

304 RESCUE SQUADRON



MISSION

The peacetime mission of the 304th is to train to achieve and maintain a combat rescue capability; to provide search capability for Department of Defense personnel; to provide rescue support for NASA Manned Space Shuttle operations; to support the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and foreign governments as directed within its capability and to provide humanitarian and disaster relief activities in accordance with the National Search and Rescue plan.

The 304th wartime mission is to provide the capability to perform night, long-range, low level operations in support of combat operations. Mission objective is to provide a combat rescue capability to recover downed aircrew members. HC-130s modified as tankers will perform refueling of combat rescue helicopters as well as operate as command and control centers. During wartime, the 304th will be assigned to Air Combat Command (ACC), Langley Air Force Base, Va., and will execute missions and taskings as directed by ACC.

Included under the command of the 304th are aircrew members consisting of pilots, navigators, flight engineers, loadmasters and radio operators; pararescue personnel; crew chiefs; rotor and fixed-wing operations; intelligence operations and life support equipment and personnel.

LINEAGE

304 Air Rescue Squadron constituted, 24 Oct 1957

Activated in the Reserve, 16 Nov 1957

Redesignated 304 Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, 18 Jan 1966

Redesignated 304 Air Rescue Squadron, 1 Apr 1990

Redesignated 304 Rescue Squadron, 1 Feb 1992

STATIONS

Portland Intl Aprt (later, ANGB), OR, 16 Nov 1957

ASSIGNMENTS

2343 Air Reserve Flying Center, 16 Nov 1957

2346 Air Reserve Flying Center, 1 Dec 1957

2345 Air Reserve Flying Center, 8 Apr 1958

Fourth Air Force, 8 Apr 1960

Sixth Air Force Reserve Region, 1 Sep 1960

Western Air Force Reserve Region, 31 Dec 1969

403 Aerospace Rescue and Recovery (later, 403 Rescue and Weather Reconnaissance) Wing,
15 Mar 1976

939 Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group (later, 939 Air Rescue Wing; 939 Rescue
Wing), 8 Apr 1985

939 Operations Group, 1 Aug 1992

WEAPON SYSTEMS

SA(later, HU)-16, 1958-1971

HH-34, 1971-1976

HH-1, 1976-1991

UH-1, 1979-1987

HC-130, 1985-1997

HH-3, 1986-1992

CH-3, 1987-1992

MH-60, 1991-1992

UH-60, 1991-1993

HH-60, 1992

COMMANDERS

Lt Col Vernon E. Acker, 16 Nov 1957

Lt Col John A. Forsythe, 19 Jan 1959

Lt Col Ross A. Meredith, 1 Feb 1967

Lt Col George W. Crandall, Mar 1967

Col James D. Beall, 26 Mar 1967

Lt Col George W. Crandall, 1 Nov 1967

Lt Col William R. Stack Jr., 21 Jan 1968

Lt Col Daniel R. Hitch, 31 May 1969

Lt Col Ross A. Meredith, 7 Jan 1971

Lt Col John A. Forsythe, 1 Feb 1971

Lt Col Ross A. Meredith, 18 Mar 1971

Lt Col James H. Barnard, Mar 1971

Lt Col William L. Siegel, 1 Dec 1972

Lt Col Rollin L. Ratchen, 11 Feb 1973
Col Donald A. Schwannenberg, 20 Oct 1974
Col Thomas M. Jones Jr., 13 May 1976
Col Deon E. Schroeder, 31 Jul 1981
Lt Col Michael J. Peters, 15 Apr 1983
Lt Col William R. Andresevic, 8 Mar 1985
Lt Col Pinar Crane, Jr., 12 Sep 1985
Lt Col Dean W. Mills, 6 Jan 1990
Lt Col Gene E. Garton, 13 Jul 1991
Lt Col Louis J. Budge, 3 Dec 1994
Lt Col James E. McKinney, Sr., 21 Nov 1997
Lt Col Randall L. Schultz-Rathbun, 10 Jan 1999
Maj Gilbert Vondriska Jr., 1 Dec 2002
2Lt Mark G. Ross, 1 Apr 2003
Maj Joel R. Kinnunen, 10 Jan 2005

