

FOR VALOR OR VALUE
AN EXAMINATION OF PERSONNEL RECOVERY OPERATIONS

BY
BILLY D. THOMPSON

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About the Author

Major Billy D. Thompson was commissioned through the Reserve Officer Training Corps, Auburn University in 1989. Graduating from Undergraduate Pilot Training (Helicopter) in 1990, he went on to fly MH-60Gs as a co-pilot, aircraft commander, instructor pilot, and evaluator pilot in the 55th Special Operations Squadron. Following an exchange tour with the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) flying MH-60Ks, he served as an HH-60G flight commander and evaluator pilot. Major Thompson is a senior pilot with over 2000 flying hours. He has a bachelor's degree in History from Auburn University, a master's degree in Aeronautical Sciences from Embry Riddle Aeronautical University, and a master's degree in Military Arts and Sciences from Air Command and Staff College. In June 2001, Major Thompson was assigned to Headquarters, United States Special Operations Command.

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Abstract

This study attempts to determine the rationale behind the conduct of personnel recovery operations. In doing so, the author first develops the history of rescue within the United States and particularly the United States Air Force beginning with World War I and building through Operation Allied Force. Next, he examines the commonly held beliefs for conducting personnel recovery operations to include sanctity of human life/casualty aversion, loss of a valuable resource, denial of intelligence and propaganda, and impact on military morale. Finally, he distills these reasons down to the basis that the United States has a moral and ethical obligation from the government to the individual soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines, as well as their families. Finally, he describes briefly how the US Government could codify this commitment.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Consider your corps as your family...Don't think of yourself, think of your comrades; they will think of you. Perish yourself, but save your comrades.

General Mikhail Ivanovich, 1890

What kind of foolhardy mission is this?

Stephen Spielberg, no date
Responding to a question regarding the mission in the movie Saving Private Ryan.

The Question

Can Personnel Recovery (PR) missions be justified? What price should the United States be willing to pay to recover its military members from hostile territory, or should the United States be willing to pay a price at all? Is the life of one person worth risking the lives of many others? Some people feel the mantra today is, “The war will stop for CSAR.” But they wonder if this is prudent.¹

The above questions go to the very heart of the issue that members of the US military and government struggle with when contemplating the PR mission. The Department of Defense (DoD) is currently in the midst of an overhaul and re-organization of the PR mission area. As part of this re-organization, an executive agency for PR, the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency (JPRA), was established under United States Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM).² In 2001, the Air Force planned to transfer eight HH-60G helicopters and five HC-130P tankers to the active component from the reserves to bolster its capability to conduct Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR)

¹ Darrel D. Whitcomb, “Combat Search and Rescue: A Longer Look,” *Aerospace Power Journal* (Summer 2000), 29.

² Mission Area Analysis (MAA) and Business Process Reengineering (BPR) for Personnel Accounting and Recovery (Arlington, VA: ANSER, October 2000), V-6.

missions.³ These commitments and others by the Department of Defense indicate that the United States has made the decision that the potential risks and costs associated with conducting PR missions are acceptable in order to ensure the safe return of US citizens, soldiers, and airmen. This decision prompts the examination that follows.

Limitations and Definitions

Personnel recovery embraces a wide range of missions that occur across a broad spectrum. These missions range from Civil Search and Rescue (SAR) to Unconventional Assisted Recovery (UAR). The Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) defines PR as follows:

... the umbrella term for operations focused on the task of recovering captured, missing, or isolated personnel from danger. It is the sum of military, civil, and political efforts to obtain the release or recovery of personnel from uncertain or hostile environments and denied areas whether they are captured, missing, or isolated. That includes U.S., allied, coalition, friendly military, or paramilitary, and others designated by the National Command Authorities (NCA). Personnel recovery includes, but is not limited to, theater search and rescue (SAR); Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR); Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE); Evasion and Recovery (E&R); and the coordination of negotiated as well as forcible recovery options. Personnel recovery may occur through military action, action by non-governmental organizations, other U.S. Government-approved action, and diplomatic initiatives, or through any combination of those options.⁴

Personnel recovery is the sum of military, civil, and political efforts to obtain the release or recovery of personnel from uncertain or hostile environments and denied areas whether they are captured, missing, or isolated.⁵ It is important to note that, although similar to PR missions, PR does not encompass “rescue” operations to free hostages or other situations dealing with terrorism or counterterrorism. PR also does not encompass the realm of non-combatant evacuation operations (NEO). The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflicts (ASD-SO/LIC) is

³ General John Handy, comments at 2001 DOD Personnel Recovery Conference, Arlington, VA, 23 January 2001.

⁴ US Deputy Secretary of Defense, *Personnel Recovery (PR)*, Department of Defense Directive 2310.2, Washington D.C.: 30 June 1997.

⁵ “Executive Summary of the Personnel Recovery Function,” *Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office*, No date.

responsible for the prosecution of counterterrorism and NEO.⁶ This study will focus on the recovery of isolated personnel from danger with an emphasis on CSAR.

Historically the United States Air Force (USAF) has played the largest role in CSAR and currently is the executive agent for CSAR through its Air Combat Command (ACC). For this reason, USAF CSAR will be a central focus of this study. However, certain other PR or hostage recovery missions will be examined when they have a bearing on the current PR debate. For the purposes of this study, CSAR is defined as “a specific task performed by rescue forces to effect the recovery of distressed personnel during war or military operations other than war.”⁷

Significance

Secretary of Defense William J. Perry stated in 1996, “Preserving the life and well-being of our Service members and civilians who are placed in harm’s way while defending our Nation’s interests is, and must remain, one of our highest priorities.”⁸ The department responsible for overseeing all PR-related issues, the DPMO, has recently reiterated that PR is an issue of national importance, and that preserving the lives of US servicemen is one of the highest priorities of the Department of Defense. DPMO bases the high priority placed on PR missions on the following four concepts that are central to this study.

First, Americans place a high value on the sanctity of human life, and the US has a moral obligation to go to great lengths to ensure the safe return of all personnel. Closely tied to this concept is the debate over casualty aversion, both our own casualties and those of the enemy. Second, the morale of American servicemen is positively affected by the knowledge that no one will be left behind, and this results in better performance. Third, by recovering its personnel the United States denies the enemy a valuable source of intelligence and possible source of coercion or political advantage that

<http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/pr/exsum.pdf>
⁶ “Operations Directive – Fact Sheet”, *Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office*, Prepared by Operations Directorate, 4 October 1999.

<http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/pr/prdef.pdf>
⁷ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Pub 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, (Washington D.C.: 23 March 1994), as amended through 12 January 1998, 87.

could change how an otherwise successful operation is perceived. Fourth, the recovery of US servicemen preserves the availability of these highly skilled resources.⁹

Similarly, Air Force doctrine holds that CSAR operations are conducted for three reasons. First, returning key personnel to friendly control allows them to fight again while conserving resources. Second, recovery denies the enemy the potential to exploit the intelligence and/or propaganda value of captured personnel; this negates the enemy's ability to influence the national or international political scene. Third, the ability of the US to conduct CSAR operations results in increased morale and a resultant increase in performance.¹⁰

Given all of the above, this study explores the rationale or justification for PR operations and challenges whether the same are valid due to the substantial evidence that PR, in fact, does not receive the proper amount of support such emphasis would warrant.

“Personnel Recovery, Search and Rescue, and Combat Search and Rescue ain't sexy. Therefore, it's not a priority.”¹¹ This comment by Retired Major General Nels Running at the 2001 Department of Defense Personnel Recovery Conference was an openly inflammatory attempt on his part to spur debate. However, many believe the truth lies close to his sentiment. A senior naval aviator at a 1997 Tactical Aviation Strike conference offered the following comment when asked about the number of CSAR helicopters: “Why are we even talking about this? We are here to discuss aviation and strike warfare. CSAR is an expensive waste of our time and assets.”¹² In perhaps the most telling condemnation of the status of PR in the Department of Defense, ANSER Corporation recently completed a Mission Area Analysis (MAA) for Personnel Accounting and Recovery, commissioned by DPMO, which stated: “Personnel Recovery

⁸ William J. Perry, *Secretary of Defense Memorandum*, 26 January 1996.

⁹ “Executive Summary of the Personnel Recovery Function”, *Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office*, No date.

<<http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/pr/exsum.pdf>

¹⁰ US Air Force, *Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.6, Combat Search and Rescue Operations*, (Washington D.C.: 30 September 1998), 4.

¹¹ US Air Force Major General (Retired) Nels Running, comments at 2001 DOD Personnel Recovery Conference, Arlington, VA, 23 January 2001.

¹² “1997 Tactical Aviation Strike Conference”, NAS Fallon, *US Naval Institute Proceedings*

is clearly not a priority for the Services or the theater commands and components.”¹³ In what could also be construed as a ranking of relative importance within the Air Force, Air Force Doctrine Document One lists CSAR as fifteenth of seventeen “Air and Space Power Functions,” ahead of only Navigation and Positioning, and Weather Services.¹⁴

The above statements regarding the relative importance given to CSAR prompt many to believe that, although CSAR is important, senior military and government leaders are not willing to devote substantial resources to it. “The problem is that although US national security decision makers appreciate the utility of a combat search and rescue capability, they are unable to justify it on a cost-benefit basis.”¹⁵ Alternatively, perhaps national security leaders and senior military officials have indeed determined exactly how much PR is worth to them and are applying resources commensurate with that determination. Whether this investment in resources during a time of constrained budgets is valid is an important question as the Air Force strives to live up to its newly adopted motto that “no one comes close.”¹⁶

Preview of the Argument

In order to assess the justification for PR and CSAR the value of these missions in the past must be considered. Consequently, this study will begin with a chronological look at the history of PR and CSAR. The earliest attempts at PR during World War I will be examined, followed by World War II, and the US experience in the Korean War. Next, what many identify as the “golden age of combat search and rescue,” Vietnam, will be addressed.¹⁷ It was during the Vietnam War that many of the concepts for CSAR used today were developed. This period also provides several examples where

¹³ Mission Area Analysis (MAA) and Business Process Reengineering (BPR) for Personnel Accounting and Recovery (Arlington, VA: ANSER, October 2000), VI-17.

¹⁴ US Air Force, *Air Force Doctrine Document 1, Air Force Basic Doctrine* (Washington D.C.: September 1997), 45.

¹⁵ US Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Bob Hunt, “Combat Search and Rescue: A Future Special Operations Mission?” (Unpublished Research Paper, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: April 1996), 21.

¹⁶ US Air Force website.

<<http://www.af.mil/>

¹⁷ Greg Alan Caires, “Advanced Aircraft Bolster Search, Rescue Capability”, *National Defense*, (February 1999), 28.

the United States refined CSAR operations that seemed to defy the cost-benefit calculus. Vietnam was also the last time a dedicated rescue aircraft, not a special operations aircraft, conducted a successful combat recovery.

The period following Vietnam presents divergent aspects of PR and CSAR, as well as US attempts to rescue American servicemen and civilians from hostage situations. The problems associated with PR in Europe will be analyzed as well as the failed attempt to rescue American hostages in Iran. Toward the end of the 1980s, the US involvement in Panama presents another case where hostage rescue of an American citizen was attempted. This was followed shortly afterward by Operation Desert Storm.

