

After Action Report

Operation Helo: Initial Deployment – Kerrville, Texas

Date Range: July 5 - 7, 2025

Location: Faith Academy, Burnet County, Texas

Prepared By: Natasha Rodriguez

Mission Overview

On the morning of July 5, 2025, Operation Helo received an official request for assistance from Burnet County, Texas, following a catastrophic flood that had devastated multiple communities. Within 34 minutes of initial contact, Operation Helo confirmed deployment and had boots on the ground within hours. Over the next 48 hours, the Operation Helo team completed more than 100 flight missions, providing real-time support to local emergency services. This mission successfully integrated a civilian nonprofit aviation team with an official emergency management infrastructure.

Deployment Timeline

July 4, 2025 – 1:19 PM

Jack Bailey (Operation Helo consultant and partner) contacted Operations Director, Natasha Rodriguez, with a heads-up about emerging needs in Texas. He had received a communication from Robinson Helicopter.

July 4, 2025 – 6:30 PM

ADVON Team (Natasha Rodriguez, Operations Director, and Jose, Logistics Lead) departs for Texas.

July 4, 2025 – 8:30 PM

ADVON Team arrives in San Antonio.

July 5, 2025 – 8:37 AM

Operation Helo receives a request from Burnet County.

July 5, 2025 – 9:11 AM

Deployment confirmed and team en route.

July 5, 2025 – 11:00 AM

ADVON arrives at the Burnet County Command Post. Air operations had already started, and they continued throughout the day and into the following day.

July 6, 2025 – 1:30 AM

Tommy Daniels, Operation Helo Chief of Technology, arrives in the area to assist with tech and support; deploys with the team at 6:00 AM and remains on mission until noon on July 6.

Operational Highlights

- **Flight Missions Completed:** 101+ in under 48 hours
- **Mission Focus:** Search & rescue grid ops, evacuations, transport of SAR teams, route recon, LZ identification
- **Operational Coordination:** Direct collaboration with Burnet County, local Fire Departments, EMS, Police, National Guard, and Sheriff's Office
- **Airspace & Drone Coordination:**
 - Operation Helo was officially cleared to fly National Guard personnel through their chain of command
 - Our team was monitoring the drones for situational awareness while maintaining strict coordination to prevent conflicts with active air assets. Ensuring the safety of flight operations was our top priority, particularly when managing helicopter landings and extractions. Landing zones (LZs) and surrounding airspace must remain clear and controlled during active aviation operations to allow for rapid, safe deployment of personnel and resources
- **TEXSAR Support:**
 - We had a cadaver K9 team that needed to be inserted into Bravo sector for some assistance. We were very willing to transport in the helicopters and had pilots who had done that kind of transport before. The rain proved to be a huge hindrance to being able to fly them in. They ultimately were inserted via vehicle and then hiked in.
- **Recon Assets:**
 - Pilots identified submerged vehicles and inaccessible terrain, allowing search crews to be deployed directly to key areas

- **Command & Integration:**
 - Helo provided assist-mode support, not full command. We deployed tech and aviation resources to amplify the county's existing response, without overstepping.
-

Strengths & Outcomes

What Worked

- **Proximity to Incident = Higher Throughput:**

Being close to the LZs allowed for rapid aircraft turnaround and mission volume that would not have been possible from a distant base.
 - **Rapid Mobilization:**

From first phone call to ADVON airborne: just over 5 hours.
 - **Strong Relationships:**

Burnet County's request and trust in Operation Helo validates our model: deploy only when invited, assisting the local leadership.
 - **Tech Resilience:**

Despite operating out of a rental truck in the rain for the first few hours until a formal command post could be established, our tech held strong. GIS coordination and real-time mapping delivered real results.
-

Areas for Improvement

- **Pre-Staged ADVON Packs (x3 recommended):**
 - Starlink Mini
 - Laptops & power

- Radios (SAT + VHF) to deploy with pilots and personnel where communications might be limited.
 - Volunteer Pilot Magnets to designate them as volunteer pilots
 - Extra gear: Helo hats, shirts, rain gear
 - **Credentialing:**
We must provide Operation Helo ID badges for team members.
 -
 - **Tech Field Streamlining:**
Systems worked, but the setup time must be faster in the field. Pivot plans needed for fully digital vs. partial paper/grid work if infrastructure is limited.
 - **Internal Comm Structure:**
Clearer protocol needed for notifying the entire team when ADVON is deployed, who is on it, and what mission type it is (Assist vs. Command).
 - **Weather Access:**
Improve field tools for aviation weather, now prioritized for gear planning.
 - **Dual Mission Plans:**
 - *Full Command Deployment*
 - *Assist-Only Mode*
-

Flight Team & Fuel Report

Pilots – July 5

- Brandon (R44)
- Luke (R44)
- Chandler (R44)
- Zach (R44)
- Gary (Bell)

- CJ (R44)

Pilots – July 6

- Brandon (R44)
- Luke (R44)
- Chandler (R44)
- Gary (Bell)
- CJ (R44)
- Shane (Bell)

All pilots flew Robinson R44 aircraft.

- **Total Flights:** ~101 (likely undercounted due to focus on real-time evac in severe conditions, where rain was moving in and we still had people by the river doing searches.
- **Total Fuel Cost:** \$3,726.25
- **Volunteer Status:** All pilots donated their time. Operation Helo covered 100% of the fuel costs.
- **Mission Efficiency:** Aircraft were able to land and take off repeatedly due to proximity, terrain familiarity, and grid management.

Next Steps

- **Credential Issuance:** Immediate design and production of field IDs for staff and pilots.
- **Tech Process Update:**
Define fast-launch, field-optimized versions of all major systems. We need to be able to deploy the tech into the field and have it operate off line or with a SAT phone.

- **Deployment Kit Finalization:**
Assemble and stage ADVON gear packs for rapid response.
-

Final Reflection

Burnet County did an outstanding job. From fire departments to law enforcement to EMS and EOC officials, every department welcomed our team with respect and professionalism. They didn't just allow us to help—they trusted us with their airspace, their crews, and their mission.

This response wasn't just proof that Operation Helo's model works—it's proof that partnership is the future of disaster response.

We're proud to have been invited to assist. And we're committed to refining this system until help and hope arrive with even greater precision, speed, and impact.