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

1 Jan 1975-31 Dec 1976
1 Jul 1977-31 Dec 1978
18 May-5 Jun 1980
1 Jul 1984-30 Jun 1986
1 Sep 1993-31 Aug 1995
1 Sep 1997-31 Aug 1999
1 Sep 1999-31 Aug 2001
1 Sep 2001-31 Aug 2002
1 Oct 2002-30 Sep 2004
1 Oct 2004-30 Sep 2005
1 Oct 2005-30 Sep 2006

EMBLEM



On a blue disc a white mountain peak detailed gray issuing from base, overall a gray duck with twirling tail, yellow feet, bill and bands on tail and neck, wearing brown skis and military flying helmet with white goggles and looking through black binoculars; all within a narrow yellow border. Attached below the disc a blue scroll bordered yellow. **SIGNIFICANCE:** Blue and yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The duck with goggles and flight helmet portrays the early traditions of military aviation and its rescue role. The skis represent rescue from mountainous terrain indicated by the mountain in the background. The yellow band on the tail of the duck symbolizes the unit's historic ties to the Air Force global mercy mission when all rescue aircraft were so marked for international recognition.

304 ARS had a unique but humorous patch. The patch evolved from various summer activities of the unit. Felix "Mac" McLarney provide this humorous story of the evolution of the 304 "Duck" patch. Each summer camp a half day break with softball game or volleyball was scheduled to break the monotony. Usually the age old separation of officers and enlisted

prevailed, and provided some bragging rights for the next year. After a few years of this winner looser joshing one of the commanders purchased one of those little inexpensive (I should say cheap) trophies that could be found all over the place. This one featured a mule (jackass if you will) and was presented by the winning side to the losers during commander's call at the next training weekend after the summer camp. It usually was placed near the coffee bar in the Hq/Ops building.

A new commander came on board and he decided that instead of presenting the little trophy he would (and did) replace it with a very real and cantankerous jackass. The losers had to care and feed it which wasn't very funny after a short time. No one had any acreage or working farm to house it, or didn't offer such anyway, so it was placed in the fenced area that housed our personal equipment/parachute shop, and vehicle parking shed. Being alone was not what this animal wanted so each and every time someone had to go in or out of the fenced compound they had to deal with an agitated beast. Fortunately at this time there were no active duty folks residing on the base at night as they would have been up in arms with the constant braying throughout the night. It was a joke our CO felt was amusing, but we never really understood his personality. Shortly after he left the animal was given away and all was quiet.

But not to be outdone, the summer games continued and someone decided that a duck would be an appropriate trophy as well as a reminder to the losers who had to care for it. What happened next was not expected. Instead of the duck being a losers badge it became the mark of Zoro, or rather I should say its feet became the mark. As our crews visited other units and bases folks would wake up the next day to find duck feet images walking across their floors, at one base clinic they went up one wall, across the ceiling and down the other. At another they were placed next to the water coolers in a hangar. And to top it off, when AFRes built us a new ops admin building there were duck feet walking up to the building cast permanently in the new concrete sidewalk.



Designed By Lt. Bradford Riordan

Blue and yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel.

The mountain terrain and night sky reflect the difficult conditions the Unit sometimes encounters during search and rescue operations. The stars as a constellation further allude to the navigational skills necessary to accomplish the mission. The hawk, with its keen eyesight and ability to soar, symbolizes the Unit's tireless efforts to search, and its diligent devotion to affect a rescue in any kind of weather. The green ray/beam denotes the night vision capabilities and advanced technical equipment in the aircraft used by the Squadron.

First emblem approved, 11 Aug 1961

Second emblem approved, 11 Oct 1973

Third emblem approved, 10 Sep 1985

Fourth emblem Approved, 7 Oct 1991

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

304 Air Rescue Squadron (ARS) was activated in the Air Force Reserve on 16 Nov 57 at Portland Intl Airport, OR. Lt Col Vernon E. Acker was assigned as the first unit commander. In 1959 the unit was selected for the Air Reserve Technician Program (ART) and Major John A. Forsythe was assigned as the first ART commander. Unit strength increased to 24 officers and 66 airmen as it transitioned into an ART Reserve Squadron and Air Reserve Technicians began replacing the training cadre of regular Air Force personnel. The squadron was assigned to the 2345th Air Reserve Flying Center for administrative and logistical support but was relieved from this assignment on 8 April 1960, concurrent with the Center's inactivation. The Unit's first assigned aircraft were the SA-16A models, subsequently replaced by SA-16B models during the first quarter of 1960, and later redesignated HU-16B's in July 1963.