The decisions that were made to employ or not employ American military forces to conduct PR in these cases illuminate the manner in which senior leaders have considered the cost-benefit ratio regarding PR. The Gulf War also raised the issue of the so-called CNN effect that possibly influenced the conduct of PR in the 1990s. Finally, US operations in Somalia and the Balkans will be examined to shed light on how the dynamics of these operations affected decision makers with respect to the conduct of PR missions.

Following the historical survey, this study will examine commonly held beliefs about PR. They include the sanctity of human life, the retention of valuable resources, denial of intelligence and propaganda to the enemy, and the impact on military morale. These beliefs will be examined in an attempt to determine whether they provide sufficient justification for conducting PR missions or whether “[the] universe is so vast and so ageless that the life of one man can only be justified by the measure of his sacrifice.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Pilot Officer V.A. Rosewarne, 1940.
<<http://www.1rcr.org/quotes.htm>

Chapter 2

THE EARLY YEARS

I am awaiting with earnest expectation the first time that an aeroplane actually saves a life; when that takes place, it will have conquered the heart of the people as well as fascinated its intellect, aroused its awe, or compelled its admiration.

Glenn H. Curtiss

*And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds
For the ashes of his fathers,
And the temples of his gods?*

Horatius at the Bridge

Lays of Ancient Rome, Thomas Babington Macaulay

World War I

The aviators that took to the skies in World War I certainly faced fearful odds and often died because those odds were not in their favor. By the beginning of World War I, Glenn Curtiss had witnessed that first “save” by an airplane.¹⁹ Ironically, the first attempt at a save could have occurred when a participant in the 1911 Chicago Air Meet landed his hydroaeroplane on the water to rescue a fellow participant who had crashed into Lake Michigan. However, the downed pilot refused the flight back to shore in favor of waiting for an approaching boat.²⁰ Nevertheless, the potential use of the airplane for rescue was not lost, and the seaplane would be a mainstay of rescue organizations for the

¹⁹ It is customary for those in Rescue to refer to each life saved as a “save.” Thus, the recovery of a two-man F-15E crew would result in two saves, a four-man B-1 crew as four saves, and so on.

²⁰ Glenn H. Curtiss and Augustus Post, *The Curtiss Aviation Book* (New York: Fredrick A Stokes Company, 1921), 139-40, cited in US Air Force Major Douglas Ebert, “Combat

next 60 years. The concept of recovering downed airmen, as demonstrated in 1911, and transporting injured troops by air had been considered for many years.

The first known aerial rescue occurred in 1870, thirty-three years before the Wright Brothers flew their plane at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. It happened in Paris during the Franco-Prussian War. To escape the bombardment of Bismarck's guns, the French used observation balloons to evacuate by airlift 160 wounded soldiers who otherwise would have died or been captured by on charging troops. Since that time, although the tactics have been refined and the means of transportation revolutionized the same principle of moving injured men out of harms way remains a key consideration in modern day warfare.²¹

Although the concept may have been around for many years, air rescue was a rare occurrence during World War I. The French had used airplanes to evacuate patients by air from Serbia in 1915, but the stagnant, well-established Western front provided little opportunity, or need, for this type of service.²² The technology of the airplane during this period was not well suited to rescue and did not provide the downed pilot much chance of survival. The wood and cloth construction, combined with non self-sealing gas tanks, was extremely vulnerable to battle damage that often proved catastrophic. In a preview of the coming years, however, two rescue attempts are worth noting.

In 1915 an American serving with the Lafayette Escadrille, Jimmy Bach, attempted to rescue his wingman who had crashed following the insertion of saboteurs behind enemy lines. After landing and picking up his wingman, Bach crashed on his takeoff attempt and both men were captured.²³ Significantly, this failed attempt may have foreshadowed the use of special operations aircraft in conducting CSAR as a corollary mission.

Ensign Hammann of the US Navy made a more successful attempt in 1918.

Search and Rescue of Distressed Aircrew in the Year 2010.” Unpublished Research Paper, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: May 1995.

²¹ L. B. Taylor Jr., *That Others May Live* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1967), 61.

²² *Ibid.*, 61.

²³ Arch Whitehouse, *Decisive Air Battles of the First World War* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1964), 60-66, cited in California Air National Guard Major Michael J. Martini, “Air Rescue in the US Air Force: A Historical Perspective.” Unpublished Research Paper, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: April 1987.

Hammann and his wingman were providing fighter cover over the Adriatic Sea in Italian built Macchi M-5 flying boats when an Austrian Albatross shot down the wingman. Observing that his mate had survived the crash at sea, Hammann landed beside him, recovered him, and returned him to Italy. For this action, Hammann became the first naval aviator to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.²⁴ Unfortunately, rescues of the above sort during World War I were the exception rather than the rule.

World War II

The period after World War I saw many developments that would aid the refinement of an air rescue capability. This period saw a rapid improvement in airplane technology that produced bigger, faster, and more capable aircraft. This period also saw the first use of an aircraft that would revolutionize air rescue: the helicopter.²⁵ Moreover, during the inter-war years the Coast Guard began flying patrols off the Atlantic coast in support of rescue efforts.²⁶ Most historians trace the beginnings of CSAR, however, to the Battle of Britain.

Both Germany and England quickly realized the need for an air-sea rescue capability, but the Germans took the lead. They had established a fleet of boats as early as 1930 for the rescue of downed airmen. Realizing that this capability was inadequate, the Germans modified several He 59B-2 seaplanes for the rescue role and established them in an air-sea rescue service, or *Sceenotdienst*. The Germans fitted the He 59s with medical supplies, heated sleeping bags, and a floor hatch with a hoist. They also developed several items that are still in use today in improved form, such as the inflatable dinghy and sea dye.²⁷ The Germans initially attempted to obtain immunity from attack for the He59s by painting red crosses on them, but the British refused to recognize this ploy, fearing they were also being used for intelligence purposes. The Germans subsequently escorted the He 59s with Me 110 twin-engine fighters, a concept that is still

²⁴ Adrian O. Van Wyen, *Naval Aviation in World War I* (Washington D.C.: Chief of Naval Operations, 1969), 78-79.

²⁵ Giorgio Apostolo, *World Encyclopedia of Civil and Military Helicopters* (London: Willow Books, 1984), 18.

²⁶ Kensil Bell, *Always Ready* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1943), 229-30.

²⁷ Sea dye is a fluorescent dye that creates a stain on the water around the downed pilot. This greatly increases his chances of being located.

practiced today with fighter escort for helicopters in what is called the Combat Search and Rescue Task Force (CSARTF).

The British were not far behind the Germans and in July 1940 established the Directorate of Air-Sea Rescue. The establishment of this directorate would lead to the rescue of one out of every three British airmen who crashed into the English Channel or the North Sea.²⁸ The British would also pioneer the use of dropping wooden lifeboats from aircraft to downed airmen, a technique the United States would use later in the war with modified B-17s.

Following the entry of the United States into the war, the Directorate of Air-Sea Rescue would gain in importance. The United States had no organization or plan for the return of downed airmen at the beginning of World War II. Instead of attempting to create one from scratch, 8th Air Force folded its own operations into the British framework and conducted combined operations with the Royal Air Force (RAF). The summer of 1943 saw the introduction of the P-47 Thunderbolt into the role of rescue spotter aircraft as well as rescue escort (RESCORT). Several of the P-47s were modified to drop rations, dinghies, smoke bombs, or other emergency gear. In 1945, a P-47 squadron of the 65th Fighter Wing was re-designated the 5th Emergency Rescue Squadron.

By the end of the war in Europe, the combined efforts of the British and American rescue units claimed 5,721 airmen saved from the waters around Great Britain as well as 3,200 other airmen worldwide.²⁹ In addition, clandestine efforts in Yugoslavia by special operations forces also contributed to the recovery of downed airmen. The 15th Air Force Air Crew Rescue Unit was established and operated in fifteen European countries. However, the majority of their rescues took place in the Balkans and resulted in over

²⁸ Earl H. Tilford, Jr., *The United States Air Force: Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia, 1961-1975* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office), 5.

²⁹ California Air National Guard Major Michael J. Martini, "Air Rescue in the US Air Force: A Historical Perspective." Unpublished Research Paper, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: April 1987, 35-6. See Major Martini's paper for an excellent historical account of rescue during World War II.

2,300 successful recoveries.³⁰

The war in the Pacific would present many of the same problems as the war in Europe, only compounded. No organization existed at the start of the war to conduct or oversee rescue, and the huge expanse of the Pacific theater was difficult to overcome. Initially, units were responsible for recovering their own people, and crews understood that they had little to no chance of being spotted or recovered if they crashed into the water early in the war. During this period, Navy PBY Catalinas were used extensively for search and rescue. Later, the Army Air Force contributed OA-10 amphibians and B-17s modified to drop lifeboats and supplies to augment the Navy effort.

Two of the more memorable rescues of World War II took place in the Pacific. In January 1943, the commander of 13th Air Force, General Nathan Twining, along with fourteen others, crashed at sea in a B-17. Adrift for over five days, the survivors were eventually spotted by a Catalina and recovered. This rescue highlighted the need for an independent rescue service because all of the aircraft involved in the search had been pulled from operational units, degrading their capability to conduct combat operations.³¹ In another memorable rescue, in February 1944, Lt Nathan Gordon, flying his PBY Catalina received word that several B-25s had been shot down and were just offshore the Japanese held island of Kavieng. Lt Gordon made four separate landings under heavy Japanese fire and recovered fifteen downed aviators. For his actions, Gordon was awarded the Medal of Honor.³²

The China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater saw the introduction of two of the most important steps in the development of combat rescue. The first was the birth of the pararescueman.³³

³⁰ Thomas T. Matteson, Cmdr, USCG, “An Analysis of the Circumstances Surrounding the Rescue and Evacuation of Allied Aircrewmembers from Yugoslavia, 1941-1945”, April 1977, 2.

³¹ Taylor, *That Others May Live*, 71.

³² Andy Evans, *Combat Search and Rescue* (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 1999), 11.

³³ “The mission of a Pararescueman is to recover downed and injured aircrew members in austere and non-permissive environments. Pararescuemen provide emergency medical treatment necessary to stabilize and evacuate injured personnel while acting in an enemy evading role. Pararescuemen also act as aircrew gunners and scanners on fixed and rotary-wing aircraft while performing flight-following duties. In addition,

The history of Pararescue began in August of 1943, when 21 persons bailed out of a disabled C-46 over an uncharted jungle near the China-Burma border. So remote was the crash site that the only means of getting help to the survivors was by paratroop. Lieutenant Colonel Don Fleckinger and two medical corpsmen volunteered for the assignment. This paratroop of medical corpsmen was the seed from which the concept of Pararescue was born. For a month, these men, aided by natives, cared for the injured until the party was brought to safety. News commentator Eric Sevareid was one of the men to survive this ordeal. He later wrote of the men who risked their lives to save his: "Gallant is a precious word; they deserve it."³⁴

The second important step in the development of combat rescue in the CBI was the introduction of the helicopter. In March 1944, an Army Air Force R-4 helicopter was used to evacuate a pilot and three wounded soldiers from the 1st Air Commando Group's secret Aberdeen base, far behind Japanese lines. Helicopters would be deployed only in very small numbers during World War II, but the seed had been sown for their use in rescue. Five years after the end of World War II, helicopters and the rest of the fledgling rescue community would again be called to service in Korea.³⁵

Korea

Following World War II, the military recognized the need for maintaining a rescue capability. Initially, disputes between the services hampered progress, but in March 1946 the Air Rescue Service (ARS) was formed under the Air Transport Command with a responsibility for conducting worldwide over land rescue. In addition, the ARS was tasked with all rescue overseas. The Coast Guard would maintain responsibility for sea rescue along the US coasts. The ARS suffered from the massive demobilization following World War II, and it was not until 1949 that the situation began to improve. New and better aircraft such as the SA-16 amphibian and the R-5 helicopter began to arrive along with sufficient personnel to fly and maintain them. This proved to

Pararescuemen provide contingency landing sites for NASA missions." Quoted on the Pararescue website.

