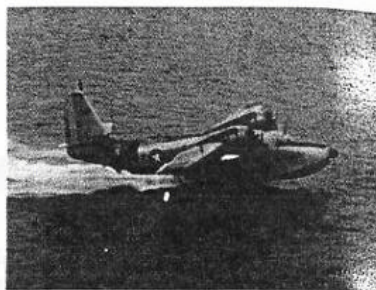


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"That Others May Live" represents the never-changing philosophy of our Rescue folks. But that's about the only thing that hasn't changed.



Rescue: Yesterday, To

Ten years ago Air Rescue Service had no formally recognized combat role. Running on a tight budget, castoff aircraft, and dedication, it was scattered across the face of the earth in small, fixed-wing air rescue squadrons and even smaller rotary wing local base rescue detachments.

The mission could be extremely rewarding — what is more rewarding than a save? — but the flying, though demanding, was mostly repetitious and occasionally boring: duckbutt after precautionary duckbutt orbit for the HC-54's, HC-97's, and HU-16's and "around the flagpole" locals for the HH-43's; pararescue deployment procedures and criteria were briefed, rebriefed, and briefed again; HH-43 crews fought fire after practice fire and honed their rescue hoist procedures to a fine edge in pattern after pattern. Maintenance crews struggled with their respective aircraft and swore at their supply priorities; commanders swore at the fine print in host base-tenant agreements; helicopter pilots swore at the H-43's lack of

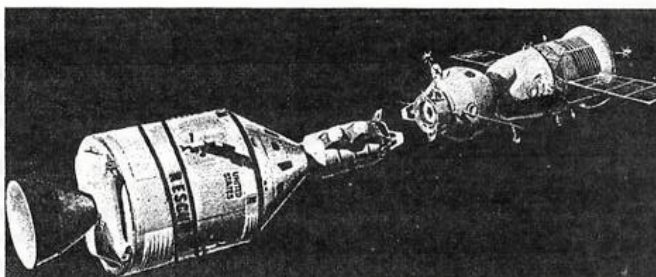
range; PJ's swore at the lack of missions; and flight engineers, flight mechanics, loadmasters, and radio operators just swore.

There was a lot of professional competence in Rescue: but it would have taken an unusually astute observer to have seen in the Rescue of 1965 the aggressive, versatile, and coordinated combat team of today.

In Combat

The story of Rescue's expansion and assumption of the combat rescue role — today the primary mission of ARRS—has been told and retold. Within a few short years, Rescue shed its reputation as an organization that trained for a mission that never happened and became, pound for pound and man for man, the most highly decorated unit of comparable size in the Air Force. Beyond that, ARRS became an integrated combat team. No longer did the fixed wing and helicopter components go their own separate ways. Air-to-air refueling was an important part of the Jolly Green Giant's act and King crews had learned an enormous amount about guiding

helicopters around mountains and thunderstorms at night and about orchestrating and coordinating air strikes. Pararescuemen now serve as helicopter gunners, in addition to jumping out of HC-130's. The question is "why was Rescue so successful in making radical changes in such a short period of time?" Few have mastered so difficult a mission in any amount of time. Part of the answer was the equipment: the HC-130K/P, the HH-3E, and the HH-53B/C are all thoroughly capable aircraft and all represented, at the time of their acceptance, the most advanced machinery in the world for the job. Little effort was spared to keep them at the top of the class. Witness the development of the night recovery system for the '53. But equipment was only part of the answer. The combat aircrew mission provided helicopter crews with manifold opportunities for busting their collective rear ends; yet the mission got done and relatively few busted rear ends were logged in the process. Most of those logged were due to hostile fire, a standard occupational hazard. Air-to-



oday and Tomorrow

air refueling gave everyone a piece of the action, and the complexities of a fast-breaking combat aircrew recovery mission placed a high premium on the accuracy of each of King's transmissions. Maintenance crews had to work long hours, under heavy pressure, in the most primitive conditions imaginable. Helicopters in particular are highly vulnerable to shoddy maintenance, yet in-commission rates — genuine in-commission rates — went up when the pressure intensified. They still do.

People Did It

Plainly, then, Rescue's success was largely a matter of people. From somewhere, Rescue had laid hands on well-trained people who could do the job, people who could make difficult decisions and judgments under fire and who had the courage to see them through. Many of them came from outside of Rescue and went into combat with only the briefest brush with ARRS procedures and attitudes; still the "old heads" largely set the tone. The pararescuemen, who occupy the only

career field unique to Rescue and who hold the only aircrew AFSC applicable to both fixed wing and helicopters, played a key role in this regard. The experience gained in flying duckbutts, making practice jumps, and fighting practice fires in the H-43 was efficiently converted into combat effectiveness. This was not because of the many combat duckbutts, combat jumps, or helicopter firefighting missions in Southeast Asia. But anything done truly well in, to, and around aircraft develops judgment, flexibility, and air — or maintenance or administrative — discipline.