Facilities were quite limited in the early 1960's. Command and Operations shared an old wooden barracks and maintenance had one small wooden building but no hangar. Nearly all the maintenance was done on the ramp with only an old tarp (with a hole in it) for a cover. Later, two engine stand buildings were acquired which could cover the engines for maintenance.

It wasn't until 1961 that Pararescuemen (PJs) were added to the unit. Because of Viet Nam conflict, there were no qualified PJs available to fill the positions at any of the five squadrons; 304 in Portland, OR, 302nd in Phoenix AZ, 301st at Homestead AFB FL, 305th at Selfridge ANGB MI, and 303rd at March AFB CA. The PJs had only an old Quonset Hut and little else. Equipment soon arrived and with strong leadership they became a top team involved in all missions.

During the 1960s the 304 had many search and rescue missions in the Pacific Northwest including one spectacular nighttime parachute jump on Mt St Helens to rescue two survivors of a small plane crash. They also participated in a highly classified mission in the South Pacific for two months in 1968. In October of 1961, the reserve units were called to active duty for the Berlin Crisis. They supported a 60-day search and rescue coverage of the North Atlantic from Goose Bay Labrador as many AF Squadrons flew overseas. The unit also had several SARs

covering the North Pacific from Alaskan Air Strips as Air Force Squadrons flew overseas to the Far East.

On 18 January 1966, the 304 ARS was officially designated the 304 Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron and in December 1968 became the sole Air Force Reserve flying unit in the state of Oregon. Host-based responsibility passed to the Oregon Air National Guard and the 304 ARRS became a tenant unit.

The squadron was reorganized on 1 January 1967. On 31 January 1967, Lt Col Forsythe was voluntarily recalled to active duty and became the Reserve Affairs Officer at ARRS Headquarters, Orlando AFB, FL. Lt Col Ross A. Meredith, a ranking reservist (later to become the Unit's ART Operations and Training Officer), assumed command on 1 February 1967, until Lt Col George M. Crandall, the Unit's senior ranking reservist, returned from an active duty training tour and took command.

Effective 29 June 1971, the 304th was once again reorganized. Beginning on 15 June 1971, the unit's HU-16B aircraft were reassigned and were replaced by HH-34 helicopters. All navigator and radio operator positions were abolished as a result. This transition in aircraft also caused the exit of several field grade officer/pilots who could not attend rotary wing schools because of limited service remaining under the Reserve Office promotion criteria. Many of these personnel had served the unit since it was first organized some fifteen years last. As of 31 March 1972, the unit possessed eleven HH-34 aircraft.

In 1972, the unit was again reorganized and the HU-16B aircraft were reassigned and replaced by HH-34 Seabat helicopters which were re-designated as Choctaw by the Air Force.

On 1 July 1972, AFRES tasked the 939th Military Airlift Group, McChord AFB, WA (originally the Portland IAP host base), with military personnel CBPO responsibility for the 304th. Up until this time, the Air Reserve Personnel Center (ARPC) in Denver, CO, had CBPO responsibility for the squadron.

The 304 ARRS Commander and other senior members of the unit realized the transition from the HU-16 to the HH-34J was going to be a monumental task requiring a maximum effort on the part of each and every member of the unit. All the hard work came to fruition four months after the receipt of the last aircraft when the unit attained a C-3 combat readiness status. The conversion from fixed to rotary wing resulted in many problems at all level of command. Of special interest is the fact that the 304 ARRS was the first Air Force unit, active or reserve, to have flown this ex Navy ASW aircraft as an Air Force Air Rescue aircraft. With considerable pride they came to realize that while they were the second unit to take delivery of its initial knocked down depot modified HH-34J's they were the first to reassemble, test fly, report all 10 aircraft as operational, and achieve mission ready status of its 12 assigned aircrews.

The 304 ARRS was fortunate the aircraft conversion did not result in a large loss of non-flying positions. The majority of its experienced aircraft maintenance staff was retained, and following

retraining on the H-34 at Sheppard AFB all continued to serve in Portland. Their skill, together with Bruce Wood's experience and flight qualifications, combined to rapidly bring the depot modified birds into operational status.