><http://www.Pararescue.com>

³⁴ Pararescue website.

><http://www.pararescue.com/history>

³⁵ Martini, "Air Rescue in the US Air Force: A Historical Perspective," 61-62.

be crucial as the Korean War erupted on 25 June 1950.

The Korean War saw the first use of helicopters in significant numbers to rescue airmen from behind enemy lines as a standard procedure. Korea would also see the use of seaplanes for water rescue as well as the escort of helicopters by fighters. The 2nd and 3rd Air Rescue Squadrons performed valiantly in Korea and rescued 170 USAF airmen and another 84 United Nations airmen from behind enemy lines, often at great risk to themselves. An example of the courage displayed by members of the ARS occurred in June 1951 when Lt John J. Najarian landed an SA-16 amphibian in the Taedong River, at night, and under enemy fire, to recover a downed F-51 pilot. For his actions, Lt Najarian received the Congressional Medal of Honor. In addition to combat rescues, aircraft of the ARS performed a secondary mission of air ambulance and evacuated over 8,500 soldiers, most of whom were ground casualties.³⁶ In the end, Korea again demonstrated the need for a dedicated, trained rescue service.

Conclusion

The first fifty years of powered flight, and the three major wars fought during this period, witnessed an evolution in warfare. The airplane expanded the means to wage wars in ways that were not possible before. The airplane also presented new challenges and possibilities that previously had not been considered. For the first time, highly skilled and trained servicemen who represented a significant investment in money, time, and training were being lost in areas beyond the front lines. As technology, geography and terrain allowed, the militaries of the world developed means to recover, or at least attempt to recover these individuals. The reasoning for these operations will be examined in more detail later in this study. Nevertheless, it is certain that during this first fifty years of powered flight, the capabilities of CSAR forces had evolved. Just over ten years later, in a different part of Asia, CSAR would rise to perhaps its greatest heights.

³⁶ Robert Frank Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea 1950-1953* (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1983), 576-84.

Chapter 3

PERSONNEL RECOVERY IN VIETNAM

It is my duty, as a member of the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service, to save life and to aid the injured. I will be prepared at all times to perform my assigned duties quickly and efficiently, placing these duties before personal desires and comforts. These things I do that others may live.

Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service Code

When the history of the war in Vietnam is finally written, the story of Air Rescue may well become one of the most outstanding human dramas in the entire history of the Air Force.

Secretary of the Air Force Harold Brown, 1968

The Inter-war Period

In 1954, shortly after the end of the Korean War, the ARS consisted of 50 rescue squadrons. Seven years later, following a period of decreased defense budgets and shifting priorities, the ARS had only 11 squadrons. The focus of the United States, and specifically the Air Force, on strategic nuclear war resulted in the dismantling of the rescue force structure. This was made clear to the Military Air Transport Service in a 1958 letter from Headquarters USAF stating:

ARS will be organized, manned, equipped, trained, and deployed to support peacetime air operations. No special units or specially designed aircraft will be provided for the sole purpose of wartime search and rescue (SAR). Wartime rescue operations will be dictated by the capabilities of equipment used for peacetime SAR, and will be conducted in accordance with JANAF [Joint Army, Navy, Air Force] and standard wartime SAR procedures.³⁷

The leaders of Air Rescue were dissatisfied with this approach and began seeking new missions for ARS. In 1961, ARS took on the responsibility of local base rescue and by October

1961, there were 70 rescue detachments. In addition, in 1961 the Commander of the Pacific Air Rescue Center dispatched a detachment of officers and airmen to Tan Son Nhut Air Base in South Vietnam with the mission of establishing a Theater Search and Rescue Center. The center coordinated rescue missions with Army, Marine, and Navy aircraft until 1964 when dedicated ARS aircraft arrived.³⁸ Another important expansion of mission for ARS occurred in the early 1960s when ARS began supporting the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA). Successful missions in support of NASA renewed interest in rescue and stimulated the development of larger, more powerful helicopters such as the Sikorsky HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant, that would play a pivotal rescue role in Vietnam. A re-establishment of rescue as a priority was critical as Vietnam would once again demonstrate the need for dedicated personnel recovery assets.

Combat Rescue

The first ARS assets arrived in Vietnam in October 1964.³⁹ These assets, HH-43 “Huskie” helicopters, and the crews that flew them and other rescue aircraft would face many challenges in South Vietnam. Over the next ten years, ARS crews would rescue over 1200 airmen, including 158 of their own, while losing 60 of their own aircraft and 84 crewmen to enemy action.⁴⁰ By 1975, the men of ARS would have the respect of all those that flew missions over Vietnam.

Equipment

The early years of the Vietnam War found ARS attempting to recover from a decade of

³⁷ HQ USAF letter to MATS, Sep 26, 1958, in Earl H. Tilford, Jr., *The United States Air Force: Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia, 1961-1975* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office), 16.

³⁸ Mission Area Analysis (MAA) and Business Process Reengineering (BPR) for Personnel Accounting and Recovery (Arlington, VA: ANSER, October 2000), A-5.

³⁹ Carl Berger, ed., *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973: An Illustrated Account* (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1984), 235.

⁴⁰ “USAF Combat Rescue Analysis of Alternatives: Combat Rescue Operational Review, A Summary of Combat Rescue Operations from Vietnam to Kosovo”, Draft for Coordination and Review, Prepared for HQ ACC/DRMR (Las Vegas, NV: Pioneer Technologies, 29 September 2000), 2-16, 2-52.

neglect, and it showed in the equipment deployed.⁴¹ The primary rescue helicopter was the HH-43B “Huskie.” The HH-43 had a limited combat radius of 91 miles and a cruising speed of only 75 knots. The newer CH-3 was 35 knots faster and had a combat radius of 220 miles but suffered a problem similar to the HH-43B’s: a lack of armor protection. With the introduction of the more capable HH-3E “Jolly Green Giants,” some of the range and armor limitations were overcome. The HH-3 could cruise at 120 knots and had a combat radius in excess of 300 miles. The HH-3 was also fitted with improved communications and navigation gear that would become standard on rescue helicopters. The introduction of the HH-53 “Super Jolly Green Giants” in 1967 allowed the recovery forces an even greater capability. With a cruise speed of 140 knots and the capability for in-flight refueling, the HH-53 had a range inhibited only by crew endurance and tanker support. The HH-53 also featured GAU-2B 7.62mm mini-guns for increased self-protection.⁴²

Improved fixed-wing rescue aircraft also began to arrive in the mid-1960s. The Lockheed HC-130 not only gave the recovery force a vastly improved aircraft for airborne mission commander (AMC) duties but also a platform to refuel the newer helicopters.⁴³ Many different airplanes would be used for Rescue Escort (RESCORT) duty during the war, but the most effective was the A-1 Skyraider. The A-1 began flying RESCORT missions in 1965. It had excellent endurance and was heavily armed. Relatively slow speed allowed it to keep track of the helicopters more easily than jet aircraft, and ruggedness allowed it to take a pounding.⁴⁴ A variety of Forward Air Controller (FAC) aircraft were used as well as a wide variety of aircraft to provide suppression and close air support. Several of these aircraft were then assembled into Combat Search and Rescue Task Forces (CSARTFs) as the rescue forces attempted to improve their tactics and, hence, their overall success rate.

⁴¹ ARS would become ARRS (Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service) on 8 January 1966. This change had little effect on operations in Vietnam. The 7th Air Force Commander maintained responsibility for theater SAR/CSAR.

⁴² “USAF Combat Rescue Analysis of Alternatives: Combat Rescue Operational Review, A Summary of Combat Rescue Operations from Vietnam to Kosovo”, 2-37.

⁴³ California Air National Guard Major Michael J. Martini, “Air Rescue in the US Air Force: A Historical Perspective.” Unpublished Research Paper, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: April 1987, 85.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

Tactics

Vietnam quickly called attention to two areas of tactics. The first involved response time and the second involved threat reduction. The ability to quickly reach a downed pilot greatly increased chances for rescue. Studies show that over 55% of successful recoveries occurred in the first hour after shootdown.⁴⁵ Rescue aircraft in Vietnam were constantly on alert but often had large distances to cover. In an effort to improve response time, various methods were used. One was to pre-position helicopters at forward operating locations (FOL) to get them closer to the fight. A similar method, made more feasible with the introduction of air refueling, was to place helicopters and tankers in an orbit, ready to respond to any incident. Upon notification of an incident, often reported directly to the orbiting HC-130, the rescue force would go into action, often in the form of a CSARTF.

Upon notification of a downed pilot, the HC-130 would begin to coordinate for strike and suppression aircraft that would scramble or divert, while the A-1s and helicopters began their trek to the survivor. Cobbled together from other missions, these assets formed the CSARTF. Often, a FAC would arrive onscene to coordinate the recovery effort of the survivor while providing fire control to the strike aircraft overhead, prior to the A-1s arriving. These “Sandy’s,” would then escort the helicopter into the zone for the pickup and cover the subsequent withdrawal.⁴⁶ The abundance of troops, anti-aircraft artillery (AAA), surface to air missiles (SAMS), and dense terrain that made concealment easy for the enemy, created the demand for the CSARTF. Experiences from Vietnam form the basis of CSAR training in the Air Force today. While there are countless examples of successful PR missions in Vietnam, the recovery of BAT-21B, Lt Col Iceal Hambleton, at a huge cost, and the attempted rescue of American prisoners of war (POW) at Son Tay, are key in forming the template for current CSAR debate.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ “USAF Combat Rescue Analysis of Alternatives: Combat Rescue Operational Review, A Summary of Combat Rescue Operations from Vietnam to Kosovo”, 29.

⁴⁶ Berger, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973: An Illustrated Account*, 237-38.

⁴⁷ To identify individual crewmembers of a multi-place aircraft, the aircraft call sign is used in conjunction with an alphabetic designation on the flight orders. In this instance, Lt Col Hambleton was identified as BAT 21 (aircraft call sign) B (alphabetic designator).

BAT 21⁴⁸

On 2 April 1972, Lt Col Iceal Hambleton was flying as an electronics warfare officer on an EB-66, call sign BAT 21. While performing an electronics-jamming mission over the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in support of efforts to halt the North Vietnamese Easter Offensive, BAT 21 was downed by an enemy SAM. Lt Col Hambleton, BAT 21B, was the sole survivor. This triggered what came to be the largest CSAR effort of the Vietnam War, and raises several issues pertinent to this study.

The rescue of BAT 21B would result in the loss of eleven lives, the capture of two airmen, the downing of six aircraft, and damage to many others. The rescue would also require over 800 strike sorties and the imposition of a restricted operating zone (ROZ) around BAT 21B that hampered ground operations and potentially put thousands of lives at risk. This obviously raises the issue of proportionality. Can the rescue be justified? At best, the men involved believed so.