Still, the combat environment that Rescue forces entered in 1964-1965 was a relatively undemanding one by today's standards. It got worse, much worse; but it got worse at a rate that allowed measured adjustment. So the equipment was changed and training adjusted to meet the threat; but, as in any such process of adjustment, there is the danger of over-specialization. The peacetime activities of the early 60's yielded very little in terms of

specific skills used in combat aircrew recovery, but somehow they contributed to the judgment, basic aircrew skills, aggressiveness, and air sense that is needed.

Back to the States

By 1975 the terms of the old equation had changed radically. After the cessation of active hostilities involving American forces in 1973, most of Rescue's combat experience rotated back to the states and out of ARRS. A cadre was retained for training at Hill AFB and in that sense, ARRS was better off than it had been in '65. But were aircrews getting the same generalized, basic, flying experience needed to develop that hard-to-pin-down but vitally needed quality called air sense? With stateside flying tending toward all-IFR operations, this was a point of concern among helicopter people in particular.

The experience background of ARRS personnel had changed in many other ways as well. The old LBR was mostly a thing of the past. Additional UH-1 detachments, which had in effect taken

Yesterday

over from the LBR's, also picked up the MAST mission. Their flying wasn't all that different from the old "flagpole" operation of the LBR days. If anything, it contained more variety, and a fair amount of aircrew rotation between the Huey detachments and Jolly Green squadrons. Maintenance troops still swore at supply priorities; PJ's still swore at the lack of missions; commanders still swore at the fine print in their host-tenant agreements; and operations specialists had the new MAIRS reporting system to swear at, but they still swore; so did the flight mechanics, the flight engineers, the loadmasters, and the radio operators. Things, in short, looked at least as good as they had in 1965. But had the crews overspecialized in this training and lost their versatility in the process?

Son Tay, Koh Tang

The first clue was provided by the Son Tay raid in November of 1970. Different as it was from the normal aircrew recovery mission, ARRS aircrews had carried it out flawlessly. There were later clues, and more than just clues, really. In the spring of '75, Super Jolly Greens from ARRS were the first into Phnom Penh for the evacuation, inserting an Air Force combat control team. They were last out, extracting the Marine Command Group. Super Jolly Greens operated from the carrier *Midway* with CH-53's of the 21st Special Operations Squadron in the evacuation of Saigon.

The definitive answer came on

15 May 1975 off the beaches of Koh Tang Island. Refueled by HC-130's of ARRS, Super Jolly Greens from the 40th initiated efforts to recapture the S. S. *Mayaguez* by placing a U. S. Marine boarding party aboard the destroyer *Holt*. The 40th's HH-53's operating in conjunction with CH-53's of 21 SOS, then participated in the first opposed helicopter assault operation in ARRS history — or Air Force history — flying into the teeth of intense ground fire from entrenched hostile forces to put their marines ashore. Throughout the long day and into the night, the rescue team functioned smoothly and effectively in a completely new environment, evacuating wounded marines from fireswept landing zones and eventually extracting the last of the landing party under fire in the dark of a completely moonless night. Again and again, Jolly Green crews shot their way into the tightly confined landing zones with their miniguns, shot it out with hostile forces while on the ground, and shot their way out. Refueling after refueling with King was made without incident, despite heavy battle damage and marginal weather conditions. Unparalleled airmanship kept them there. Even the MAIRS reports went in successfully. For a few days, at least in the 40th, PJ's did not complain about the lack of missions. The maintenance troops were too busy mending battle damage to complain about much of anything. The commander was too tired to even read the host-tenant agreement, let alone swear about it. And then things reverted to normal — except that things really didn't revert to normal; they never will.

The *Mayaguez* incident illustrated graphically that such normalcy as there is today in international affairs is a very chancy thing. The American fighting man must be ready to take on the most improbable missions at any hour of the day or night.

ARRS, now one of the most versatile and flexible forces in the American inventory, is doubly vulnerable to such midnight calls. Ten years ago, the thought of ARRS aircraft conducting an assault landing against defended landing zones would have seemed preposterous. Today, because of the flexibility and professionalism of ARRS aircrews and the superior equipment they operate, it seemed perfectly natural. We've got to keep it that way. ✱



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Guilmartin is the assistant operations officer of the 40 ARRS, Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand, and is qualified in the HH-53C. He has also flown the HH-43B and HH-3E. He received his commission in 1962 and completed undergraduate pilot training at Laughlin AFB, Texas. Major Guilmartin attended Princeton University under the AFIT program and was an instructor in the Department of History at the Air Force Academy from 1970 until 1974. He participated in the evacuation of Saigon earlier this year. His military decorations include the Silver Star.