1974 saw the HH-34 being replaced by the HH-1H Huey helicopters. The 304 was assigned to the 403rd Air Rescue and Recovery Wing at Selfridge ANG, MI on 15 March 1976 and in July 1978 the unit was designated to participate in the Military Assistance to Safety and Traffic (MAST) program. They were the first AFRES unit so designated to provide emergency helicopter transportation services to the Northern Oregon-Southern Washington region.

Effective 31 January 1974, the unit was once again reorganized. The Sikorsky HH-34H helicopters were replaced by Bell HH-1H helicopters. The first of the new helicopters arrived on 14 December 1973; the thirteenth was delivered on 8 July 1974. Under this transition, maintenance manpower was significantly reduced, while pilot and flight mechanic personnel increased. Hardest hit was the Field Maintenance Shop, as there were fewer systems on the HH-1H aircraft that required specialist support.

In 1975, the 304th became the first Reserve rescue unit to participate in the Red Flag exercise at Nellis AFB, Nevada. The entire exercise was completed with a 100 percent maintenance reliability rate; and successful mission accomplishment by the 304th has prompted reevaluation of the combat role of light-lift helicopters.

The Albert P. Loening Trophy was presented to the 304th ARRS in the summer of 1977 in recognition of the unit being selected for that honor as the most outstanding ARRS unit in the Air Force Reserve for 1976. Also in 1977, the 304th ARRS was presented the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award.

29 Dec 78 The 304 APR Squadron, AFRES, assisted in the recovery of 163 survivors of a DC-8 crash near Portland, Oregon.

Also on 8 July 1978, the 304th was designated to participate in the Military Assistance to Safety and Traffic Program (MAST). The squadron, the first AFRES unit so designated, would provide emergency helicopter transportation services to the Northern Oregon/Southern Washington area. This program was the culmination of extensive coordination between AFRES, AF, U.S. Army, and concerned civilian personnel.

After conversion to helicopters, humanitarian missions increased dramatically. During 1974, 13 SAVES were credited and 29 search/rescue/med-evac missions were flown. In the Bicentennial Year of 1976, the crews of the 304th flew 66 search/rescue/med-evac missions and were credited with 52 SAVES during the year.

The Albert P. Loening Trophy was again awarded to the 304th ARRS in September 1978 in recognition of the unit's selection as the most outstanding Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron in 1977 within the Air Force Reserve.

It was publicly announced on 29 March 1979 that the 304th would be converting to seven UH-1N helicopters to replace the present twelve HH-1H in late 1979. The conversion would reduce the unit from 121 authorized to 90. The reduction included a loss of fourteen ART/Civilians, as well as reducing the reserve strength. Plans indicated the conversion to be completed by 1 October 1979, with a target date for C-3 of 31 December 1979.

On 4 June 1979, the above announcement was rescinded and it was announced that the unit would convert five UH-1Ns and five HH-1Hs at a crew ratio of 1.4, a loss of three aircrews, rather than the cut previously announced. The unit would have a military strength of 112 with the addition of spaces not previously authorized. There was no reduction of civilian or ART personnel. Conversion was to be completed on the dates previously stated.

Two spectacular operations occurred in 1980. Situated in the wilderness of Washington State, but near recreation and logging interests, the Mount Saint Helens volcano had lain dormant for 125 years. When it erupted on May 18, 1980, the 304 Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron at Portland, Oregon, was in the midst of a monthly training session. Unbidden, the unit responded to the emergency, and within minutes its helicopters were en route to the mountain. On that first day, the 304 rescued 51 persons on 32 sorties. In all, at the end of ten days, the 304 had flown 111 sorties and saved 61 lives. Also participating in the rescue operations were the 304's sister rescue squadrons, the 303d from March AFB and the 305th from Selfridge; maintenance men from all over the Air Force Reserve; and the 129th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group of the California Air National Guard.

Deployed crews to provide SAR coverage worldwide, including to Keflavik, Iceland, during and after the Gulf War and to the Gulf War area, 1993.

Occasionally provided support for space shuttle launches and to the USAF Fighter Weapons School.

Pararescuemen from the 304 Rescue Squadron, Portland, Ore., deploy from HH-60 Pavehawk helicopters assigned to the 305th Rescue Squadron, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., June 8-13, 2007, to practice mountain and water rescue skills. Although geographically separated, both squadrons are subordinate units of the 943rd Rescue Group located at D-M.

