

# ONE-AIRFRAME— MANY-MISSIONS



Vandenberg's only hangar is home to its only flyers.



While most visitors to Malmstrom just see the SAC side of operations . . .

By Maj. Thomas A. Farrier  
Headquarters MAC/SEF

**T**he UH-1N Twin Huey is the Air Force's most abundant helicopter airframe. Operated by four major commands (MAC, PACAF, AFSC, and TAC), the "N-model" performs five primary missions in MAC: VIP airlift (at Andrews and Ramstein); training (at Kirtland); missile site support; USAF Survival School support; and range support for the Western Space and Missile Center. The 37th Air Rescue Squadron's (ARS) four UH-1N-equipped detachments handle the three support tasks. To get a better idea of how MAC's "light-lift" workhorse meets such diverse requirements, *The MAC Flyer* took a tour of those four rescue units to take a firsthand look at the unique contributions each makes to the UH-1N's superb operational and safety record.

No one can call the 37 ARS, based at Francis E. Warren Air Force Base in the southeastern corner of Wyoming, a "little operation." Lt. Col. Mike Wiram, the

squadron commander, and his small staff handle three different types of support missions, spread out over eight detachments in seven states. While the squadron's 20 HH-1H single engine helicopters support Strategic Air Command missile sites at four of those detachments (previously profiled in *TMF* May '90), it also operates 24 UH-1N helicopters to support not only SAC, but Air Training Command and Space Command as well. The unique missions and geographic settings of the four bases served by 37 ARS UH-1Ns present very different challenges to both aircraft and crews that fly them.

What started out as a cavalry fort has become the home of SAC's 90th Strategic Missile Wing—the first to field the LGM-188A Peacekeeper ICBM—and of the 37th Air Rescue Squadron. In addition to hosting 37th's administrative headquarters, F.E. Warren has the distinction of being the only base in the Air Force with both an operational flying mission, and no runways! Detachment 10 of the 37th operates its own "base operations," manages its own "airfield facilities" (helipad, ramp, and slide practice area), and welcomes any aircraft capable of landing at KFEW—in other words, transient helicopters. While a number of pilots from "upstairs" (squadron headquarters) are attached to fly with Det 10, the detachment has its own full complement of pilots to support both its primary missile site support mission and its secondary Military Assistance to Safety and Traffic (MAST) mission.

The MAST mission is an Army-managed program designed to fill in with military helicopter resources in areas which lack commercial emergency medical services facilities. Detachment pilots are justifiably proud of the hundreds of lives saved through

their participation in the MAST program, and will gladly point out the huge scoreboard of successful missions covering a multi-story expanse of wall in their operations hangar. Meeting 24-hour-a-day requests for support for both operational taskings and lifesaving MEDEVAC flights, the UH-1N aircraft and Det 10 pilots serve both their customer and their community.

Average winter temperatures take a nosedive as we follow the trail of the UH-1N north from Cheyenne toward Great Falls, Montana, home of a world-renowned "cowboy art" museum and of Malmstrom Air Force Base. Until recently, a SAC air division oversaw the operations of Malmstrom's separate bomb and missile wings. As a part of the reorganization affecting us all, those organizations now work cooperatively but independently. At times, both call upon the services of the 37's Det 5, which is primarily geared toward supporting the missile wing, but frequently participates in base-level exercises involving the bombers and tankers as well.

Det 5 boasts the largest number of aircraft of any 37th detachment—eight N-models. The extra Hueys and pilots that go along with them are necessary to cover the more than 23,000 square miles of facilities run by the 341st Strategic Missile Wing. While occasionally asked to provide MEDEVAC assistance, Malmstrom crews are usually kept busy just staying on top of their demanding support taskings. On the morning *TMF* watched operations unfold, one aircraft and crew were TDY, another was on its way to Minot on an out-and-back mission, two others were working out on the fringes of the missile field in support of a missile movement, and a fifth was being subjected to multiple engine runs to bring it

back on line. Operations Officer (now detachment commander) Maj. Brian Livie's only observation was a laconic "This is about average." The UH-1N is an ideal helicopter to assign against such high-tempo operations, particularly where winter temperatures plummet far below 0° F. The relatively compact design of the airframe permits hangaring for virtually all kinds of maintenance not requiring actual engine runs. The aircraft itself can operate safely in temperatures as low as 60 below, although numb feet and frozen breath are the rule when the mercury dips that low, since the UH-1N's cabin heat is exclusively bleed air-driven.

