

920 RESCUE WING



MISSION

LINEAGE

920 Troop Carrier Group, Assault established and activated, 15 Jan 1963

Organized in the Reserve, 11 Feb 1963

Discontinued and inactivated, 15 Dec 1965

Redesignated 920 Tactical Airlift Group, 2 Mar 1973

Activated in the Reserve, 25 Apr 1973

Redesignated 920 Weather Reconnaissance Group, 1 Jan 1976

Inactivated, 1 Nov 1983

Redesignated 920 Rescue Group, 1 Apr 1997

Activated in the Reserve, 15 Apr 1997

Redesignated 920 Rescue Wing, 1 Apr 2003

STATIONS

Memphis Muni Aprt, TN, 11 Feb 1963-15 Dec 1965

Keesler AFB, MS, 25 Apr 1973-1 Nov 1983

Patrick AFB, FL, 15 Apr 1997

ASSIGNMENTS

445 Troop Carrier (later, 445 Air Transport; 445 Military Airlift) Wing, 11 Feb 1963-15 Dec 1965

459 Tactical Airlift Wing, 25 Apr 1973

Eastern Air Force Reserve Region, 1 Jan 1976

Western Air Force Reserve Region, 15 Feb 1976

Fourth Air Force, 1 Oct 1976

403 Rescue and Weather Reconnaissance Wing, 1 Jan 1977

Fourth Air Force, 1 Jul 1981
403 Rescue and Weather Reconnaissance Wing, 1 Mar-1 Nov 1983
Tenth Air Force, 15 Apr 1997
939 Rescue Wing, 16 Apr 1997
Tenth Air Force, 1 Apr 2003

WEAPON SYSTEMS

C-123, 1963-1965
C-130, 1973-1977
WC-130, 1976-1983
HH-60, 1997
HC-130, 1997

COMMANDERS

Col William J. Johnson Jr., Feb 1963-15 Dec 1965
Col David G. Knight, 25 Apr 1973
Lt Col Charles B. Coleman III, 20 Jun 1976
Col Norman E. Buescher, by Jun 1981
Col James B. Cobb, 27 Jun-1 Nov 1983
Col Richard R. Severson, 15 Apr 1997
Col Bruce E. Davis, 23 May 1999
Col Timothy E. Tarchick, 7 Oct 2001
Col Steve W. Kirkpatrick, Apr 2006
Col Robert L. Dunn
Col Jeffrey L. Macrander
Col Kurt A. Matthews
Col John C. Dobbin

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards
Jul 1977-31 Dec 1978
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

920th Tactical Airlift Group emblem: Azure, issuing from base in pale between two stylized aircraft fesswise argent, a lighthouse of the like garnished gray emitting two rays of light one to dexter and one to sinister or, each bearing two lightning flashes gules, all within a diminished bordure of the second. **SIGNIFICANCE:** The emblem is symbolic of the unit and the Air Force colors, ultramarine blue and golden yellow, are used. The blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations, and yellow to the sun and excellence of personnel in assigned tasks. The silhouetted airplanes illustrate unity, and the lightning bolts denote the unit's ability to deploy rapidly. The lighthouse symbolizes the concept that the unit is steadfastly prepared to fill a vital need. (Approved, 26 Sep 1974)



MOTTO

OPERATIONS

Trained for and performed military airlift missions, 1963-1965 and 1973-1975. Flew weather reconnaissance missions, including flying into hurricanes, 1976-1983. Trained for combat search and rescue (CSAR), performed search and rescue (SAR) and medical evacuation missions primarily over land areas of and water areas off Florida, 1997. In addition, provided support for space shuttle and Eastern Test Range launches and landings and deployed aircrews to stand SAR alert at Keflavik, Iceland.

In January 1976, the Air Force Reserve's 920th Tactical Airlift Group at Keesler AFB, Mississippi, converted to WC-130Hs and was redesignated as a weather reconnaissance unit. The unit's major peacetime mission was to locate, identify, and track hurricanes, assuming 70 percent of the Department of Commerce's responsibility for that function. The group also sought out winter storms on the East Coast, supported transatlantic fighter deployments, and met Department of Defense weather reconnaissance requirements on the West Coast.

1 Jan 76 ARRS became the intermediate gaining command for the 920th Weather Reconnaissance Group of Air Force Reserve at Keesler AFB, Mississippi. The 920th WR Group assumed 70 per cent of the weather reconnaissance requirements for the Atlantic Gulf Coast

area of the United States.

