

QUICK FACTS

Terry Palmer

Airborne Public Safety
Association
Frederick, Maryland

CURRENT JOB

I manage training programs for the Airborne Public Safety Association. I also chair HAI's Training Working Group, serve on the board of the Commission on Accreditation of Medical Transport Systems (CAMTS), write articles for trade publications, and speak at various aviation industry events.

FIRST AVIATION JOB

I started taking flight lessons in the 1980s but couldn't find a stable flight school, so I sold the robotics company I owned and opened one. I was driven by the strong desire to be part of aviation.

FAVORITE HELICOPTER

I don't think I have a favorite. They all play an important role in some operation, but I do fondly remember training in the Bell 206L-4 LongRanger and the BK 117.

How did you decide helicopter aviation was the career for you?

Aviation captured my imagination when I was a small girl. I used to watch airplanes from my yard in Colonia, New Jersey. Some days we were under the flight path for landing at Newark Liberty International Airport (KEWR), 25 miles away.

I shocked my parents when I said, "When I grow up, I want to stop airplanes from crashing." I remember family members saying, "Girls don't do that." As a teen, I discovered the world of radio-control model aviation. I flew models and went to industry events, becoming a contest director for the Academy of Model Aeronautics. I didn't become a pilot until the late 1980s.

How did you get to your current position?

My first career was building and operating robots and special effects. Some of my clients were Walt Disney, Universal Studios, Siemens, IBM, and Kraft. During my flight-school days, I managed to get my ratings and fly many types of aircraft. When I sold the school, I went to



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work for Omniflight Helicopters, where I managed training programs, developed training material, and specialized in human factors and crew resource management (CRM). I traveled to air medical operations around the country and taught at various industry events.

I've been involved in safety and training most of my aviation career. Clark Kurschner, when he was Omniflight's director of operations, taught me the importance of human-factors/CRM training, and FlightSafety International taught me the value of scenario-based training in simulators to prevent accidents. I spent several decades working on



As chair of HAI's Training Working Group, Terry often works with HAI staff members (from left) Zac Noble, director of flight operations and maintenance; Greg Brown, director of education and training services; and Chris Hill, senior director of safety. (Terry Palmer Photo)

committees and attending safety meetings, often presenting human-factors training at the Airborne Law Enforcement Association's conferences. Now rebranded as the Airborne Public Safety Association (APSA), the organization provided me the opportunity to bring training resources to the public safety sector, which was the motivation for me to take my current position with APSA as its training program manager.

What are your career goals?

In many ways, I have met and exceeded my career goals. My goal now is to continue to bring training and safety resources to aviation. I just want my tombstone to say "I made a difference."

What advice would you give someone pursuing your path?

Never give up. You can do anything you set your mind to. I didn't know where my career path would take me. I believe it's important not to focus on a narrow path, but to open your mind to all the career paths available and recognize that your vision and goals may change.

Who inspires or has inspired you?

There are so many people and organizations that have inspired me that I couldn't possibly name them all.

HAI, the International Helicopter Safety Team, CAMTS [the Commission on Accreditation of Medical Transport Systems], and FlightSafety International inspired me to pursue a goal focused on safety and training. Robert Sumwalt, former chair of the NTSB [US National Transportation Safety Board], inspired me to continue to make a difference. Eileen Frazer, CAMTS's executive director, taught me the value of accreditation. Larry Mattiello [director of aviation at The Loomis Co.] showed me how the insurance industry can support training. Dennis Pierce, pilot and founder of Colorado Heli-Ops, inspired me to work with flight schools to mentor students and help them define a career path. John Frasca, CEO of Frasca

International, showed me that the simulator providers can develop resources for the small operator. The most inspiring was my late husband, Juan Serrato. He was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam and spent his career flying in many types of operations. He was a wealth of knowledge and encouraged me every day to continue to search for solutions to challenges.

What still excites you about helicopter aviation?

What excites me most about helicopter aviation are the people who will continue to make the industry safer. The volunteers who serve on industry committees and working groups are a good example. They develop resources and identify solutions that improve both operations and safety. I'm encouraged that industry associations and their staff place a high priority on training and provide training resources and events. The aircraft and technology

manufacturers, as well, have embraced training and simulation.

What challenges you about helicopter aviation?

There are still accidents that could be prevented. Training to proficiency and understanding the importance of preflight planning to include good decisions are critical to preventing accidents. The shortage of pilots, mechanics, and instructors is also critical. It directly affects both operations and training.

Complete this sentence: I know I picked the right career when ...

... I started to see the significant changes in the industry that embraced training. When I started my aviation career, there were only a few helicopter simulators. Now, the use of technology in training including simulation, spatial disorientation, and Web-based resources is standard. 



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