The PJs were able to deploy from the helicopters and practice a variety of tactics. Pararescuemen are among the most highly trained emergency trauma specialists in the U.S. military. With their medical and rescue expertise along with their deployment capabilities air-land-sea, PJs are able to perform life-saving missions in the world's most remote and dangerous combat or humanitarian environments to rescue injured or stranded people. The PJs commitment to training and self-sacrifice to save lives reaffirms their motto "These things we do that others may live". Without the PJs and support Airmen from the rescue squadrons, thousands of service members and civilians would have been unnecessarily lost in past conflicts and natural disasters.

The 304th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron (now the 304th Rescue Squadron), was activated at Portland, Ore., on Nov. 15, 1957, with four officers, 31 enlisted personnel and two HU-16 Gruman Albatross amphibious, twin-engine aircraft. In 1971, the 304th converted to the Sikorsky' HH-34J Seabat helicopter. In January' 1974, the Seabat was replaced with the Bell HH-1H Huey helicopter. In June 1979, the 304th retained five of the HH- 1H's and added five twin-engine UH-1N Huey helicopters. Throughout its Huey period, beginning in 1974, the unit has been credited with more than 500 lives saved.

The unit supported the XIII Winter Olympic games at Plattsburgh, N.Y., from Jan. 25 to Feb. 25, 1980. During the May 18, 1980, volcanic eruption of Mount St. Helens, Wash., and the three weeks that followed, the 304th operated as the primary rescue source for assistance rendered. The unit was credited with 66 lives saved and received, for their efforts, the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award and the Albert P. Loening Trophy, as the outstanding rescue and recovery unit within 4th Air Force command. In addition, the unit conducted the largest awards ceremony in Air Force Reserve history on May 16, 1981, when it honored the men and women involved in the rescue work resulting from the Mount St. Helens disaster, with 75 Air Medals and 15 Air Force Commendation Medals.

In April 1981, the 304th assisted in providing 40 percent of the rescue support for the first flight of the space shuttle, Columbia. Since 1981, the unit has participated in numerous shuttle flights. The 304th was awarded the Albert P. Loening Trophy for the years 1976 - 77, 1977 - 78, 1978 - 79 and 1984 - 85. The unit also received the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award in 1976, and again in 1980. The unit added six HC-130 Hercules aircraft to their inventory in January 1985. The aircraft, an extended-range search and recovery version of the C- 130 transport, provides additional depth and dimension to the unit's mission and capabilities. In February 1987, one twin-engine Huey aircraft was transferred out of the unit's inventory to active duty service.

On Dec. 30, 1986, two H-3, Sikorsky twin-turbo, Jolly Green Giant helicopters arrived on station to begin the replacement of that aircraft for the inventory of twin-engine Hueys. Two additional H-3s arrived on base on Jan. 16, 1987.

The 304th was redesignated from the 304th Air Rescue Squadron (ARS) to the 304th Rescue Squadron (RQS) on Feb. 1, 1992. In February 1991, the 304th began its conversion from HH-1H and H-3 helicopters to Sikorsky HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters. The last flight of the unit-assigned H-3 helicopters was on Jun. 18, 1991. The final H-1 flight was on Oct. 28, 1991, and the last two H-1 departed the base Oct. 1, 1991. Until the arrival of the first unit-assigned Pave Hawk, unit members trained on loaner H-60s, the first of which arrived at the unit May 1, 1991.

The first unit-assigned Pave Hawk was flown from Pensacola, Fla., to Portland on Jan. 29, 1992, by a 939th air crew which included as aircraft commander, the most junior pilot in the unit and as co-pilot, the commander of the 304 RQS. The H-60, although not fully electronically-configured upon its arrival to Portland, was equipped with an operational hoist, air refueling

probe, weather radar and two 185 gallon fuel tanks. The last of the units' nine H-60s arrived on base in 1994.

During August - September 1992, personnel from Portland, Ore., deployed to Florida to assist their sister rescue unit, the 301st Rescue Squadron, with rescue relief efforts after Hurricane Andrew devastated southern Florida on Aug. 24, 1992. The 304th was jointly credited with the 301st with 137 lives saved for these rescue efforts.

As of Feb. 1, 1993, the unit was assigned to the wartime command of Air Combat Command (ACC), Langley Air Force Base, Va. June through September 1993 and 1994, members of the 304th deployed in increments to Southwest Asia to relieve active-duty rescue forces stationed there.