These squadrons were tenant units at Keesler. Both units were in place by 31 July 1973. In addition to the units belonging to Military Airlift Command, Keesler also gained an Air Force Reserve tenant in April 1973 when the 920th Tactical Airlift Group activated. This unit flew C-130s.

When Space Shuttle Atlantis lifted off launch pad 39A at Kennedy Space Center and disappeared into the clouds over Florida's east coast July 8, it marked the end of an era for both NASA and an Air Force Reserve unit that has been supporting the nation's space program for almost 50 years. For NASA, the 135th space shuttle mission — which involved a 12-day trip to the international space station — was the agency's last. The shuttle program is being terminated, and NASA has no replacement space transportation vehicle in place. The United States will now rely on Russian space ships to carry its astronauts into orbit until commercial transport vehicles are developed and ready to fly into space.

For the 920th Rescue Wing, located 11 miles south of Cape Canaveral at Patrick Air Force Base, the liftoff marked the end of its involvement in search-and-rescue and range-clearing missions for the shuttle program. The wing has been conducting these missions since the first space shuttle, Columbia, lifted off in 1981. However, its history with NASA goes back even further. "Manned spaceflight is something the 920th Rescue Wing has been doing really since the early '60s, participating in one way or another," Guardian Angels carry out final space shuttle support mission By Staff Sgt. Anna-Marie Wyant said Col. Robert Ament, vice wing commander.

The 920th RQW provided rescue-contingency support for the first Mercury launch in 1961, said Colonel Ament. This marked the beginning of the unit's long-standing relationship with NASA. For every manned space mission since, the 920th, along with regular Air Force rescue Airmen, have been present to clear the range and stand by in the event of a mishap. The 920th RQW used HC-130 King air refueling aircraft and HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters to transport their highly trained and effective rescue teams, often called Guardian Angels. Their unique combat search-and-rescue skills and equipment make them the most qualified in the world to respond to any emergency scenario, the worst being a problem that would cause the astronauts to bail out over the Atlantic Ocean during liftoff. To prepare for this scenario, the 920th RQW regularly performed exercises with NASA astronauts.

"I was one of the dummies they dropped off in the ocean and pretended I was incapacitated," said NASA astronaut Richard R. Arnold II. "They took good care of us. It's an amazing operation." Mr. Arnold, who flew on a Space Shuttle Discovery mission in March 2009, said he is thankful for the support the 920th RWQ has given him and his fellow astronauts over the years. "It's one of those things where you hope you never ever see those guys, but you're really glad they're there," he said of the Guardian Angels. "It's kind of a nice security blanket knowing they are there taking care of us."

With the shuttle program coming to an end, Mr. Arnold said he is proud to have been part of such an amazing program. While many people focus on the astronauts, he said the program's end signifies so much more. "It's an unusual day," Mr. Arnold said. "But to me, it's kind of a celebration of all the folks around the country who've made it all possible, including the 920th

Rescue Wing. I don't think most people understand how much coordination and how many people are involved around the county to make this whole thing work and how we get each shuttle to fly safely. Today is all about them."

Colonel Ament expressed his feelings about the last shuttle launch and what it means for the wing. "It's a bittersweet day; we had a wonderful launch, but we also had the last launch of the space shuttle program," said the colonel, who has been on approximately six NASA search-and-rescue training missions and 15 range-clearing missions. "Our training that we've done, our equipment we have provided for the space shuttle, and the specific equipment that we developed, built ourselves and used to rescue astronauts is significant, and it was a huge contribution to the overall space effort. But, with that going away, much of what we developed will in fact go away as well because we have no follow-on program identified."

So what's next for the 920th RQW? "We still have the rocket range-clearing mission, so we'll still keep that at least for the near term," Colonel Ament said. "But that is a much simpler mission in the fact that there is no rescue. If there is a situation where a rocket does explode, there is no recovery portion to that mission." After 30 years of supporting shuttle launches, the 920th will focus more on its primary mission. "Our No. 1 priority has to be to maintain mission-ready status for all personnel recovery forces," Colonel Ament said.

