



Single Engine Warriors

The mission goes on.

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A whirlwind tour of four SAC bases found MAC helicopter crews getting the job done safely in unkind climes. The plan was simple: Get to know what the 37th Air Rescue Squadron (ARS) does by visiting the four detachments still flying the single-engine UH-1H. It was hard to imagine how these units got by on a tenuous supply line, far displaced from their parent squadron, let alone their parent command. It's a given in the helicopter world that morale is high and camaraderie strong in the small organizations making up the bulk of Air Rescue Service. Still, the obvious question remains: how can crewmembers keep their spirits up flying around

the nation's frozen midsection, counting on one trusty Lycoming engine not to burp and deliver them into a long, cold wait for assistance? A quick look-see was in order.

First Stop: Detachment 9, 37 ARS.

The drive from Scott AFB, Illinois, to Whiteman AFB, Missouri, isn't particularly long, but the two bases are worlds apart in mission and level of activity. Whiteman, a SAC base without a primary flying mission for many years, is a beehive of activity. Facilities are being upgraded or newly constructed in anticipation of the first operational B-2 Stealth bombers' arrival. A tiny oasis of relative calm exists in the hangar housing Det 9 of the 37 ARS, which for years accounted for most of the active duty Air Force flying at Whiteman. Maj. (Lt. Col. Sel) Lee Meador, Commander, and Maj. Keith Curtis, Operations Officer, welcomed Lt. Col. Kent Lee, Chief of MAC's Flight Safety Division, in typical rescue fashion—trying to keep things running while just about everybody else was flying. Det 9's primary mission, like that of all but two of the 37's detachments, is to support its host SAC missile wing with time-critical airlift of people and parts. They also fly other support missions around their base's missile field. The Whiteman detachment is fortunate in this instance since the base itself is effectively surrounded by its launch facilities, rather than at the edge of them. This enables Det 9 to fly a large number of short-hop support flights while still having plenty of time available for rescue familiarization training.

Conducting a tour of the tiny operations area, Major Curtis pointed with noticeable pride to the briefing room, wallpapered with low-level hazard charts, airfield diagrams, and pictures of ad-

versary weapon systems. "We spend a lot of time in there," he noted, adding that the scenarios for each simulated rescue mission are deliberately complex, and mission planning for them is time consuming. The Whiteman detachment's local flying area is well-suited to this type of training, containing plenty of challenges to low-level navigation.

The B-2 construction will affect the detachment too. They'll soon be moving from their present hangar to the other end of the flight line where a new helicopter operations facility is almost complete. It's a change that the pilots, whose desks are stacked into a single office, are more than ready to make.

Second Stop: Detachment 3, 37 ARS.

It seemed like a good idea to visit some of the northern tier bases when the mercury was down a bit . . . just to get a feel for the operating environment. Readers who have never experienced the sensation of having the hair in your nose freeze are encouraged not to seek it. Lieutenant Greg (Fotch) Falcinelli, the detachment's safety officer, served as the one-man Sunday afternoon reception committee at Grand Forks International Airport and pointed out the sights between the airport and the base. (It didn't take long!) Grand Forks is closest to the small town of Emerado, N.D., and is about ten miles from the city of Grand Forks itself. The base is run by a SAC air division, which hosts both a B-1B bomber wing and a Minuteman missile wing. Majors Mike Damron and Don Quinn, Detachment Commander and DO, respectively, are quick to point out the difficulty in supporting the Grand Forks missile field and the hazards encountered in doing so.

"Radio coverage isn't bad over most of the area," Major Quinn observed, "but the dis-

tances are pretty significant. Flying one aircraft from the base to the farthest site out and back can take up a good part of a day." Major Damron added that the detachment's traditionally low manning level and high mission workload kept the unit on its toes. They enjoy an excellent relationship with their missile wing "customers" and rarely have problems meeting their support taskings. The cold weather poses an ever-present danger—crewmembers carry arctic survival equipment on every sortie. A helicopter's great advantage in an emergency is the ability to make a quick landing almost anywhere, but a prolonged wait in an unheated helicopter in the middle of the Dakotas can be as dangerous as the emergency itself. Careful flight planning and flight following are the professional hallmarks of operations at Det 3, and they do them well.

Third Stop: Detachment 7, 37 ARS.

Same state, same weather—the government-issued parka is getting a real workout. At least most of the folks at world-famous Minot AFB are wearing theirs, too. With wind-chills down to -35 degrees F, there's no other way to go!