In November of 1993, 304 RQS members deployed to Hong Kong to participate in a search and rescue exercise. In April, 304 RQS members also deployed to Bolivia to participate in a deployment for training/nation building exercise with the Bolivian military. The members also delivered food and clothing to the Bolivians that was donated by Oregon's Northwest Medical Teams.

In April 1981, the 304th assisted in providing 40 percent of the rescue support for the first flight of the space shuttle, Columbia. Since 1981, the unit has participated in numerous shuttle flights. The 304th was awarded the Albert P. Loening Trophy for the years 1976 - 77, 1977 - 78, 1978 - 79 and 1984 - 85. The unit also received the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award in 1976, and again in 1980. The unit added six HC-130 Hercules aircraft to their inventory in January 1985. The 303rd Rescue Squadron was reactivated in May, 1997, creating a separate squadron for the C-130s. The aircraft, an extended-range search and recovery version of the C-130 transport, provides additional depth and dimension to the unit's mission and capabilities. In February 1987, one twin-engine Huey aircraft was transferred out of the unit's inventory to active duty service. On Dec. 30, 1986, two H-3, Sikorsky twin-turbo, Jolly Green Giant helicopters arrived on station to begin the replacement of that aircraft for the inventory of twin-engine Hueys. Two additional H-3s arrived on base on Jan. 16, 1987.

In February 1991, the 304th began its conversion from HH-1H and H-3 helicopters to Sikorsky HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters. The last flight of the unit assigned H-3 helicopters was on Jun. 18, 1991. The final H-1 flight was on Oct. 28, 1991, and the last two H-1 departed the base Oct. 1, 1991. Until the arrival of the first unit-assigned Pave Hawk, unit members trained on loaner H-60s, the first of which arrived at the unit May 1, 1991.

The first unit-assigned Pave Hawk was flown from Pensacola, Fla., to Portland on Jan. 29, 1992, by a 939th air crew which included as aircraft commander, the most junior pilot in the unit and as co-pilot, the commander of the 304 RQS. The H-60, although not fully electronically configured upon its arrival to Portland, was equipped with an operational hoist, air refueling probe, weather radar and two 185 gallon fuel tanks. The last of the units' nine H-60s arrived on base in 1994.

During August - September 1992, personnel from Portland, Ore., deployed to Florida to assist their sister rescue unit, the 301st Rescue Squadron, with rescue relief efforts after Hurricane Andrew devastated southern Florida on Aug. 24, 1992. The 304th was jointly credited with the 301st with 137 lives saved for these rescue efforts.

As of Feb. 1, 1993, the unit was assigned to the wartime command of Air Combat Command (ACC), Langley Air Force Base, Va. June through September 1993 and 1994, members of the 304th deployed in increments to Southwest Asia to relieve active-duty rescue forces stationed there. In November of 1993, 304 RQS members deployed to Hong Kong to participate in a search and rescue exercise. In April, 304 RQS members also deployed to Bolivia to participate in a deployment for training/nation building exercise with the Bolivian military. The members also delivered food and clothing to the Bolivians that was donated by Oregon's Northwest Medical Teams.

The mission of the 304th ARRS, Portland Air National Guard Base, Ore. , is to achieve and maintain a combat rescue capability. In peacetime, the 304th will maintain a search and rescue capability for personnel of the Department of Defense, will support the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and foreign governments within its capability, and will provide humanitarian and disaster relief in accordance with the National Search and Rescue Plan.

The 304th ARRS is a Category A Reserve Training Unit, assigned to the 403d Rescue and Weather Reconnaissance Wing, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Michigan. The Military Airlift Command (MAC) and the Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Service (ARRS) provide advisory support.

The 304th ARRS is authorized and assigned twelve HH-1H Huey helicopters.

PERSONNEL (Average strengths):

Air Reservists: 37 officers, 87 airmen (Total: 124).

Air Reserve Technicians: 5 officers, 37 airmen (Total: 42).

Active Air Force Advisors: 1 officer, 1 airman.

The 304th has provided professional search, rescue and medical evacuation support during military and civilian emergencies from Alaska to Brazil, Labrador to the Dominican Republic and extensive areas of the Pacific Ocean.