Air Force Reserve Command's 920th Rescue Wing at Patrick AFB, Fla., recently retired its last legacy HC-130 King search and rescue support aircraft. The unit's six heavily used HC-130P/N airframes were grounded last year due to corrosion and would have required an expensive and time-consuming depot-level overhaul to continue in service, AFRC leadership acknowledged. The aircraft will be back-filled by less-worn HC-130s made available by the ongoing recapitalization of the Active Duty fleet with new-build HC-130J Combat King IIs. "We are excited about receiving our newer [slightly used] aircraft and making them a part of the family," said 920th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron Commander Maj. Stephen Young. The last of Patrick's former fleet, serial number 65-00976, departed for the boneyard after several hours' delay to replace an engine on Sept. 9, 2015. The aircraft accumulated more than 16,000 flight hours before retiring to storage.2016

Members of Air Force Reserve Command's 920th Rescue Wing recently rehearsed rescue operations with NASA astronauts at NASA's Neutral Buoyancy Center Lab in Houston and Langley Research Center in Hampton, Va. Rehearsing astronaut rescues is nothing new for the airmen, who were on call during 50 years of launches before the human spaceflight program ended in July 2011, according to a release. NASA plans to launch crews aboard the Boeing CST-100 Starliner and SpaceX Crew Dragon spacecrafts from US soil to the International Space Station in the near future, and the rehearsals allow for rescue technique refinement. Each rehearsal focuses on a different aspect of recovery operation. At the Langley Research Center, pararescuers worked with NASA engineers to perfect how to climb aboard and stabilize a CST-100 Starliner mockup in a large pool. In an earlier exercise, airmen practiced rescuing astronauts off the Florida coast. "Exercises like this are extremely important to the development of tactics, techniques, and procedures, as well as practicing and refining communication protocols between the flight crew and ground support teams for both NASA and the Defense Department," said Tim O'Brien, of the Commercial Crew Program's Ground

and Mission Operations Office.

The 920th Rescue Group proudly traces its heritage to the first days of rescue in the Air Force Reserve as the 301st Rescue Squadron, its predecessor designation. Today, the group claims an enviable 43-year record of safe and distinctive service unequaled by similar organizations. The 920th RQG proudly maintains readiness to deploy worldwide, conducting combat search and rescue operations and humanitarian relief efforts. The unit also operates an aeromedical evacuation staging unit. In 1998, the group will demonstrate its resolve with ongoing deployments to Iceland and to support Operation Northern Watch.

The group's legacy includes the Reserve's first combat rescue in January 1957 and continuous participation in NASA's rescue contingency operations beginning with the first Mercury launch in 1961. The unit also participates in civilian search and rescued operations, saving 137 South Florida residents during the 18-day humanitarian operation following Hurricane Andrew in August, 1992, and on one day in March 1993 saving 93 elderly residents from raising flood waters at their island retirement community.

The 920th played a vital role in the rescue of 28 sailors forced to jump overboard as their freighter sank some 265 miles east of Cape Canaveral Dec. 30, 1997. The unit's crews fly in weather conditions that often test man and machine, and at night wearing night-vision goggles. These reservists complete arduous, long-range, over-water rescues which frequently require the unit's HH-60 helicopters to be air refueled by the unit's HC-130 tanker aircraft.

The 920th features an organizational structure based on functional components:

- 39th Rescue Squadron (flying HC-130 Lockheed 'Hercules' aircraft)
- 301st Rescue Squadron (flying HH-60G Sikorsky 'Pave Hawk' helicopters)
- 920th Aeromedical Staging Squadron
- 920th Maintenance Squadron
- 920th Mission Support Flight
- 920th Operations Support Flight
- 920th Rescue Group Headquarters

The 920 Rescue Group trains to perform combat rescue and missions which search for, locate, and recover Department of Defense personnel and others as directed. In addition to maintaining a high level of proficiency, the group's reservists participate in a wide variety of public service activities.

The Air Force Rescue Coordination Center has credited the 920th with more than 400 life-saving rescues, and with assisting in countless other humanitarian efforts throughout South Florida, the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico. Some over-water missions have been medical evacuations of critically ill sailors from freighters or passengers from cruise ships. Other rescues were accomplished after exhaustive search patterns for missing or injured boaters. Unique One Day Save When raising flood waters, caused by the "storm of the century", cut off the only means of escape from a

Tampa-area island retirement community, two HH-60 aircrews of the 920th braved 50-knot winds and evacuated 93 residents. Many of the elderly, some with serious medical conditions and whose ages ranged from 65 to 99, waited for help on their flooded homes' roofs. The HH-60s ferried the victims to a nearby airfield where those needing medical attention were taken to a hospital.