The leaders of the air war in Vietnam believed that conducting recovery missions was of primary importance. Gen John Vogt, Commander of 7th Air Force, said in regards to rescue in Vietnam: “Damn it, the one thing that keeps our boys motivated is the certain belief that if they go down, we will do absolutely everything we can to get them out. If that is ever in doubt, morale would tumble.”⁴⁹ In terms of whether the effort was made in proportion to everything else going on in the war, there are varying opinions. General John Carley, the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) operations officer, stated he had “received clear verbal instructions from General Abrams that no expense was to be spared in attempting to recapture American prisoners or rescue downed aircrews. This was to have top priority over all other missions.”⁵⁰ This view was at times troublesome to soldiers involved in the ground war.

Lt Col Gerald Turley, a Marine advisor with an ARVN unit heavily involved in the ongoing ground battle during the rescue effort, believed that SAR missions are okay as long as they are kept in proportion and do not draw assets away from the ground force commander (GFC) at a critical juncture. Regarding the BAT 21B rescue, Turley believed “The effort was

⁴⁸ For a detailed account of the rescue of BAT 21B, see *The Rescue of Bat 21* by Darrel Whitcomb.

⁴⁹ Gen. John Vogt, 7AF/CC interview by Jeffrey Ethell and Alfred Price, “Man on the Run,” *Air Power History*, fall 1989, 45. Found in Darrel Whitcomb, *The Rescue of Bat 21*, 153.

made in proportion to everything else that was going on at the time.”⁵¹ However, the imposition of a 27 km restricted operating zone (ROZ) around BAT 21B could have been fatal for hundreds of troops on the ground if their supporting artillery had adhered to the restriction. Luckily, the ROZ was largely ignored, and strike aircraft actually hit many of the same targets as the ARVN artillery. In this case, aircraft that were hitting targets associated with the SAR effort were striking many of the same targets they would have been striking if they would have been conducting CAS or interdiction missions in support of the ARVN.

The men who flew missions in support of the BAT 21B recovery and the Navy SEAL, Lt Tom Norris, who completed his recovery, were all supportive of the operation in spite of the fact that they lost squadron mates and friends. Following the loss of several aircraft early in the rescue attempt, an A-1 pilot, Captain Don Morse, and a Jolly Green pilot, Lt Cdr Jay Crowe, had similar sentiments about the rescue mission. Morse stated “The effort was going to be difficult, but there was no doubt that they would go back in to get him. That was what the rescue forces did; that was why they were there. Just as for any other downed airman, all efforts would be made to get him out as long as he was still alive and free.”⁵² Crowe said, “The reason we did so much for those guys was because they were there to have it done for them. We all hoped that if the role were reversed that he would do for us what we were trying to do for him. I think that is about all there is to that.”⁵³ When a reporter said to Lt Norris “It must have been tough out there. I bet you wouldn’t do that again!”, the SEAL bristled. Then coldly he replied, “An American was down in enemy territory. Of course I’d do it again.”⁵⁴

SOF and Sontay

In an operation that would provide a basis for SOF missions in the future, an American joint force of Army Special Forces soldiers and Air Force airmen would attempt a heroic rescue

⁵⁰ Maj. Gen. John T. Carley (Ret.), 24 Aug. 1993, interview by Darrel Whitcomb, *The Rescue of Bat 21*, 41.

⁵¹ Col. Gerald Turley (USMC Ret.) interview by Darrel Whitcomb, *The Rescue of Bat 21*, 112-13.

⁵² Lt. Col. Donald Morse (Ret.), 16 May 1993, interview by Darrel Whitcomb, *The Rescue of Bat 21*, 38.

⁵³ Capt. Joseph “Jay” Crowe (USCG Ret.) interview by Darrel Whitcomb, *The Rescue of Bat 21*, 153.

⁵⁴ Darrel Whitcomb, *The Rescue of Bat 21*, p. 101. From Harve Saal, *MACV Studies and Observations Group*, vol. 3, *Legends* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edwards Brothers, 1990), 568.

on the evening of 20 November 1970. By 1970, the US government was feeling pressure to do something about the POW situation in North Vietnam. The US knew the names of over 500 captured Americans and felt pressure from many fronts to relieve their plight. Reports of cruelty and torture, combined with failed negotiations, spurred the US to action. Intelligence sources indicated that between 70 and 80 POWs were being held at the Son Tay prison camp in North Vietnam. After months of extensive planning and rehearsals that would come to characterize special operations missions, the extremely complex operation was launched. While tactically a success —the plan was executed almost flawlessly with no US casualties and many dead North Vietnamese —the operation failed due to the POWs having been moved from the camp before the raid.⁵⁵ This failed operation articulated the need for timely and accurate intelligence support in rescue operations. Sadly, it would foreshadow a more costly failure in the deserts of Iran ten years later.

Conclusion

The US experience in the Vietnam War stimulated the need for an effective personnel recovery system. By 1975, 2,780 lives had been saved in combat rescues by ARRS units. These units lost 71 American rescuemen in the process.⁵⁶ New aircraft and equipment were developed, training and doctrine were improved, and the ARRS was a highly effective organization by the late 1960s. In a preview of the coming decades, special operations forces were employed to conduct unconventional assisted recovery (UAR), and SOF helicopters were tasked to conduct CSAR operations.⁵⁷ The heroic actions of the rescue forces in Vietnam had demonstrated the criticality of an effective PR force and laid a solid foundation for the future. However, in a somewhat ironic closure to the Vietnam War, on 15 May 1975, a CH-53 pilot assigned to the 21 SOS became the last US fatality of the war while participating in rescue efforts during the *Mayaguez* incident.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, the *Mayaguez* incident would not be the last time a SOF crewmember would lose his life in a rescue or recovery effort. However, it was the last time a

⁵⁵ Son Tay Raider Association website

<<http://www.sontayraider.com/history.htm>.

⁵⁶ California Air National Guard Major Michael J. Martini, “Air Rescue in the US Air Force: A Historical Perspective.” Unpublished Research Paper, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: April 1987, 35-36.

⁵⁷ For a detailed account of UAR in Southeast Asia, see *Code-Name Bright Light: The Untold Story of U.S. POW Rescue Efforts During the Vietnam War* by George J. Veith.

dedicated, non-SOF, rescue asset attempted a combat recovery. In the following chapters, this study will examine how a capable, decorated force such as the ARRS could fall into neglect and disrepair.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ <<http://www.pavelow.org/tailhistories.doc>.

⁵⁹ By 1975, ARRS aircrew had received one Medal of Honor, one Distinguished Service Cross, and 37 Air Force Crosses, along with countless Distinguished Flying Crosses and Air Medals. For a detailed list of awards see Donald D. Little, *"Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service, 1946-1981: An Illustrated Chronology"* (Office of MAC History, Scott AFB, IL, 1983) 73.

Chapter 4

THE DECAY OF RESCUE AND THE RISE OF SOF

To you all, from us all, for having the guts to try.

Message scrolled on cardboard beer case by British mercenaries serving in the Sultan of Oman's Air Force. 25 April 1980

Introduction

Following the US involvement in Vietnam, the American military began a gradual draw down of forces. The ARRS fared pretty well and managed to maintain a force structure roughly commensurate with the level of other US Air Force units. For the ARRS, losses in the area of local base rescue were offset by the addition of Air Weather Service WC-130 and WC-135 aircraft as well as the addition of missile site support operations and the continued support of the resurgent NASA. Rescue forces in the Navy would not fare so well. In 1983, Admiral Paul T. Gilcrist would summarize the views of the Navy following Vietnam:

Coming out of Vietnam, having learned much about survivability of aircraft in a modern threat environment, but with a very constrained budget to work with, the Navy was really faced with a choice to either put its resources into improved survivability or to modernize its rescue capability. The Navy elected to do the former. In a restricted funding environment when the hard choices have to be made, it is by far preferable to put your money where it will keep your crews in the cockpits and off the ground.⁶⁰

While it appears that the Navy made a conscious decision to neglect search and rescue, the Air Force would stumble into decay indecisively. In 1976, when ARRS still possessed a robust capability of 214 aircraft and 4,000 personnel, the first of many actions that would result in the degradation of the rescue capability in the USAF took

⁶⁰ House Armed Services Committee Testimony by Admiral Paul T. Gilcrist, Director, Aviation Plans and Requirements Division, Washington, D.C., April 5, 1983, 679. As found in Rife, 15.

place.⁶¹

Organization and Re-organization

In 1976, the Air Force and Army began to explore the possibility of transferring the SOF rotary wing mission to the Army. At first glance, this would seem to have had little impact on ARRS, as both services agreed the bulk of CSAR would remain a mission of the Air Force. In fact, little would transpire over the next four years to cause concern, but the seed had been planted for the transfer of Air Force helicopters to the Army. Then, on 24 April 1980, the pivotal event that would shape combat rescue in the Air Force over the remainder of the century took place: Operation Eagle Claw and the disaster at Desert One.

Operation Eagle Claw⁶²

On 4 November 1979, Iranian militants stormed the American embassy in Tehran and seized 52 American captives. A joint task force was formed under Army Maj Gen James Vaught and planning for Operation Eagle Claw began.

The resultant plan involved eight Navy RH-53 helicopters, four USAF MC-130E transports, three EC-130s transports, three AC-130 gunships, and two C-141 transports, as well as the Delta Force assault team and a Ranger force for the airfield seizure. The plan called for a two-night operation. On night one, the helicopters and C-130s would rendezvous in the Iranian desert, the helicopters would refuel, load the Delta soldiers onboard, fly them to a rendezvous site near Tehran where they would link up with covert operators already in Iran, and then both the helicopters and Delta members would proceed to “hide sites” awaiting the assault on the embassy the following night. On night two, Delta would assault the embassy while Rangers flown in on the C-130s secured the airfield at Manzariyeh. The AC-130s would provide fire support for the Rangers and the C-141s would land when the airfield was secure. After securing the hostages, Delta would rendezvous with the RH-53s at a nearby stadium from where they would be flown to Manzariyeh. Everyone would then board the C-141s and C-130s and depart Iran. The

⁶¹ Donald D. Little, “*Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service, 1946-1981: An Illustrated Chronology*” (Office of MAC History, Scott AFB, IL, 1983) 71.

⁶² Operation Eagle Claw information was taken entirely from Air Force Colonel James H. Kyle (Ret.) *The Guts To Try* (New York: Orion Books, 1990).

helicopters would be destroyed in place.

The plan fell apart for several reasons. First, the RH-53s, flown by Marine pilots (with the exception of one Air Force pilot) encountered dust storms in the Iranian desert enroute to Desert One, became disorganized, and fell behind schedule. Two of the eight RH-53s also aborted the mission due to mechanical problems enroute to Desert One. When the remaining six helicopters finally arrived at Desert One, it was discovered that an additional helicopter would have to abort the mission due to mechanical difficulties. This abort dropped the helicopter force to below the minimum number needed for the mission, and the entire mission was aborted. However, in the attempt to refuel the helicopters for the return mission to the USS Nimitz, an RH-53 struck a C-130 while repositioning. In the ensuing mahem, five airmen and three marines would lose their lives. Because of this failure, the US Government formed the Holloway Commission. Several recommendations of the commission would have a large impact on the future of combat rescue in the Air Force.