On 30 May 2002, at 1351 local time (2051 Zulu), an HH-60G helicopter, 89-2601 crashed near the summit of Mount Hood in Oregon at a level of 10,700 feet MSL. The helicopter, assigned to the 304 Rescue Squadron (RQS), 939th Rescue Wing RQW, Portland Air National Guard Base, Portland Oregon, was assisting civilian authorities to rescue three critically injured climbers who had fallen into a crevasse on Mount Hood. The pilot, co-pilot, flight engineer, and 4 pararescuemen egressed safely with non-life threatening injuries. The helicopter sustained \$4,750,385.00 in damages. There was no injury to civilians or damage to other property as a result of this accident. Shortly before impact, the helicopter was in a thirty-foot hover at 10,700

feet MSL, over the rescue site, which is located on the southwestern flank of Mt Hood. The flight engineer was preparing to commence lifting one of the victims of the climbing accident who was on a litter hooked to the hoist cable when main rotor RPM slowed and the helicopter began to descend. The aircraft then went into an uncontrolled right yaw, which put the pilot's intended escape route behind him. The flight engineer cut the hoist cable. While attempting to maneuver to land the helicopter on the 45-degree slope of the mountain, the main rotor blades imparted the steeply sloping terrain. The helicopter began to roll side over side down the mountain slope. The helicopter rolled seven and one half times before coming to rest inverted, approximately 200 feet below site of impact. By clear and convincing evidence I have determined that the crew used inaccurate performance planning data, and therefore lacked the power required to accomplish the mission. The pilot immediately recognized the slowing of his main rotor RPM, which was most likely caused by the loss of favorable headwinds. These headwinds had very probably initially compensated for the crew's inaccurate performance data. However, the pilot chose to delay the execution of his pre-briefed go around procedure. The pilot's hesitation prior to executing his go around and utilizing his escape route resulted in the helicopter's main rotors drooping to the point where the helicopter lost altitude, and was difficult to control. Due to the helicopter's 30 degree uncommanded yaw to the right, the mishap pilot's intended escape route. By substantial evidence I have determined that changing winds on Mount Hood, a common occurrence at the Bergschrund, where the rescue operations took place, contributed to the accident. Additionally, I have determined that the mishap crew either lacked an understanding of or did not adequately consider the effects of unpredictable mountain winds on flying performance when selecting a method for executing the survivor recovery.

For the last 50 years, the Air Force has maintained a rescue presence in Portland, Ore. That streak was in serious jeopardy for members of the 304 Rescue Squadron during the most recent Base Realignment and Closure actions. The BRAC commission targeted the squadron's host unit, the 939th Air Refueling Wing, for closure. The 304 managed to survive. Over the next year or so, the Reserve's presence at Portland will dwindle from nearly 1,100 Airmen to about 100, all members of the rescue squadron. It appears that the 304 is destined to remain in Portland. The BRAC closure marked the second time in three years that the rescue Airmen had managed to survive a drastic change. In 2003, the 939th, then a rescue wing, converted to KC-135 tanker aircraft and became an air refueling wing. Though the wing changed missions, the 304 RQS remained in place, becoming a part of the 920th Rescue Wing at Patrick Air Force Base, Fla. "It's very much like a family, especially since rescue folks have been here since 1957," said Chief Master Sgt. Richard Konopka, 304 RQS chief enlisted manager. "So, the closure is very hard on everyone. All the people in finance, the military personnel flight and the clinic are the same friends we've always had, so it's very difficult losing them." Even positive events for the 304 RQS, like moving into a new building, come with negative consequences. "Coming here to our new building (a facility previously used for maintenance) was difficult. It's like we're vultures," said Master Sgt. Patrick Tillmann, NCO in charge of aircrew life support. "I told my guys to be very polite. They've been very supportive of us. "These people are our friends. They're going away, moving their families, and we're staying. We still have a mission and are busy while they're here without aircraft." Although the 939th ARW is going away, some members were