Squadron personnel have been integral members of NASA's astronaut rescue contingency operations at the Kennedy Space Center beginning with the Mercury program in 1961. During all Space Shuttle blast-offs and landings, an HC-130 crew is either circling over the Atlantic recovery site or is on 'strip-alert'.

In 1994, the 920th was given primary responsibility for surveillance of the Eastern Range during every manned and unmanned launch from KSC or Cape Canaveral Air Station. Miami Seaquarium "Whale Drop" Mission. The 920th airlifted two of 15 pilot whales that had beached themselves near Key West, Florida, to treatment facilities at the Miami Seaquarium in 1991. The whales, weighing some 700 pounds each and measuring ten feet, were placed in specially-designed slings inside the unit's HH-3 for the 120 mile trip. A year later, the two whales completed extensive therapy and were judged ready to return to a pod of whales 145 miles east of Miami. 920th members, flying their new HH-60 helicopters, airlifted the whales in steel containers. At the target location, and from 20 feet over the waves, the 920th crews successfully made the drop.

The 920th represented the United States during the NATO exercise Display Determination '89. Unit members and three HC-130s deployed to Rimini, Italy, while two of the squadron's HH-3s were transported, in a C-5 aircraft, to Brindisi in the south. 301st members conducted rescue training with their Italian counterparts, while a delegation spent five days with members of the Turkish air force in Izmir, Turkey.

The unit supports NATO's North Atlantic Rescue Alert commitment at Keflavic, Iceland, with HC-130s and crews. Every year, the 920th conducts an average of 10 two week deployments.

Latin American Involvement The LATAM CO-OP/Deployment for Training Program has invited the 920th to share its rescue expertise with military forces from several Latin American countries. Squadron members have traveled to Brazil, Columbia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Surinam, Uruguay and Venezuela; while air crews from countries, such as Jamaica and Uruguay, have come to South Florida for similar training as guests of the 920th. The visit by the 920th to Surinam, on South America's northeast coast, October, 1993, marked the first time that the United States conducted joint training with that country.

920th members have become America's good-will ambassadors by hosting three visits, within one year, by dignitaries from Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. High-ranking military personnel received briefings on search and rescue operations and participated in unit's regularly scheduled flying activities. The March, 1994 visit by high-ranking Polish air force officials marked the first time military members of that former 'Iron Curtain' country traveled to the

United States for such training.

A contingent of 920th members and aircraft have supported American forces in the Persian Gulf during two 90-day rotations. The unit, along with other Air Reserve Forces, helped provide around-the-clock patrols of Iraqi air space. The reservists' presence allows for active duty forces to return stateside for extended leaves.

Operation Provide Comfort/Operation Northern Watch

Alongside other American and European forces, the 920th helps enforce the northern 'no-fly' zone over Iraq and provides humanitarian assistance for Kurdish refugees. During a six month period in 1996, as part of Operation Provide Comfort, more than 150 unit members were deployed to Incirlik AB, Turkey, for four-to-six month rotations. In 1998, another 100 members of the 920th RQG participated in the 939th Rescue Wing's six-week commitment to Operation Northern Watch.

On Monday, August 24, 1992, the pre-dawn, 200 plus mile-an-hour winds of Hurricane Andrew destroyed much of south Dade County and all of Homestead Air Force Base. The nation's worst natural disaster left 160,000 people homeless, demolished some 100,000 homes and businesses, and caused nearly \$30 billion in property damage. That afternoon, Dade County officials requested the assistance of the 301 RQS. Their fire department's two medical evacuation helicopters had been destroyed when their hangar collapsed on them. These officials knew that clogged roads - from the massive amount of storm-related debris and from traffic congestion caused by the influx of emergency assistance and spectators -- would cause delays in transporting the injured to hospitals operating outside the disaster area. Later that day, the first of the 301st helicopters had returned from their evacuation site and were placed on alert at Tamiami Airport some ten miles northwest of Homestead. That airfield, too, had undergone extensive damage. 301st operations were established in a facility without electricity or running water. An emergency generator provided partial electricity, while a few tents offered some shelter for maintenance and other support functions. Initially, the only communication was by means of an UHF radio mounted in the unit's only surviving vehicle. Patrick Air Force Base became the center for the unit's HC-130s, which were critical for the airlift missions. Without electricity to pump fuel at Tamiami, the alert helicopters were dependent on midair refueling from the Hercules aircraft.

