



From Albatross to Choctaw: The 304th ARRSq makes a difficult transition safely and smoothly.



Routine to the Unaware

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IN TODAY'S EVER-CHANGING Air Force, units frequently find themselves transitioning from one type of aircraft to another. This in itself presents a challenge, but when an Air Force Reserve unit retires its HU-16 fixed-wing amphibians and reequips with HH-34 helicopters the challenge is a doubly demanding one. Here is an account of one unit's experience with this conversion.

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The 304th ARRSq, of Portland, Oregon, recently accomplished a

seemingly routine mission. Routine to the unaware, that is! To the men and women of the squadron who did it, their families who shared it, and their associates who knew about it, it was somewhat more than that. The mission was a cross-country training flight and an exercise in mobility. Eight helicopters left Portland, Oregon, flew to Hamilton AFB, California, and returned. But this is beginning at the end; let's go back to the real beginning.

The mission really began in April 1971 when the newly assigned com-

mander published a combination accident prevention and aircraft transition policy letter. In it he offered these thoughts:

"It's easy to say, I'm for safety. What isn't easy is to prove it, and make it a part of our everyday functional activities.

"In the near future we will be flying a new piece of machinery. An active, alert, knowledgeable crew member, crew chief, or specialist will have no trouble with the transition."

Troubles were minimal but the ef-

fort to complete the transition smoothly was taxing. Activities such as OJT, TTU, correspondence courses, and supply restocking became a full-time way of life. The managers and supervisors, though perhaps not "peaked out," were extended. Not only did everyone have to be retrained; through it all had to run the continuous thread of safety. The commander planned carefully, the supervisors managed efficiently, and the specialists learned and performed their tasks thoroughly. And yet, all the while, a spirit of can do and will do prevailed. Each day the sense of accomplishment was great, and only four months after receipt of the last UE aircraft, the squadron attained a C-3 combat readiness status. That was eight months ahead of schedule! And the following month, ARRS Headquarters IG rated the unit "Excellent."

The conversion of this and other squadrons from fixed to rotary wing had created some command problems in the areas of standardization, supply, and logistics. Introduction of the HH-34 was completely new to the Air Force and Reserve inventory. Probably the major problem was the lack of specific information on the reliability of the HH-34 Choctaw helicopter and requirements for its logistic support. To clarify some of the problem areas and acquire first-hand information about

the reliability and capability of the system, an exercise plan was developed based on the mission requirements of MAC Manual 51-34.

A cross-country training flight, involving low level navigation, diversion from flight plan, and logistic support, was chosen as the basic activity. An operations order was developed which laid on the mission for the flight crews, support from maintenance and supply, and coordination with higher headquarters, other U.S. Air Force activities, and FAA.

The HH-34s requirement for 115/145 aviation fuel presented a logistics problem. The helicopter has an operating range of three hours at 85 knots, so en route refueling would be necessary. However, the only 115/145 fuel available on course in Oregon was at Portland International Airport, so the plan called for squadron personnel to position a fuel truck with 3,000 gallons of 115/145, and a 1-1/2 ton truck with specialists and mobility equipment such as an APU and spare parts at Medford, Oregon.

A major decision was made to use all eight of the unit's assigned UE aircraft. For emergency assistance, two extra support HH-34s would be placed on alert status at Portland. The eight mission aircraft would depart Portland International Airport, fly VFR in trail to Medford for re-

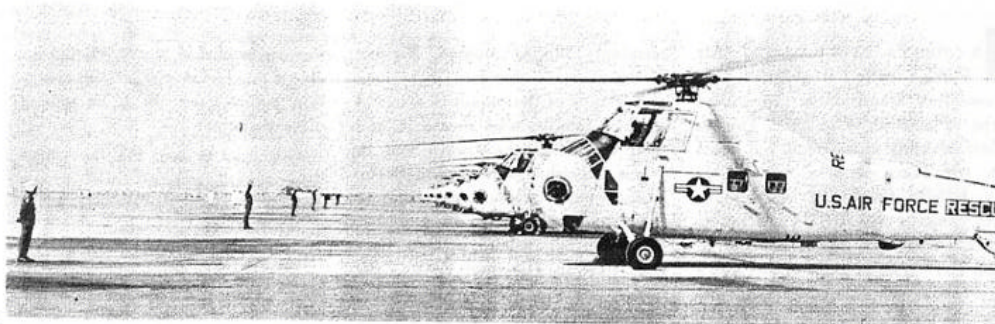
fueling, then proceed toward Hamilton AFB with a preplanned diversion to Beale AFB, California. The return flight was an exact reversal of the plan.

How did it work out? As mentioned earlier, "The 304th ARRSq . . . accomplished a seemingly routine mission . . ." The proof can be found in this simple statistical summary:

- 8 Aircraft (as planned)
- 51 Personnel (as planned)
- 3 Days (as planned)
- 50 Sorties (flown exactly as scheduled)
- 97.4 Hours Flown (as planned)
- 3 Aircraft Discrepancies:
 - Inverter Light (changed)
 - Garlock Seal (changed)
 - ASE Role Mode Out (repaired)
- Mobility Plan (completed)
- Capability of HH-34 in Operational Environment (confirmed)

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The 304th ARRSq demonstrated that safety in any operation starts far before the ops plan is written, continues through its everyday activities, and becomes a statistical part of its history through total individual awareness of its existence. To the personnel of the 304th, accident-free performance and operational capability are evidence that foresight, planning, and hard work pay off. Their success in this mission looks routine only to the unaware. ✪



TURNAROUND FORMATION: This line-up of HH-34s at Hamilton AFB signals the halfway point in the mission.