



# The Sound of Service

For L.A., It Meant Hope

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COVER



**SALUTE to  
EXCELLENCE**  
POWERED BY VAI

# Honoring the Best in Vertical Aviation

**Every year, through our Salute to Excellence Awards, VAI recognizes a number of outstanding members of the vertical flight community for going above and beyond in their work. Whether in a single instance or throughout a career, these aviation professionals from around the globe remind us to always aim for excellence.**

**On the following pages, VAI celebrates our 2025 honorees for their extraordinary contributions to aviation and the example they set for the entire vertical flight community.**

**Nominations for the 2026 Salute to Excellence Awards, to be celebrated at VERTICON 2026 in Atlanta, will be accepted beginning in June 2025. Visit [verticalavi.org](https://verticalavi.org) for more information.**



# Law Enforcement Award

For contributions to the promotion and advancement of rotorcraft in support of law enforcement activities

## For several days in late May 2022,

multiple months' worth of regional rainfall fell in Brazil's northeast state of Pernambuco. In the state's capital, Recife, and surrounding areas on the Atlantic Ocean, the floods and landslides created catastrophic damage that claimed more than 130 lives and left more than 6,100 people homeless.

On May 28, one of the heaviest rainfall days, the Air Tactical Group of the Public Security Department of Pernambuco State (Grupamento Tático Aéreo de Pernambuco, or GTA) in Recife was grounded due to low visibility, having VFR-only Airbus AS350s and an H125. That morning, a flight nurse ran over to the base from an air ambulance airplane requesting help because the ambulance couldn't make it to the airport through the flooding. After determining they could assist safely, the crew airlifted the critical patient to a hospital.

"That was just the beginning," recalls GTA Assistant Chief Lt. Col. Heitor Martins. "We had to wait about two hours at the hospital for the rain and low ceiling to pass before we returned to base. We called in all our pilots and crews—about 15 people total at the time—to help with rescues to keep our three aircraft flying."

As the rain cleared, a post-apocalyptic landscape of water and mud emerged. Thousands of people were stranded on roofs, in trees, and on isolated high ground.

The GTA started rescuing people, in one case returning time and again to one house with 19 people on the roof. With rescue baskets attached to the aircraft, GTA crews were able to lift 63 people from their roofs in the first few hours. They also assisted firefighters in rescuing thousands more by

guiding and transporting fire department personnel and equipment.

The group's half a dozen pilots and its mechanics and crews worked around the clock, taking short breaks, first rescuing and transporting people to safety and the hospital, then delivering critical food, water, medicine, and other supplies to communities in the hardest-hit areas that had become completely cut off by the destruction. The GTA also partnered with the not-for-profit organization Vizinhos Solidários, delivering additional food, water, clothes, and bedding to isolated communities.

The critical humanitarian work continued for a month as the group's aircraft made up for lost roads and bridges.

"It was very heavy work and unique for our unit," Martins says. "We'd only recently been reorganized from military police to an integrated team of military firefighters, military police, and civil police under the Office of the Secretary of Public Security [Secretaria de Defesa Social] in Pernambuco."

The GTA's work didn't go unnoticed. Due in large part to the group's considerable support during what turned out to be the state's worst natural disaster on record, the GTA received a boost in funding. Its fleet has since grown to three Airbus AS350 B2s, one H125, two H130s, and four airplanes. Additionally, the unit recently took delivery of its first twin-engine IFR helicopter, an Airbus H135.

"The [rainfall] event showed the government how important our unit could be in this type of scenario," Martins says. "We can do much more now with IFR capabilities."

## Air Tactical Group, Public Security Department of Pernambuco State, Brazil

Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil



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