Initiative 17 and SOF Dominance

Following the tragedy at Desert One, the Holloway Commission report placed a greater emphasis on the need for special operations forces. The commission also made some specific recommendations. Among these was a recommendation to transfer nine HH-53H (later MH-53J) Pave Low III helicopters from ARRS to the 1st Special Operations Wing (SOW) at Hurlburt Field in August 1980. The rationale of the commission was that there was a need “to develop long-range infil/exfil capability for SOF” and that “the chances of ingress would have been enhanced by any and all means which would have improved the helicopters (and their crews) capabilities to penetrate adverse weather.”⁶³ The Pave Lows had Terrain Following/Terrain Avoidance (TF/TA) radar, a Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) imaging system, and were night vision goggle (NVG) compatible. By transferring these assets to SOF, the Air Force met the commission’s recommendation.

In 1980, the Air Force, as part of a larger joint integration plan, again began to look at the possibility of transferring the SOF rotary wing mission to the Army. As a

⁶³ Internal AFSOC memorandum. No date.

result of this, a joint agreement between the Air Force and the Army was reached that would permit the transfer of all Air Force helicopter operations, with the exception of search and rescue, to the Army. This initiative, called Initiative 17 and published in October 1983, occurred because “the rotary wing SOF insertion capability ought to be [performed by] the service with the most rotary wing birds, the Army. After all, we have hundreds of helicopters and thousands of pilots, and it’s our people who are going to be transported.”⁶⁴ It is interesting that Air Force special operators were not consulted and that rescue remained exempt from the transfer.⁶⁵

On the surface, it would appear that Initiative 17 would be good for ARRS and fatal for rotary-wing SOF. However, other factors were at play. In 1983 a major re-organization took place that would cripple combat rescue. In March 1983, 23^d AF was activated with responsibility for both rescue and SOF. A new ARRS would oversee rescue and the 2nd Air Division would oversee SOF. However, in October 1983 ARRS was effectively gutted when all the operational units were put under the direct control of 23^d AF, and ARRS would oversee only the continental rescue coordination centers and a few minor programs under the auspices of a new ARS. Combat rescue was now approaching an all-time low. In 1984, Congressional opposition began to build against Initiative 17, and 23rd AF began to focus more effort on the SOF mission. In conjunction with the increased SOF emphasis, funding for conversion of all Air Force H-53s to the MH-53J Pave Low configuration was approved. In October 1985, the House Appropriations Committee directed the deferral of Initiative 17. By 1987, Initiative 17 was effectively dead; and in June 1991, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), which had been established in 1987, stated in the Joint Special Operations Aviation Board Report, “Initiative 17 is no longer an issue.”⁶⁶ However, by this time, combat rescue had been effectively crippled.

⁶⁴ Army Gen J. Wickham. Quoted in Edgar Ulsamer, “The Gabriel-Wickham Legacy”, *Air Force*, August 1986, 24. As found in California Air National Guard Major Michael J. Martini, “Air Rescue in the US Air Force: A Historical Perspective.” Unpublished Research Paper, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: April 1987, 100.

⁶⁵ Initiative 17 was one of 31 initiative the Air Force and Army agreed upon in order to foster joint cooperation between the services.

⁶⁶ Internal AFSOC memorandum. No date.

The Decline of ARRS

The failure of Operation Eagle Claw was a bitter pill for many in ARRS. Not only did this failure and the subsequent Holloway Commission report result in the loss of valuable ARRS assets, it was perhaps the first of a continuing series of conflicts where combat rescue, in the form of ARRS or its successors, was overlooked in favor of others. Some believed the ARRS HH-53H Pave Low crews would have been far more successful in prosecuting the helicopter portion of Operation Eagle Claw. Although the Pave Low system was relatively new and unproven, it did possess attractive features. Others also felt “Certainly, one must concede that Pave Low aircrews, who were trained in the CSAR arena and routinely relied on C-130s in their daily operations, were the logical choice for this type of mission and had a better aircraft with which to conduct it.”⁶⁷ Regardless, ARRS was not chosen; and the downward spiral continued, even as ARRS recorded its 20,000th save on 22 September 1981⁶⁸.

The decision in October 1983 to reorganize ARRS was not done blindly. Another of the 31 initiatives agreed to by the Air Force and Army was Initiative 16. Initiative 16 would transfer part of the long-range rotary wing CSAR mission from the Air Force to the Army special operations forces once Initiative 17 was implemented. The Air Force would still do CSAR missions in areas closer to the front, but range and threat level would dictate the use of SOF in rear areas. Many felt that the battlefield had become too hot for the old “quick snatch” operations, and SOF assets would be required to ensure success.⁶⁹

Complicating ARRS’s ability to argue against this transfer was the fact that following the transfer of the HH-53s to the 1st SOW, the ARRS was left “with an inventory of old 1960s and 1970s technology helicopters consisting of UH-1s, CH-3s,

⁶⁷ US Air Force Captain Edward B. Westermann, “Air Rescue Service: A Direction for the Twenty-first Century” 4.

<<http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/5fal90.html>.

⁶⁸ Donald D. Little, *Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service, 1946-1981: An Illustrated Chronology*, 62.

⁶⁹ Army Major Russell D. Carmody “Theater Combat Search and Rescue” Unpublished Research Paper, Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1993, 26-30.

and HH-3s.”⁷⁰ Initiative 16 would die along with Initiative 17, but ARRS was still saddled with the same aircraft. This meant, “In effect, the ARRS had no means to accomplish the CSAR mission in the threat environments of the 1980s and 1990s.”⁷¹ This was the state of affairs of combat rescue when Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

Desert Shield/Desert Storm

In August 1990, ARRS, now designated ARS (Air Rescue Service), was in no position to contribute to the war effort. Only one ARS squadron, the 38th ARS at Osan AB, South Korea, had received MH-60Gs, and those four aircraft were committed to the Pacific theater. On the contrary, Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) contributed eight MH-60Gs and thirteen MH-53Js to the desert operation. Eight of the MH-53s, along with all the MH-60Gs were in Saudi Arabia, the remaining MH-53s were in Turkey. The 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) (160 SOAR(A)) also sent MH-60Ls and MH-47 helicopters to Saudi Arabia in support of the operation, and these aircraft would provide a secondary CSAR capability. The US Navy would have two HH-60Hs on 24-hour alert in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea.⁷²

Air Force Special Operations Command Central Command (AFSOCCENT) was formally tasked with conducting CSAR. AFSOCCENT stood up a Joint Rescue Coordination Center (JRCC) and dispersed CSAR forces to five forward operating locations (FOLs) in Saudi Arabia.⁷³ However, Iraq would present formidable problems for these rescue forces. The terrain was inhospitable to successful evasion, and the Iraqis possessed a significant air defense capability, particularly around the Baghdad area where many missions were flown. The distances to be covered in Iraq also presented a problem in many cases due to the sheer amount of time it would take to reach a downed pilot.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷¹ US Air Force Captain Edward B. Westermann, “Air Rescue Service: A Direction for the Twenty-first Century” 4.

<<http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/5fal90.html>.

⁷² “USAF Combat Rescue Analysis of Alternatives: Combat Rescue Operational Review, A Summary of Combat Rescue Operations from Vietnam to Kosovo”, Draft for Coordination and Review, Prepared for HQ ACC/DRMR (Las Vegas, NV: Pioneer Technologies, 29 September 2000), 2-69.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2-69 —2-70.

Arguably, the AFSOC forces could also have better utilized the combat air forces (CAF) assets at their disposal. All of these factors combined to limit the number of successful recoveries to five, two of whom were recovered by ground forces.⁷⁴ By the end of the war, the Joint Rescue Coordination Center had launched 13 SAR missions in an attempt to rescue 77 personnel. The Iraqis fared better, capturing 21 American and 10 Allied airmen. However, one of these rescues was particularly noteworthy.⁷⁵

On 21 January 1991 at 0605 in the morning, an F-14A Tomcat flown by Lt Devon Jones and Lt Larry Slade was shot down by an SA-2 approximately 130 miles inside Iraq. The pilot and backseater were separated in the ejection sequence and became separate evaders. Lt Slade would be captured and held prisoner until the end of the war. An MH-53J, operating alone, launched to begin the CSAR process at approximately 0800. Simultaneously, Coalition fixed-wing aircraft were attempting to contact the downed crew with little success. After exhausting his fuel, the MH-53 returned to Saudi Arabia to refuel and then took off again. Meanwhile, a pair of A-10s located Lt Jones and relayed his position, via AWACS, to the helicopter. Enroute to the pickup site a pair of F-15s chased away Iraqi Mig-23s while the A-10s told Lt Jones to prepare for rescue. At approximately 1355, the Pave Low spotted Lt Jones and landed to recover him. An approaching Iraqi truck was destroyed by the A-10s and all the aircraft successfully returned to Saudi Arabia. This recovery was the first successful combat rescue since the Vietnam War.⁷⁶

Conclusion

The deterioration of dedicated rescue forces in the period following the Vietnam War would continue to cause problems in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Following the Gulf War, ARS faced an uphill climb to regain its former status as it attempted to rebuild both its force structure and its relevance. The Gulf War had demonstrated that SOF, while highly trained at executing combat missions, still had room for improvement in the CSAR arena. Unfortunately, in the decade of the 1990s, there would be many

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2-69.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 2-61.

⁷⁶ Andy Evans, *Combat Search and Rescue* (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 1999), 133-36.

opportunities to relearn old lessons as dedicated combat rescue continued to struggle and SOF remained the force of choice for the theater commanders.

Chapter 5

PR in the cnn age

Six One hit. Six One hit. Blackhawk going down.

CW4 Cliff Wolcott, 3 October 1993

CNN pushed the boundaries of world news: no longer did the network merely report events, but through its immediate reportage, CNN actually shaped the events and became a part of them.

Lewis Friedland

Introduction

The images projected on television screens around the world during the Gulf War would have implications for the US in the decade of the 1990s and beyond. The seemingly effortless precision achieved by allied forces at remarkably low cost would set a difficult standard to measure up to in the future.⁷⁷ At the 2001 DoD Personnel Recovery Conference, AFSOC Commander Lt Gen Maxwell Bailey stated: “CSAR is an ancillary capability. It does not help CINCs win wars.”⁷⁸ While Gen Bailey’s comment is almost certainly true regarding large-scale operations, I believe PR, and CSAR in particular, can have dramatic impact on the outcome of smaller scale contingencies and peacekeeping operations. The images projected on television screens around the world on 3 October 1993 would seem to support this conclusion.

⁷⁷ The US suffered 613 casualties in the fighting. 146 KIA, 467 WIA. Source: Michael R. Gordon and Gen Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals’ War* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company), 457.

⁷⁸ US Air Force Lt Gen Maxwell Bailey, comments at 2001 DoD Personnel Recovery Conference, Arlington, VA, 23 January 2001.

