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HAI is proud to announce this year's Igor I. Sikorsky Award for Humanitarian Service recipient, the Crew of Helicopter ER-MHH from Heli Harvest Ltd. On March 17, 2006, six wildlife rangers from the Department of Conservation were trapped after a volcanic eruption on Raoul Island, located in northern New Zealand. An earthquake accompanied the blast. Without hesitating, the Crew of Helicopter ER-MHH went straight into rescue mode.

After installing long-range tanks to their ER-MHH helicopter, the crew set out flying five hours, 1,000 kilometers across the South Pacific Ocean. They were piloting a Mi-8MTV-1 helicopter, a large twin-engine Russian manufactured helicopter, one of few helicopters in New Zealand with enough operational capability to attempt such a rescue mission.

When the crew arrived, they conducted an aerial surveillance within the active crater area, located the trapped rangers, secured a landing spot, and hoisted the five survivors to safety. The crew then flew the survivors back to New Zealand that same night.

The Heli Harvest crew showed tremendous bravery and a calm demeanor during an extremely stressful situation. This assignment was far from their day job, which consists of harvesting 11,000-pound logs, firefighting, and construction work in New Zealand and throughout the Australasian region. The five crewmembers include, pilots, Alexey Ostapenko and John Funnell, flight engineer, Oleg Pazynitch, engineer, Alexander Ivlev, and crewman, Senior Constable Barry Shepherd. The rescued rangers are alive today because this extraordinary team worked together as one. Congratulations to the crew for a job well done.

All winners were recognized at HELI-EXPO 2007's annual "Salute to Excellence" Awards Celebration on March 2, 2007 at 8:00 p.m. in Orlando, Florida. For more information about the 2007 "Salute to Excellence" Awards Celebration, contact HAI's Communications Department at 703-683-4646, fax: 703-683-4745, or email: rotor@rotor.com. For more information on HELI-EXPO 2007, visit www.heliexpo.com.