able to secure positions within the 304. "We've been able to pick up a few people from the support side of the house, and that's a good thing," Chief Konopka said. "It was like rescuing our own family from what was going on across the street." While the BRAC commission decided Portland could do without a refueling mission, the rescue mission was deemed more essential. The decision to keep this mission in Portland was based, in large part, on the unit's level of experienced pararescuemen, also known as PJs. The unit has approximately 50 pararescuemen, 11 combat rescue officers and 48 support people. "For the Air Force (as a whole) we provide the largest pool of seven-level trained PJs — period," Chief Konopka said. "This is a very good recruiting area for the type of people who are motivated to be in rescue. Currently, we have the highest percentage of new recruits in pararescue in Air Force Reserve Command." By the time a PJ gets through all the training to attain his three-level, Chief Konopka said, it takes an average of 30 months. In addition to being highly trained members of the 304 RQS have a lot of very important deployment experience, having spent time in Kosovo, the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, they deployed in support of relief efforts after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. "We have a tremendous amount of wartime, deployment, and civilian search and rescue experience," said Capt. Chris Bernard, 304 RQS combat rescue officer. In addition to a valuable pool of trained resources and a good recruiting base, another advantage of maintaining a rescue presence in Portland is the availability of various training environments within a few hours of the base. "The area here is conducive to training," Captain Bernard said. "All major environments are represented here in Oregon. Within two hours you can be at the ocean, major rivers, forests, mountains, glaciers or the desert. You have any environment you want in which to train." With the upcoming departure of the 939th ARW, finding a way to continue supporting the 304 is a priority. "As the 939th goes away, our concern is that the Reservists who stay get the adequate support they need," said Lt. Col. Paul Dechirico, performance manager with the 920th RQW at Patrick AFB. "The good news is that we have some breathing room because the 939th is not leaving right away." Colonel Dechirico was part of a site activation task force that studied the future manpower needs required for the 304 RQS. He said AFRC is working closely with the host Air National Guard unit at Portland to provide many of the support requirements. "As things begin to go away, such as support functions, it just gets a little bit more difficult, but it's not insurmountable by any stretch of the imagination. It's just the new reality," Chief Konopka said. "We have good relationships with other assets, both locally and regionally." "We have no problem getting Air Force Reserve or Guard aircraft in here," Captain Bernard said. "They like to come up and train here. We also train with the Army and Coast Guard. By doing so, they get to sign off on some of their training. This (the BRAC closure) has actually forced us to become more focused on joint operations. "One of the advantages working with our sister agencies is taking some of the good things they have to offer and implementing them to what we do," the captain said. "I know working with the Coast Guard, those guys are the experts at water rescue. So we've definitely learned some good things from them and adapted them to our training." While current members of the squadron are going to have to adapt to being the Reserve's lone presence at Portland, this situation is really nothing new in the big scheme of things. "We were a geographically separated unit from 1957 until 1985," Chief Konopka said. "So, in a sense, we are going back to our roots." 2007

Airmen, Civilians Conduct Disaster Response Drill Active Duty airmen and members of the Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard joined civilians and other service members at Camp Rilea, Ore., Aug. 5 for an exercise simulating the humanitarian aid response to a large earthquake occurring in the Pacific Northwest, triggering a tsunami. Lt. Col. John Graver, commander of 304 Rescue Squadron, oversaw rescue efforts for the "Pathfinder-Minuteman" exercise from the event's joint operations center. "When a disaster strikes, no one group or agency can do it all. So why wait until game day?" he said, according to an ANG news release. About 250 people worked in 12-person teams to find injured people and provide medical care. The exercise involved a water rescue and drowning victim recovery, house-to-house searches for injured victims, and search and rescue for victims trapped in vehicles and collapsed buildings. Scientists say the Pacific Northwest is overdue for a massive earthquake—magnitude 7 or greater—that could wreak widespread devastation. Dr. Jon Jui, who leads the Oregon Disaster Medical Team, said local officials have focused on training for a worst-case scenario for several years, but having military members and civilian agencies work together will improve communication and response if disaster strikes. 2015

Air Force reservists in Oregon helped rescuers find two men who disappeared while hunting for wild mushrooms, according to a release. The men got separated from a fellow mushroom hunter at 1 p.m. on Oct. 25, when they were trying to leave the remote wilderness area because of severe weather. The 304 Rescue Squadron sent a 10-person Guardian Angel search and rescue team to join the search on Oct. 26. Volunteers found the men, who were suffering from hypothermia, and the airmen provided medical treatment before helping them walk out of the wilderness. "When you are looking for someone in remote mountainous areas, you don't know where they are going to end up. They could have fallen off a cliff into a ravine, and those situations can be very difficult," said Maj. Chris Bernard, a spokesman for the 304 RS. The Guardian Angels—pararescuemen, combat rescue officers, and search evasion resistance escape professionals—are trained rescue specialists who have expertise in navigating rough terrain, Bernard said. 2015

USAF Unit Histories
Created: 27 Feb 2023
Updated:

Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.
The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.
Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.