Within 30 minutes of the squadron's availability, the unit received its first calls for medical assistance and airlift. Rescues, by 301st aircrews flying with Dade County paramedics or 301st pararescue specialists (PJs), ran the spectrum from automobile accidents, to storm-related injuries, to heart attacks and gunshot victims, to women in labor.

During the first four days of around-the-clock operations, 301st and arriving members from the 939 RQW, along with the Dade County paramedics and sometimes an Air Force flight surgeon, flew more than 150 flights. They were credited with 61 saves. During one mission, a crew repeatedly shuttled critically injured victims from various field stations to hospitals for more than three hours. On another day, Dade County officials requested that the 301st place three

teams of PJs into several areas in the southern part of the county. People, in these remote areas, had not received food, water, or medical care for three days. In addition to dispersing supplies, the PJs made two notable saves. In the rubble of one house, the team found a three-year old boy with a skull fracture. In the remains of another home, they found a badly injured woman who was eight and half months pregnant. Both victims were transported by helicopter to hospitals. The woman was prepared for surgery while enroute and an emergency cesarean section was performed in a hallway next to the helipad.

The 301st was able to maintain non-stop operations due to the outpouring of support from other Air Force Reserve units including aerial port and RED HORSE Civil Engineering teams which established a tent city for cooking, sleeping and supply storage. Members of Patrick's active duty 41st RQS also provided aircrew and PJ support. The biggest delegation-some 125 strong-belonged to the 939th RQW. Beginning Aug. 26, these HC-130 crews, and maintenance and logistical troops, provided needed relief to their 301st colleagues. They also brought the equipment and supplies to keep the six helicopters flying. HC-130's from the 301st and re-supply sorties carrying more than 50,000 pounds of supplies and offloading more than 400,000 pounds of fuel. By Sept. 12, when Dade County assumed helicopter rescue duties, the 301st had delivered 8,000 pounds of supplies and 650 gallons of water. The total number of saves credited to the 301st had climbed to 137 lives.

The mission of the 920th Weather Reconnaissance Group is to direct the organization, equipping, and training of assigned or attached operationally ready forces to conduct aerial weather reconnaissance in the following areas: Surveillance of Hurricanes in the Atlantic, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico. The WC-130H aircraft and crews fly into the eye of each hurricane and collect vital information about the force, pressure, and movement of storms. The 920th will accomplish 70% of these missions. Volant Coast mission is the weather reconnaissance conducted along the Atlantic Coast of the United States during the winter months (1 November through 15 April) to help forecast severe winter storms which frequently strike the East Coast of the United States. The 920th will accomplish 50% of this mission. Volant Met mission is the weather reconnaissance conducted in data sparse "areas of interest" for Air Force Global Weather Central. Volant Cross mission is the weather reconnaissance of over-water refueling areas and routes for the deployment of large TAC fighter unit movements. Wartime missions are essentially a continuation of the peace time missions with the specific priorities determined by the JCS and Unified/Specific Theater Commanders.

The 920th Weather Reconnaissance Group was redesignated from the 920th Tactical Airlift Group on 1 January 1976 at Keesler AFB MS under the command of Colonel David G. Knight, who was the previous commander. The first WC-130H aircraft arrived from California on 20 November 1975. Four aircraft were transferred from the 53 WRS at Keesler AFB MS in December 1975. Balance of the authorized aircraft were delivered in January 1976.

The Group's parent organization is the 403rd Rescue Weather Reconnaissance Wing at Selfridge ANG Base MI, and the gaining organization in case of mobilization is HQ ARRS, Scott AFB IL for all units except the 920 CF whose gaining command is AFCS. Detachment 2, 41 RWRW, is

assigned to Keesler AFB MS as advisors and augmentation support for the conversion to the weather mission. The first hurricane mission was flown 9 June 1976. Two penetrations were made into "Hurricane Annette" off Western Mexico in the Eastern Pacific.

Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Coleman, III assumed command of the Group on 20 June 1976.

The 1976 storm season missions were completed with outstanding results. A total of nine named storms were penetrated, 660.4 flying hours into storms and 168.4 flying hours in deployment were accomplished, and the tasking of 70% of the hurricane mission was also accomplished 100% effective.

USAF Unit Histories
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Sources

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Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.