

# 83<sup>rd</sup> EXPEDITIONARY RESCUE SQUADRON



## **MISSION**

### **LINEAGE**

83rd Air Rescue Squadron

Activated, 1 Sep 1952

Redesignated 83rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron

Redesignated 83<sup>rd</sup> Expeditionary Rescue and Recovery Squadron

### **STATIONS**

Bordeaux-Merignac, France

Spangdahlem AB, Germany, 1 Aug 1953-8 Dec 1957

Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

12th Air Rescue Group

### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

H-19B

### **COMMANDERS**

### **HONORS**

**Service Streamers**

**Campaign Streamers**

**Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

**Decorations**

## **EMBLEM**

On a disc Celeste, above a landscape Azure, parted by a sun streak Or, and a shoreline of the first, a duck looking to dexter Gris, detailed of the second, eyed Argent, beak and tail stripe of the third, on its head three rotor blades of the second, its dexter wing shading its eyes, all within a narrow Red border. Attached below the disc, a White scroll edged with a narrow Red border and inscribed "83D EXP RESCUE SQUADRON" in Red letters. Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue represents the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The emblem portrays the mission of a rescue squadron assigned helicopters and amphibious craft. The landscape indicates both mountainous and level terrain and water. The life raft, piloted by a caricatured duck intently scanning the horizon, indicates search; the rotor blades, worn as a head piece by the duck, indicate helicopter capability; and the yellow stripe on the duck's tail is a recognized air rescue aircraft marking.

## **MOTTO**

## **NICKNAME**

## **OPERATIONS**

3 Feb 53 During floods in the Netherlands, 12 aircraft (SA-16s, H-19s, C-47s, and C-82s) of the 66th, 68th, 69th, 82d, and 83d AR Squadrons flew 198 sorties, evacuating 161 persons and delivering 32,900 pounds of relief supplies.

H-19B 52-7500 Crashed, rotor blade separation, 3nm SW of La Teste, France, 3 JUN 54, 4 fatalities.

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — Air Force Master Sgt. Mike McHugh remembers the more difficult times here for coalition forces, when his unit would sometimes carry away a dozen wounded combat troops with severe injuries from the battlefield in a single 12-hour shift.

A pararescueman, McHugh has deployed to Afghanistan numerous times. He recalled one time a few years ago when Canadian soldiers in an M113 personnel carrier hit an improvised bomb in Kandahar province, the birthplace of the Taliban. The soldiers were trapped inside and needed to be extricated.

"When those would get blasted, they would flip over," McHugh said of the flat-bottomed vehicle. "So when you're using a skill that no one else has, it feels good."

McHugh is deployed again now with the elite 83rd Expeditionary Rescue Squadron to this airfield, the U.S. military's largest installation in Afghanistan. And this time, his unit frequently has another job requiring more patience: wait.

Pararescuemen, or "PJs," are considered the only members of the military trained to conduct "full-spectrum personnel recovery. That means they can do everything from parachute from planes to find downed fighter pilots on cliffs where helicopters cannot land to slice open a blown-up armored vehicle with hydraulic "Jaws of Life" tools to save those inside.

As part of the U.S. military's slow withdrawal from Afghan battlefields, PJ units received an order last year: those deployed to Afghanistan would consolidate their mission here to Bagram,

and no longer commonly carry out medical evacuation missions, said Lt. Col. Chris Richardson, the squadron's commander. Rather, the order said, they should focus on being ready for more complex combat search and rescue missions that other units are not trained to carry out.

It's a reflection of the evolving U.S. mission in Afghanistan, where there are now about 9,800 American troops deployed, down from more than 100,000 in 2010 and 2011. The pararescue units are capable of carrying out routine medevac missions, but by leaving it to other units, senior commanders can reduce their presence in Afghanistan and send them to other regions with military operations, like Africa and Iraq.

Richardson's squadron includes active-duty airmen from the Air Force's 23rd Wing at Moody Air Force Base in Georgia, and reservists with the 920th Rescue Wing, primarily from the 304th Rescue Squadron of Portland, Ore. They observe air traffic message closely from their headquarters along the flightline, where their HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters wait.

Certain kinds of traffic — talk of a pilot in distress, for example — perks up ears, Richardson said. Crews don't immediately run to their aircraft when it happens, but the squadron has the authority to deploy quickly and then keep higher commanders informed.

"When you really strip it down, it's about saving lives," Richardson said in an interview at his unit's headquarters at Bagram. "It doesn't get any more simple than that, and it doesn't get any more noble than that, in my opinion."

The helicopters are typically equipped with either a .50-caliber or 7.62mm machine gun, and have the ability to hoist patients to relative safety.

Maj. Niul Manske, a combat rescue officer with the squadron, said the unit does training sorties on and near Bagram to remain sharp for when they are needed. They typically fly in tandem with two helicopters carrying PJs, although they can be escorted by another aircraft, like an Apache attack helicopter.

None of the members of the squadron mind flying fewer medevac missions, though — or seeing the fallen service members who don't make it. 2015

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Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.