

Ulkopuolinen kuorma vaikuttaa helikopterilla lentämistä tuntuvasti. **Timo Ylitervo** oppi lannoituslentoilla, miten kopteriin kiinnitetty paino vaikuttaa koneen hallintaa. Nyt taidoista on hyöttyä todella uudella alalla, sillä Ylitervo leikkaa helikopteriin kiinnitetyllä kymmen-teräisellä sirkkelillä vaarallisia oksia pois sähkölinjojen välittömästä läheisyydestä.

Maanantaina ja tiistaina Ylitervon lentämä Verkonrakennus Oy:n kopteri pyöri Luumäellä, viime viikolla Loviisan lähistöllä. Kerran ajettua linjaa ei tarvitse käsitellä seuraavana eikä vielä sitä seuraavanakaan vuonna, mutta yritys uskoo silti markkinoita riittävän yhdelle yksikölle.

Tilastojen mukaan jopa 80 prosenttia sähkön jakeluhäiriöistä johtuu lumen tai myrskyn taivuttelemista oksista. Niiden leikkaaminen pitkillä sahoilla maasta käsin auttaa, mutta on hidasta. Lisäksi linjojen päälle, sahan ulottumattomiin jäävät oksat ovat riski nekin, jos lunta tulee äkkiä paljon.

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A second essential requirement is sustained concentration. Pilots must constantly follow operational instructions while remaining fully aware of aviation regulations and surrounding air traffic. Today, many electricity companies prepare digital vegetation management maps, allowing pilots to monitor completed sections of the route in real time using a tablet computer.

A third requirement is natural aptitude. Salmela recalls an occasion when the Swedish company Helimatic tested a highly experienced pilot with more than 10,000 flying hours. Although the pilot had no difficulty lifting the saw or flying with it, he was unable to lower it safely back into its transport frame. Eventually, the saw had to be set down in a nearby field.

For this reason, helicopter saw pilots are selected primarily on the basis of their suitability for the task.

"Just like fighter pilots," Salmela adds.

The comparison is fitting not only because of the skills required but also because of the aircraft itself. The Hughes/McDonnell Douglas 500 helicopter used for helicopter sawing was originally developed in 1963 for military operations during the Vietnam War.

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