The guide for this leg, Lieutenant Ray Shultz, took a round-about way into the base to show off a real surprise—a genuine UH-1F static display helicopter, proudly positioned near the VOQ. Minot denizens are accustomed to various jokes made about their base, but they close ranks to defend both the people and the sense of purpose you find there. Minot isn't a showcase for new weapons systems—the bomb wing flies B-52s and KC-135s, but everyone contributes to the base mission equally, and everyone is respected for the part they play in getting the job done. Where else could you find a "Chopper Avenue" on an

Air Force base?

Lt. Col. Denver Pletcher and Maj. Guy Dempsey, Detachment Commander and Ops Officer, show off their new operations and maintenance facility to all visitors. It shows obvious signs of extensive self-help improvements and upgrades. They were also the third consecutive supervisory team to praise their contract maintenance staff from Kay and Associates, Inc., (KAI).

Like their counterpart at all eight 37 ARS detachments, the Minot KAI staff works closely with their detachment's operators to meet SAC mission requirements, as well as MAC's continuation training needs. The KAI professionals, many of whom are retired Air Force maintenance specialists, brave the same conditions as the pilots on the flight line at Minot, usually for a lot longer time. During our conversation over several welcomed cups of coffee following the numbingly cold launch of a night training sortie, KAI personnel reminisced about some of the challenges they'd faced, including using a flatbed truck to retrieve a helicopter that had made a precautionary landing a considerable distance from the base. Detachment personnel, when they aren't otherwise engaged in flying, handling additional duties, hanging from helicopter skids in the O'Club, or applying stickers to everything in sight, have nothing but praise for KAI employees. They know those contractors "go the extra mile" for them sometimes, so they return the favor by sponsoring an annual "appreciation breakfast" every year. The sense of teamwork you find everywhere at Minot is epitomized by the esprit-de-corps of the two sides of Det 7—the flyers and the fixers.

Last Stop: Detachment 2, 37 ARS.

Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time. Why worry these

hardy pioneers on the frontiers of MAC with a headquarters-type hanging around them for days on end? Keep moving, get around, don't wear out the welcome. Four dets in eight days may have been pushing it, though. The weather at Rapid City, S.D. was the worst of the week, with icy roads adding to the fun. A "nerveless" (and presumably unmarried and orphaned) driver from the motor pool made the trip to the edge of the Black Hills and Ellsworth AFB in a "Daytona qualifying time" (even for dry roads). The "Q" beckoned for the evening. First light saw record low temperatures—to the point that even locals were muttering as they stared at the weather channel (a popular diversion that entire week).

Ellsworth AFB is one of the busiest flying environments in the north central United States. The recently opened Strategic Warfare Center is headquartered there and plays host to a small crosssection of all of SAC's aircraft. The base also operates a full B-1 wing, a missile wing, one of the ubiquitous ACE (T-38) detachments and, of course, the Hueys of Det 2.

The commander and DO, Maj. Bobby Clegg and Maj. Rob Storey, along with safety officer Lt "Oz" Osarczuk, provided a thorough orientation. Density altitude (although about as low as the Lincoln Tunnel on this particular day) frequently becomes a factor in the detachment's support mission. Ellsworth is situated on the fringes of the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains, and much of its operating area incorporates higher elevations than the 37th's other single-engine Huey detachments. The terrain is far less forgiving, too. The plains of the eastern Dakotas and western Missouri give way to rolling, heavily wooded hills and ridgelines here, and fewer options for quick land-

ing are available. A simple memorial plaque in the stairway leading up to Operations is a sobering reminder of the hazards that can stalk even the wary and prepared who fly in this environment.

The volume and diversity of air traffic around Ellsworth is a real challenge, as Major Storey is quick to point out. "Ever since the Strategic Warfare Center opened for business, use of the VR route north of the base has really been booming. Since the bombers are on one frequency and we're on another, the flying is VFR with emphasis on the 'visual'... heads up, looking out all the time."

Last fall, Ellsworth's Huey detachment hosted the 37th's first "Blade Wars," a comprehensive combat training exercise complete with threats and a continuously evolving intelligence scenario. Selected crews from all of the squadron's far-flung detachments converged on Ellsworth to participate in this first-of-its-kind event, which squadron officials hope to make a regular part of the "seasoning" of the many relatively inexperienced crewmembers who fly the missile support mission. The consensus among Det 2's pilots was that the sacrifices and hard work put into organizing this event were well worth the results.

The trip back to St Louis (by way of Minneapolis, the northern tier's answer to Atlanta), presented a good opportunity to review this whirlwind tour. It really came down to a few essentials:

—Some of Rescue's best flyers are making the most of a demanding, thankless mission with well-worn, but well-tended aircraft.

—The nature of our strategic deterrence posture and the geography of our missile base locations seems to guarantee they'll be needed for a long time.

—The best time to see the northern tier is not December! ✈