Tragedy in Mogadishu

Background

The US involvement in Somalia began with the best of intentions. In 1991, Somalia was in the midst of a civil war, and the formal government of Somalia was collapsing. The conflict involved many different clans and organizations, but the two principal actors were Mohamed Farah Aidid and his forces, and Ali Mohamed Mahdi and his forces. Aidid, over time, would pose the largest problem. By 1992, Somalia was a failed state, and as many as 4.5 million Somalis were in danger of death by starvation, malnutrition, and disease.⁷⁹

UNOSOM (United Nations Operation in Somalia) was established on 24 April 1992.⁸⁰ The charter for UNOSOM I was to provide humanitarian aid and facilitate the end of hostilities.⁸¹ Throughout 1992, the UN presence continued to swell in Somalia, but the situation was little improved. Finally, in December 1992, UN Resolution 794 was passed. This resolution was based on a US offer to lead an effort to create a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian aid. Notably, this resolution authorized “all necessary means” to achieve its objectives.⁸² This operation, christened Operation Restore Hope by the US, would mark another use of US troops in the “peacekeeping” role.⁸³ Restore Hope was initially successful. UN Special Representative Kittani said on 18 January, “We have moved from an almost impossible situation to a very difficult situation — which is a great improvement.”⁸⁴ Starvation was no longer imminent for

⁷⁹ United Nations Fact Sheet, *Somalia – UNOSOM I*, Prepared by Department of Public Information, 21 March 97.

⁸⁰ UNOSOM 1 was chartered as the Unified Task Force (UNITAF) and renamed UNOSOM 1 upon the creation of UNOSOM II.

⁸¹ USAF Major Clifford Day, “Critical Analysis on the Defeat of Task Force Ranger” (Unpublished Research Paper, Air Command and Staff College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL: March 1997), 2.

⁸² United Nations Fact Sheet, *Somalia – UNOSOM I*, Prepared by Department of Public Information, 21 March 97.

⁸³ Robert B. Oakley, “Somalia: A Case Study”, as found in “Two Perspectives on Interventions and Humanitarian Operations”, ed. Earl H. Tilford (Carlisle, PA : Strategic Studies Institute, uly 1997), 3-4.

⁸⁴ *UN Chronicle*, Vol. 30, Issue 2, Jun 93, 16.

large numbers of the population and there was a period of reasonable security.⁸⁵ For this reason, it was determined that UNITAF could hand over the operation to UNOSOM II, which had been established in March 1993 by UN Resolution 814. “UNOSOM II would therefore seek to complete the task begun by UNITAF for the restoration of peace and stability in Somalia.”⁸⁶ Significant in Resolution 814 was the responsibility for the US to provide a quick reaction force (QRF) for UNOSOM II.

The QRF mission “was to conduct military operations to consolidate, expand, and maintain a secure environment for the advancement of humanitarian aid, economic assistance, and political reconciliation in Somalia.”⁸⁷ Aidid saw the UN, and the QRF, as a significant threat to his power. On 5 June 1993, UN forces, mostly Pakistani, conducted a mission designed to destroy an Aidid radio station. Aidid’s forces had been tipped off and ambushed the Pakistani soldiers resulting in the death of 24 and the wounding of 50 more. One day later, UN Resolution 837 was passed that authorized action against those responsible.⁸⁸

Over the next month, UN forces would conduct operations designed to capture Aidid, and seven UN peacekeepers would die in the fruitless missions. Then, on 12 July, US helicopter gunships attacked a meeting of senior Aidid loyalists and killed between 20 and 50 people while wounding as many as 200. The level of violence was escalating; and in late August 1993, the US government responded to the request from the senior Americans in Somalia, and deployed Task Force (TF) Ranger, “a force comprised of Rangers and Delta Force.”⁸⁹ TF Ranger would operate under a strictly US chain of command.

⁸⁵ Alan Ryan, “There is No Front Line: Lessons from Black Hawk Down”, 3.

<[http://www.defence.gov.au/lwsc/Publications/Journal%20Articles/Army%20Journal/June%202000/There%20is%20no%20front%20Line%20\(Ryan\).pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/lwsc/Publications/Journal%20Articles/Army%20Journal/June%202000/There%20is%20no%20front%20Line%20(Ryan).pdf)

⁸⁶ United Nations Fact Sheet, *Somalia – UNOSOM I*, Prepared by Department of Public Information, 21 March 97.

⁸⁷ Day, “Critical Analysis on the Defeat of Task Force Ranger”, 3.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁹ Ryan, “There is No Front Line: Lessons from Black Hawk Down”, 3.

Ma-alinti Rangers⁹⁰

Throughout the month of September, TF Ranger conducted six operations with varying levels of success. When not conducting actual missions, TF Ranger conducted daily flights over Mogadishu with the intent of providing familiarity of the city for TF Ranger and to desensitize the Somalis to the presence of the helicopters. “On 3 October Task Force Ranger’s mission was to conduct a raid into the Bakara neighbourhood — Habr Gidr turf — to capture two of Aideed’s key lieutenants and other members of the Somali National Alliance (SNA) leadership.”⁹¹ There was no indication that this mission would be any different from the others.

The 3 October mission started much like any other that TF Ranger had undertaken in their time in Somalia. There were few indications that this mission might be more dangerous than the others. The mission would be flown in accordance with the template that was familiar to the participants. However, the problems for TF Ranger began with the initial insertion. Private First Class Todd Blackburn, a Ranger on Super 67 (call sign for the Blackhawk aircraft) missed the fast rope on his way out of the helicopter and fell 40 – 60 feet to the hard street below suffering critical injuries.⁹² This Ranger would survive the battle, but 18 of his fellow soldiers would not.

The real trouble began when Super 61 was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) and crashed just northeast of the target building. The two pilots, CW4 Clifton Wolcott and CW3 Donovan Briley, were killed on impact but the crew chiefs and TF Ranger soldiers in the rear of the aircraft survived the impact. TF Ranger had trained for this contingency and began to execute their CSAR plan. The plan included the insertion of a ground security team, complete with Air Force pararescumen (PJs) and combat controllers onto the crash site. The team from this aircraft was the only CSAR asset in the assault force. Another aspect of the plan called for Super 64, piloted by CW3 Michael Durant, to replace the downed Super 61 in an orbit around the target building.⁹³

⁹⁰ Somali for “The Day of the Rangers.” This is how the Somali’s refer to October 3rd. Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 331.

⁹¹ Ryan, “There is No Front Line: Lessons from Black Hawk Down”, 7.

⁹² A fast rope is a 3 inch interwoven nylon rope of varying lengths. During a fast rope insertion the rope is deployed from the helicopter and the team members slide down the rope in a manner similar to a fire pole.

⁹³ Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press), 72, 90.

This action would result in what was rapidly becoming a bad situation turning into one that was unmanageable from a CSAR perspective.

Approximately ten minutes after replacing Super 61, Durant's helicopter was hit by another RPG. Despite the crew's efforts to reach the safety of the airfield, Super 64 crashed one mile south of the target building. With no remaining CSAR capability, the crash site was quickly overrun, despite heroic efforts on the part of members of the downed crew and two TF Ranger soldiers who volunteered to be inserted at the crash site.⁹⁴ Following a ferocious gunfight, CW3 Durant was captured by the Somalis and would spend ten days in captivity. The day after his capture, a Somali videotape of Durant was seen on televisions around the world, as well as more disturbing images of dead US servicemen being dragged through the dirty streets of Mogadishu.⁹⁵ It was these images, and what they signify, that would have an impact on the future of CSAR.

Ramifications of UNOSOM II

The inability to successfully recover the crew of Super 64 would have repercussions throughout the US government.⁹⁶ In a *Time* magazine poll 96 percent of the respondents said "making sure US soldiers taken prisoner are released" should be an important goal of the US in Somalia. Only 43 percent felt that "establishing a stable government" in Somalia was important.⁹⁷ Almost immediately, senior government officials and private citizens began to call for American withdrawal from Somalia, but only after our soldiers were all accounted for. Senator Robert Byrd called for an immediate end "to these cops-and-robbers operations." Senator John McCain, a former

⁹⁴ These two soldiers, Sergeant First Class Gary Gordon and Sergeant First Class Randall Shughart, would posthumously receive the Congressional Medal of Honor (CMH). This was the first time since the Vietnam War the CMH had been awarded. Their citations are listed in the Appendix. The other members of the Super 64 crew were CW4 Ray Frank, Staff Sergeant Bill Cleveland, and Staff Sergeant Tommie Fields.

⁹⁵ Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 306-08.

⁹⁶ The crew of Super 61 would be recovered by TF Ranger, but not without problems. The bodies of the pilots were pinned in the aircraft and the TF Ranger personnel would struggle throughout the night under intense fire to free the bodies. The Somali crowd carried off the bodies of the Super 64 crew, along with those of SFC Gordon and SFC Shughart. They would later be returned to US control by the Somalis.

⁹⁷ *Time*, 18 October 1993.

POW from the Vietnam War, said, “Clinton’s got to bring them home.”⁹⁸ On 4 October, one day after the battle, the decision was made for America to leave Somalia by March 1994.⁹⁹

President Clinton made a statement on 8 October that would seem to give great importance to the ability to conduct PR missions in the future. When questioned about the situation in Somalia, President Clinton replied:

It’s just that I believe that I think that any Americans who are held captive must be released. I think they know the United States has no intention of leaving Somalia until that is done. We’re going to have all of our people present and accounted for before we go home. And that’s going to be a part of whatever happens from now on in. It is the priority that we have to pursue and for our own people.¹⁰⁰

If, as President Clinton said, the US is going to have all people present and accounted for before going home from an operation, PR has considerable impact on the conduct of the war. At the 2001 DoD Personnel Recovery Conference, Deputy Director of DPMO, Mel Richmond, said, “In Mogadishu it (SAR) had national policy implications.”¹⁰¹ The implication of this statement is that if a successful CSAR operation had been carried out at both crash sites, there would not have been video footage of CW3 Durant in captivity or of US soldiers being dragged through the streets. Therefore, the outcome of the American investment in Somalia may have been far different. At a minimum, the events of 3 October 1993 changed the way the US military viewed peacekeeping operations associated PR operations. The bottom line is that while PR and CSAR may be ancillary capabilities and may not help CINCs win wars, they can drastically influence the perception of an operation, and the way it is prosecuted. Three years later, in a different part of the world, CSAR would once again capture the world’s eye.

⁹⁸ Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*, 310.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 311.

¹⁰⁰ President Bill Clinton, Yale University, New Haven, CT, 9 October 1993.

¹⁰¹ Mel Richmond, comments at 2001 DoD Personnel Recovery Conference, Arlington, VA, 22 January 2001.

Triumph in the Balkans

Operation Deny Flight

The decade of the 1990s would witness an escalation of violence in the Balkans following the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. In October 1992, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) aircraft began monitoring flights in the airspace of Bosnia-Herzegovina. On 31 March 1993, UN Security Council Resolution 816 was passed and on 12 April 1993, Operation Deny Flight began. The mission of Operation Deny Flight was threefold. First, a “No-Fly Zone” (NFZ) would be imposed over Bosnia-Herzegovina. Second, close air support (CAS) would be provided to NATO ground forces. Third, approved air strikes would be conducted against designated targets threatening the security of UN-declared safe areas.¹⁰² A little over two years would pass before CSAR forces were called upon to support Operation Deny Flight.

Basher 52

On 2 June 1995, a US F-16C call sign Basher 52, flown by Captain Scott O’ Grady was shot down by a Bosnian Serb SA-6.¹⁰³ There was no voice or visual contact with Basher 52 and NATO received unconfirmed reports that the Bosnian Serb Army had recovered O’ Grady.¹⁰⁴ For the next six days, O’ Grady evaded capture.

