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# The EMS Experience

Saluting those with 20 years or more in EMS

**Les Powell, NREMT-Paramedic, HM-M, CSST, SAPA, RSO, AHA-TCF**



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## **What was your first day on the job in EMS?**

I became an EMT on May 18, 1981, while I was serving in the U.S. Army in the Military Police Traffic Division at Fort Richardson in Alaska. I began flying as a flight medic in September 1981 for the 120th Aviation Search and Rescue Team.

**Do you have 20 years or more in EMS? Do you answer to dino-medic? We're looking for a profile of you! If you're interested, please write Kelly Harrell at [Kelly.harrell@dshs.state.tx.us](mailto:Kelly.harrell@dshs.state.tx.us).**

## **Which services have you worked for over the years?**

Over the past 28 years, I have worked for many groups from Alaska to Louisiana to the Gulf Coast of Texas. These organizations include: 120th Aviation AeroMedical Evacuation/Search and Rescue in Anchorage, Alaska; Three Crosses Ambulance (part-time) in El Paso, Texas; Holston Ambulance Service in Lake Charles, Louisiana; Baton Rouge EMS (part-time) in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; remote medicine paramedic for Medic Systems in Houston; Orange County Ambulance (part-time) in Orange,

Texas; Williams EMS in Beaumont, Texas; TranStar EMS in the Port Arthur/Beaumont/Silsbee area of Texas; Total-Port Arthur Refinery (formerly Fina Oil and Chemical), Gold Star EMS (part-time), and Metro Care EMS (part-time) in Port Arthur, Texas; as emergency response coordinator for Westlake Chemical in Geismar, Louisiana; and Acadian Ambulance (part-time) in Port Arthur, Texas and Gonzales, Louisiana.

## **Why did you get into EMS?**

Johnny and Roy, of course.

... Actually, Hut Riley was really the biggest influence on the beginning of my EMS career. While I was still in high school in 1976, I began volunteering for the DeRidder (Louisiana) Volunteer Fire Department. Riley was an EMT for the City-Parish Rescue, which ran out of the same fire department. He gave me an EMT book and started teaching me. Later, while I was in the military police, I was part of the Traffic Division, and I responded to a lot of accident calls. I was eventually offered an opportunity to attend an EMT class while I was stationed in Alaska, so I did. The rest is history. . . .

## **How has the field changed since you've been in it?**

Vehicles and equipment are changing all the time and now there are lots of options. My first assigned helicopter was a Huey UH-1 in the Army; now the rescue helicopters have air conditioning and are a lot

quieter. Back then a lot of services were still using converted Pontiac hearses or modified “high-top” Suburbans for ambulances, but now you can get a box style with much more room to work. And compare the ancient MRL monitor/defibrillator in it’s heavy aluminum case with today’s 12-leads and AEDs—we were excited just to move up to the LP5 and thought we had gone to heaven when the LP-10 came out.

**Is there a particular moment or call that stands out?**

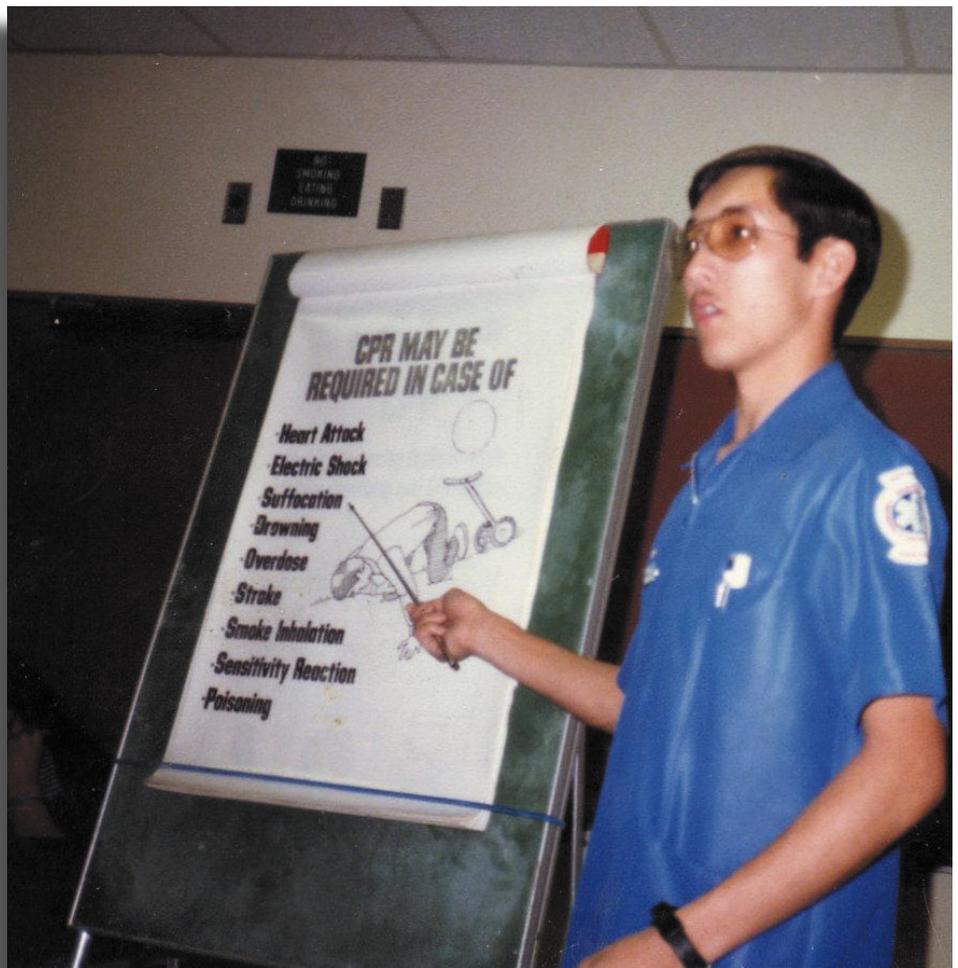
One moment in paramedic clinicals, way before RSI, jumps out: Dr. Marc Pittman told me to intubate a patient, and I said “But Doc he is still awake!”, and he said the patient will be dead if you don’t tube him, so I did. Another time, I was calling in a patient report, and the nurse said over the radio “Does the patient have insurance?—If not, take them some where else!”

But I guess the call that stands out the most would be from August 28, 1990. I responded to an officer down and had to take care of a police officer who had been shot while on duty. He was a friend and fellow volunteer firefighter who died from his injuries two days later.

**What has been your favorite part of your career in EMS?**

Helping people . . . saving lives and teaching emergency medicine: “Helping you, help others!”

*Even the improved versions seem old-fashioned by today’s standards. Powell remembers lugging the hefty MRL monitor/defibrillator (top left and right) and the LP5, but he was the most impressed when the LP-10 came along (lower right).*



*Powell, enjoying the education side of EMS just a few years into his career, leads a class in 1984.*