Travelling from the northernmost reaches of the Missouri River to Spokane, Washington, takes us across the Continental Divide and into a vastly different climate and terrain. The "Inland Empire" of eastern Washington State is probably familiar to a large number of MAC crewmembers who have undergone training at the USAF Survival School based at Fairchild AFB, 15 miles west of Spokane. Those who have been there also recall an even more intimate, ground-level familiarity they may have gained in the Survival School's field training area near Cusick, Washington, about 80 miles north of the main base.

Detachment 24, 37 ARS, is the only part of the now-disbanded 40th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron still in operation. It was transferred to the 37th and given new life quite simply because it is indispensable to the Survival School's mission. A detachment helicopter and complete crew are always in place at a forward operating base adjacent to the field training area whenever students are in the field. During the day, the crew flies sorties in support of school training events, accepting vectoring instructions





... the MAC Eagle proudly flies at the north end of the runway.

from students and demonstrating the procedures used for rescue hoist recovery. The crew is always on standby however, against the very real possibility that someone may get hurt somewhere in the rugged wilderness. The unit's list of "saves," steadily inching toward the five-hundred mark, testifies to their value. The Commandant of the Survival School, Col. David R. Lloyd, described himself and ATC as "supremely pleased" with Det 24's support, noting that the detachment extends every effort toward meeting all requests for assistance from his staff and instructors. While hardly a mainstream 37th ARS unit, Det 24 carries out its one-of-a-kind mission with dependability and pride, courtesy of its trusty Hueys.

The flexibility and reliability of the UH-1N weapon system makes itself known in quite a different way at Vandenberg AFB. We may think to ourselves,

"California! Dream duty!" For some, this may be the case. For flyers, especially Detachment 8 pilots, (the only active duty pilots assigned to the base), the dreams are frequently of the sort that come after a midnight pizza. While BX T-shirts extoll the virtues of Vandenberg in terms of vultures and other marks of desolation, to flyers, Vandenberg means fog—and plenty of it.

"We have some of the worst fog you've ever seen around here," explained Maj. Mark Foster, detachment commander. "It rolls in off the Pacific and shuts everything down. You can be out flying a training mission less than 20 minutes away and have to drop everything and run for home before you get weathered out!" While helicopters can and do land almost anywhere when the weather gets bad, this is never a desirable alternative. In Det 8's case, they also have to cope with large

sectors of "no-fly" airspace hemming them in from the east, further cutting their options when the weather goes down. This has led unit pilots to seek as many opportunities as possible to polish their instrument flying skills, not generally a high priority in the mainly VFR helicopter world. While not an ideal platform for conducting extensive instrument operations, the UH-1N fleet is fully equipped and certified for IFR flight, and the recent addition of glide slope receivers to extend the communications/navigation suite has made low approaches a lot less nerve-racking.

Det 8 exists to serve mainly space-related support functions. While primarily flying missions covering the sprawling 98,000 acres of base property and off-shore facilities belonging to Space Command's Western Space and Missile Center, detachment crews also team up with UH-1N crews from AFSC to cover Space Shuttle takeoffs and landings at Edwards AFB. As is the case with the 41st Air Rescue Squadron's H-3s (see *TMF* Sep 91), Det 8 crews sit alert during launches to cover possibility of various contingencies requiring the Shuttle crews to make an immediate landing. While the Patrick rescue crews anticipate options which could result in a return to the Kennedy Space Center, Edwards and Vandenberg crews, sometimes with augmentees from other 37 ARS bases, stand ready to respond to situations which might require a one-orbit return to Edwards. They are also on hand for scheduled Shuttle arrivals at Edwards.

Like their counterparts at F.E. Warren, Malmstrom, and Fairchild, Vandenberg crews serve their customers with the proven, reliable, and versatile UH-1N — truly "one aircraft for many missions."