For the two years preceding the shoot down of Basher 52, the 21st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) had maintained MH-53J “Pave Low” helicopters at Brindisi, Italy. Although not a primary mission of special operations aircraft, CSAR is a collateral mission for which the 21st SOS was trained.¹⁰⁵ Combat Air Force (CAF) HH-60Gs were still recovering from the years of neglect and were unable to provide support to Operation

¹⁰² “Allied Forces Southern Europe Fact Sheet, Operation Deny Flight”, AFSOUTH, prepared by Public Information Office, Viale della Liberazione – Italy.

<<http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/docs/DenyFlightFactSheet.htm>

¹⁰³ USAF Major John N. Sims, “Shackled by Perceptions: American’s Desire for Bloodless Intervention” (Unpublished Research Paper, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: June 1997), 58.

¹⁰⁴ “Allied Forces Southern Europe Fact Sheet, Operation Deny Flight”, AFSOUTH, prepared by Public Information Office, Viale della Liberazione – Italy.

<<http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/docs/DenyFlightFactSheet.htm>

¹⁰⁵ US Air Force, *Air Force Doctrine Document 35, Special Operations*, (Washington, D.C.: 16 January 1995), 10.

Deny Flight. Sharing the responsibility for CSAR at the time of the O' Grady shoot down were elements of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), aboard the USS Kearsarge. The 21st SOS would cover the periods of darkness and the Marines would cover the daylight hours.

In the early morning hours of 8 June, an F-16C, call sign Basher 11, made the first radio contact with O' Grady since the downing of his aircraft. Reporting back to the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) at Vicenza, Italy, via an Airborne Early Warning and Control (AWACS) aircraft, Basher 11 relayed O' Grady's location and condition. Upon receiving an execute order, a Marine TRAP (Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel) team conducted a successful recovery of O' Grady and returned to the USS Kearsarge without suffering casualties. The recovery of O' Grady was a relatively straightforward mission, that if conducted within the realm of a larger campaign similar to that fought in Vietnam, would have received little attention. But, the "CNN factor" drove this recovery to center stage.

Ramifications of Operation Deny Flight

The US government response to the O' Grady shoot-down signaled to the PR community that in the future their services would continue to gain in importance.

Yet in the eyes of the Pentagon, Congress and the Clinton Administration, the episode was anything but perfect. Why they asked, did it take six days to locate one soldier – one soldier, mind you who had remained within a two mile radius of where his plane was downed? Officials in Washington slammed fists on the table; PR had to receive higher priority.¹⁰⁶

Largely due to this incident, the Defense Prisoner of War, Missing Personnel Office was formed, along with the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency.

Major John Sims noted, "Various press reports dubbed the O' Grady shoot-down a 'crisis' —even in light of U.S. Secretary of Defense William J. Perry's estimate of inevitable U.S. casualties." Sims went on to note, "The potential loss of a single airman became a 'crisis' for the Clinton administration."¹⁰⁷ However, contrary to the Somalia experience, the successful prosecution of a CSAR mission resulted in national euphoria and the return of Captain O' Grady to the US as a hero. It also allowed the President the

¹⁰⁶ Kathleen Kocks , "Search and Rescue's New Direction", *Journal of Electronic Defense*, April 2000.

opportunity to bring O' Grady to the White House and show him off to the nation while offering the following remarks:

We know that the months, the weeks, the years in training someday, somewhere will always have to be put into effect and, last week, those of you who brought life to that training and saved one brave man's life said more about what we stand for as a country, what our values are and what our commitments are than any words the rest of us could ever utter; and we thank you for it.¹⁰⁸

Operation Allied Force (OAF)

The O' Grady incident would not be the last shoot-down of an American aircraft during the Clinton presidency. From March to June 1999, the US and its NATO allies conducted a major military operation against Serbia in an effort to quell Serbian attempts at ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. This 78-day operation resulted in over 14,000 combat sorties and the loss of two US aircraft.¹⁰⁹

Fortunately, as in the O' Grady shoot down, both pilots were quickly recovered in Kosovo. The first, an F-117 pilot, call sign Vega 31, was recovered only 20 miles from Belgrade. The second, an F-16CJ pilot, call sign Hammer 34, was recovered near the Serbian-Croatian border. Both recoveries were conducted by MH-60Gs, flown as part of a three-ship package with MH-53J/Ms, belonging to AFSOC.¹¹⁰

In both recoveries, the rescue force received significant opposition in the form of small arms fire, anti-aircraft artillery (AAA), and in the case of the Hammer 34 rescue, surface to air missiles. The missions were not flawless; the command and control structure was awkward and integration with CAF support assets did not go well, but the recoveries were a success nonetheless. As was the case in Operation Deny Flight, CAF rescue assets were initially unavailable for deployment to the fight. When CAF assets did arrive in-country, the operation was winding down and following both recoveries, they were not equipped to

¹⁰⁷ Sims, "Shackled by Perceptions: American's Desire for Bloodless Intervention", 59.

¹⁰⁸ President Bill Clinton, The White House, 12 June 1995.

¹⁰⁹ "USAF Combat Rescue Analysis of Alternatives: Combat Rescue Operational Review, A Summary of Combat Rescue Operations from Vietnam to Kosovo", 2-76.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-82 – 2-86.

operate in the infrared (IR) threat environment.¹¹¹ AFSOC would leave their MH-60Gs in-country for the arriving CAF unit to fly.

Ramifications of Operation Allied Force

Operation Allied Force served as yet another wake-up call for CAF rescue assets. For the third time in the 1990s, CAF rescue assets were on the sidelines as AFSOC forces were required to perform CSAR missions during combat operations. There has been much critiquing and second-guessing of SOF from CAF rescue proponents. They point to perceived breakdowns in command and control, although AFSOC Commander Lt Gen Clay Bailey stated at the 2001 DoD Personnel Recovery Conference, “OPCON to the JFSOCC, TACON to the JFACC, is the proper organization for employment of SOF forces in PR.”¹¹² In other words, he believed that the command and control arrangement present during OAF was correct. CAF rescue proponents have also criticized AFSOC tactics, despite two successful recoveries with no friendly casualties. In short, they argued that CAF rescue procedures for command and control and prosecution of CSAR missions are more efficient and effective. While this is perhaps true, it cannot be proven by observing combat operations from afar. CAF rescue assets have to get into the fight.¹¹³

The successful rescues conducted by AFSOC during Operation Allied Force allowed the US government to focus on the operation as a whole, rather than having the capture of a US pilot generate a “crisis” for the government. Contrary to the US experiences in Somalia and Operation Deny Flight, the US was not forced to focus on the efforts to recover captured or missing airmen and soldiers for days at a time. The successful recoveries of Vega 31 and Hammer 34, while extensively covered by the mass media in the immediate aftermath of the shoot downs, were generally portrayed as positive events and did not provide much of an occasion for pundits to attack US

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2-82.

¹¹² US Air Force Lt Gen Maxwell Bailey, comments at 2001 DoD Personnel Recovery Conference, Arlington, VA, 23 January 2001.

¹¹³ CAF rescue assets were reported as unavailable to deploy for Operation Allied Force despite the fact that only 8 of 36 active duty and 72 active/guard/reserve HH-60Gs were deployed to Operations Southern/Northern Watch (the only other potential “combat” zones during this time period).

involvement in the operation. The loss of the stealthy F-117 was enough of an issue by itself. The capture of the pilot could have been perceived as politically embarrassing and potentially harmful to the security of the stealth program. In short, while CSAR did not win the war, it also did not contribute to losing the war.

Conclusion

Life in the CNN age puts an increased emphasis on the ability of the US to successfully recover personnel from combat areas. The US experiences in Somalia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia bring to light many of the issues to be addressed in the following chapter. Somalia demonstrated the negative effect on public opinion a failed operation and pictures of dead and captive Americans can have. Operation Deny Flight and the successful recovery of Captain Scott O' Grady demonstrated the importance that the US places on the life of a single soldier but also demonstrated the potential for the loss of one life to create a "crisis" with a resultant impact on an administration and its policies. Finally, Operation Allied Force showed how successful recoveries, conducted immediately following shoot-downs, turned potential vulnerabilities into "non-events." Still, people ask whether the risk is worth the gain. For this reason a review of the commonly held beliefs for conducting personnel recovery missions is necessary.

Chapter 6

WHY BOTHER?

To me it has always been a source of wonder and pride that the most potent and destructive military force ever known should create a special service dedicated to saving a life. Its concept is typically American—we hold human lives to be the most precious commodity on earth.

Brigadier General Thomas J. Dubose
Commander, Air Rescue Service, 1952 – 1959

Avoidance of bloodshed should not be taken as an act of policy if our main concern is to preserve forces.

Carl von Clausewitz

Introduction

The US has a long history of conducting PR missions as documented in the preceding chapters. The history of PR missions is not at issue, but rather *why* the US conducts the missions. In other words, why bother? As noted earlier in this paper, the DoD has recently made several commitments that indicate the US has made the decision that the potential risks and costs associated with conducting PR missions is acceptable to ensure the safe return of US citizens, soldiers, and airmen. It appears the US government and the DoD base the decision on four principles. First is the value placed on the human life. Second is the loss of a valuable resource that is cost prohibitive. Third is the importance associated with denying the enemy an intelligence and propaganda opportunity. Fourth is the resultant positive impact on military morale as the result of PR.

Retired USAF Colonel Darrel Whitcomb wrote an article in [Aerospace Power Journal](#) that supports and expounds on the above reasoning for conducting CSAR operations, to include the following:

First is *human nature*. Rescue stories are some of our most heroic. People

always come forward to help those in distress. The fact that the enemy contests CSARs only causes us to redouble our efforts. Second is the fact that *we can*. We have developed the hardware to recover anybody from just about anywhere. Additionally, we do not hesitate to use any technology if it benefits the process. We have also learned how to organize our forces to achieve the necessary level of situational superiority for our rescue forces to operate. Third, rescue operations involve a *morale factor* for our troops. Fourth, rescuing our people denies the enemy a valuable resource. Finally, a covenant or bond binds the brotherhood of airmen. Again, General Arnold noted that aircrews performed their missions more efficiently with the expectation that if they went down, we would make every effort to rescue them.¹¹⁴

These concepts are not new to the US government or the DoD. Air Force Manual 2-36, Search, Rescue, and Recovery Operations outlined the rationale for CSAR operations as long ago as 1967.

The United States stands in the vanguard of all nations that place a high value on human life. While SAR/recovery is essentially a humanitarian function, its practical military advantages transcend this aspect. The resources (personnel and aerospace hardware) available to a nation are always limited; therefore, it is essential that positive efforts be exerted toward the recovery of these resources when potential or actual losses are evident. Over and above the actual monetary value of the recovered resources are the intangible benefits that accrue as a result of recovery. These include an increase in combat effectiveness through preservation of combat resources; improved morale of aerospace crew members; the scientific value of technical data represented in recovered aerospace hardware; and regional, national, and international goodwill generated as a result of SAR/recovery operations.¹¹⁵

The recently completed “Mission Area Analysis for Personnel Accounting and Recovery” also seized upon these same concepts while acknowledging their contribution to achieving national objectives.

Recovering isolated US military personnel not only prevents their capture and exploitation, but also sustains US warfighting capability. Even if only a miniscule part of the total force is isolated and recovered, the impact on overall morale and readiness is huge. Ultimately, DoDs success or failure at recovering its personnel impacts public support for committing military

¹¹⁴ Darrel Whitcomb , “Combat Search and Rescue: A Longer Look”, *Aerospace Power Journal* (Summer 2000), 32.

¹¹⁵ US Air Force, “Air Force Manual 2-36: Search, Rescue, and Recovery Operations”, 3 January 1967, 1-2.

forces to achieve US national security objectives.¹¹⁶

Since there seems to be consensus on the reasons for conducting PR missions, a review of these commonly held beliefs is warranted.

Sanctity of Human Life/Casualty Aversion

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”¹¹⁷ From the very beginnings of the United States, its citizens have placed a high value on human life. This does not mean that America has not had its share of problems that devalue human life, to include slavery and abortion. What it does mean is that a certain sanctity for human life almost unarguably exists and has existed since the founding of the nation. This sanctity is perhaps most evident in the debate surrounding casualty aversion and its implications for the US government and the DoD, as well as the PR mission.

Background

It is unclear where the roots of the perceived casualty aversion of the US began. Some point to the American experience in Vietnam and feel that it has an impact on the conduct of operations by the US military even today. The Gulf War Airpower Survey (GWAPS) in its study of the 1991 war with Iraq stated:

Throughout the lead-up to and the conduct of this war, concerns over possible American battlefield casualties expressed this factor most directly; this was a direct reflection of the impact of Vietnam on the American psyche. From the onset of the crisis, this fear of heavy losses was a major factor in decision-making in Washington.¹¹⁸

Some believe the dominating performance of the American military while absorbing a relatively small number of casualties further contributed to this perception. Benjamin Lambeth writes:

To be sure, recent research suggested that the widespread assumption that

¹¹⁶ Mission Area Analysis (MAA) and Business Process Reengineering (BPR) for Personnel Accounting and Recovery (Arlington, VA: ANSER, October 2000), V.

¹¹⁷ Declaration of Independence

¹¹⁸ *Gulf War Airpower Survey*, Vol. II (Washington, D.C.: 1993), 84-5.

the American public will no longer accept casualties from the nation's military commitments abroad has been greatly oversimplified and that the staying power of public support is, in fact, very much a function of public perceptions of the stakes of a commitment and the competence of U.S. leadership in handling it.¹¹⁹

One recent study suggests the preoccupation with casualty aversion began with “the incident in Mogadishu in October of 1993. Eighteen US Army Rangers were killed in that action. Live television coverage in the United States subsequently showed the body of an American soldier being dragged through the streets surrounded by jubilant Somalis.”¹²⁰ Military sociologist Charles Moskos calls this the Somalia syndrome. He believes the Somalia syndrome is what is shaping our consciousness now rather than the Vietnam syndrome.¹²¹ This conundrum is a dual-edged sword for the PR mission. While it appears to increase the value of conducting missions to prevent incidents such as Somalia, it also places even greater pressure to successfully conclude these missions, while preventing further friendly casualties. Risk management and assessment become even more important in an effort to control perceptions.

Perceptions

The Defense Prisoner of War Missing Personnel Office recently recognized the importance of controlling the image portrayed to the American public and government while recognizing that it is increasingly difficult to do so by stating:

Americans, and the American Congress, are becoming accustomed to the U.S. engaging its adversaries with few or even no American casualties. A televised view of an American being dragged through the streets of a foreign capital like we witnessed in Mogadishu, can turn the tide of our national will, and affect U.S. national policy. More recently, Saddam Hussein's public display of human shields to protect critical targets during Desert Storm could have had a profound effect on U.S. policy had the war lasted longer.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Benjamin Lambeth, *The Transformation of American Airpower* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 306.

¹²⁰ Don Snider, US Army Major John Nagel, and US Army Major Tony Pfaff, “Army Professionalism, The Military Ethic, and Officership in the 21st Century.”
<<http://www.accts.org/ethics/snidert>.

¹²¹ Sims, “Shackled by Perceptions: American's Desire for Bloodless Intervention”, 51.

¹²² “Executive Summary of the Personnel Recovery Function,” *Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office*, No date.

<<http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/pr/exsum.pdf>

The result is that if successful PR operations are conducted, there will be fewer opportunities for negative perceptions to be portrayed. This is crucial due to “the perception among civilian elites—the policy makers who determine national strategy—that the public is casualty-averse hinders coercive diplomacy and limits military options in support of our national strategy.”¹²³

Managing the perception of casualty aversion within the military is also critical in that it influences the way the military trains for combat and executes operations. Army doctrine now reflects the casualty averse nature of the modern battlefield. “The American people expect decisive victory and abhor unnecessary casualties.”¹²⁴ There are many within the US military who believe casualty aversion, and the resultant focus on force protection, is now the military’s primary focus. An Army major recently reported that his guidance from his brigade commander in Bosnia was, “If mission and force protection are in conflict, then we don’t do the mission.”¹²⁵ Another Army officer, this time a young lieutenant recently returned from Bosnia, told an audience at the United States Military Academy that, “I tell my men every day there is nothing there worth one of them dying for.” When asked why this was his guidance to his men the lieutenant replied, “Because minimizing, really prohibiting, casualties is the top-priority mission I have been given by my battalion commander.” This was puzzling to the cadets. “Their studies had led them to believe that minimizing casualties was an inherent part of every combat mission but not a mission in and of itself.”¹²⁶

These Army officers appear to have been mimicking attitudes displayed to them by the highest-ranking officers in the military. Former Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, General Wesley Clark, said, “In an air campaign you don’t want to lose aircraft” because when “you start to lose these expensive machines the countdown starts against you. The headlines begin to shout, ‘NATO loses a second aircraft,’ and the people ask,

¹²³ USAF Maj Charles K. Hyde, “Casualty Aversion: Implications for Policy Makers and Senior Military Officers”, in *Aerospace Power Journal*, (Summer 2000), 23-4.

¹²⁴ Sims, “Shackled by Perceptions: American’s Desire for Bloodless Intervention”, 51.

¹²⁵ Don Snider, US Army Major John Nagel, and US Army Major Tony Pfaff, “Army Professionalism, The Military Ethic, and Officership in the 21st Century.”

<<http://www.accts.org/ethics/snidert>.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

‘How long can this go on?’¹²⁷ However, it is probable that General Clark would rather answer questions about an aircraft than having to answer questions about its crew. This again underscores the importance of PR.

In addition to the perceptions of the public, government, and military, a susceptibility to casualty aversion is not lost on the enemy. A recent study notes, “This fear of casualties among our political leaders encourages renegade world leaders to take risks, based on the potential that their actions will skirt under the threshold of US interests that would elicit a response.”¹²⁸ Further, these renegade leaders then feel they can force the US to disengage from its commitments once American casualties figures begin to rise. This attitude is almost certainly a direct reflection of the American experience in Somalia.

Implications

With the apparent casualty-averse attitude of the US public, government, and military, how should the DoD address casualty aversion, and what is the impact on PR? Dr. Karl Mueller gives an extreme example to support his contention that the US is willing to suffer casualties when the stakes are high enough by noting:

The fact that for 50 years the United States has opted to suffer casualties in a number of conventional conflicts that could easily have been settled by using nuclear weapons is but one clear indication that we do not actually believe that spilling American blood must be avoided at all costs short of surrender.¹²⁹

In an outstanding examination of the casualty aversion phenomenon, Eric Larson concludes the US is no more casualty-averse than it was in World War II. He states, “Americans have always had a high regard for human life, but they balance that regard within a continuous cost-benefit analysis which ultimately determines support.”¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Jeffrey Record, “Force-Protection Fetishism: Sources, Consequences, and (?) Solutions,” in *Aerospace Power Journal*, (Summer 2000), 5.

¹²⁸ Hyde, “Casualty Aversion: Implications for Policy Makers and Senior Military Officers”, 24.

¹²⁹ Karl P. Mueller, “Politics, Death, and Morality in US Foreign Policy”, in *Aerospace Power Journal*, (Summer 2000), 15.

¹³⁰ Hyde, “Casualty Aversion: Implications for Policy Makers and Senior Military Officers”, 24.

While there are disparate opinions regarding whether the US is casualty-averse or not, there are perceptions and expectations. The perception is that the US will go to great lengths to minimize casualties, perhaps at the expense of prosecuting the mission. The expectation of Americans is that when leaders commit US forces to battle, they do so when it is in the interest of the US and they articulate these interests to the public. Perhaps the best summation of the dynamics of the casualty aversion argument is this:

Does the American public really demand that the lives of US troops and those of civilians not be wasted? Will the press have a field day if civilians are killed by US bombing? At the most fundamental level, it should not matter. We certainly ought to protect our forces and protect noncombatants, insofar as we can, regardless of popular opinion—not because doing so is politically prudent but because it is morally right. Conversely, however, there are objectives that are worth dying—and killing—in order to achieve; in such cases, it is morally wrong not to risk or take lives when necessary.¹³¹

So, will America lose the war if a PR mission is not successful? No. Is the recovery of American civilians, soldiers, and airmen, an objective that is worth dying—and killing—to achieve? Yes. This would imply that there are times when PR missions are justifiable regardless of the presence of casualty aversion, or lack thereof. If this is true, then the retention of a valuable resource is possibly another reason for conducting PR.

Loss of a Valuable Resource

“Military leaders adhere to the principle of economy of force and do not want to fritter away limited assets on missions that might detract from the ultimate mission of defeating vital threats to national security.”¹³² Properly executed PR missions can contribute to the conservation of resources by returning valuable assets, airmen, sailors, and soldiers, to friendly control, with the minimum disruption to the achievement of the ultimate mission. As noted in 1967:

Search, rescue, and recovery activities constitute an essential element in the total aerospace posture of the United States. The basic contributions of SAR/recovery forces are the preservation of human life, including

¹³¹ Mueller, “Politics, Death, and Morality in US Foreign Policy”, 14.

¹³² Hyde, “Casualty Aversion: Implications for Policy Makers and Senior Military Officers”, 24-5.

highly trained combat aircrews, and the conservation of costly, high priority material.¹³³

As the US military appears headed towards the future with an eye on quality instead of quantity, the return of these valuable resources is likely to become more important than ever. Not only are the aircraft becoming more expensive, the cost of training a mission-qualified pilot also continues to grow. If, during Operation Allied Force the United States had been unable to recover Hammer 34, a downed F-16 pilot, the Air Force would have lost \$2.06 million in replacement training cost alone, based on fiscal year 1999 dollars.²² This figure does not include the untold costs associated in closing the experience gap between a new pilot and an experienced pilot.

This point would beg the obvious question of how much training costs would be lost if a rescue aircraft were lost during the recovery process. Crew complements for rescue aircraft vary. However, assuming a USAF HH-60G crew of two pilots, two flight engineers, and two pararescuemen, the replacement training cost would still be less than one half of the replacement training cost for a single F-16 pilot.¹³⁴ From a replacement training cost perspective, these figures support the requirement to recover valuable resources.

Potential enemies recognize the value of the recovery forces as well as the stranded personnel. To safeguard these highly trained personnel, elaborate procedures have been established to minimize the potential of recovery forces being lured into a trap by the enemy. This tactic, successfully employed by the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War, entails setting up hidden defenses around a downed airman, the bait, in order to lure recovery aircraft into the trap. Avoiding these traps will be as important in the future as it has in the past.

¹³³ US Air Force, "Air Force Manual 2-36: Search, Rescue, and Recovery Operations", 3 January 1967, 1.

¹³⁴ Costs include two primary undergraduate flying training slots (\$167,967 per slot), \$200,000 for rotary-wing training, four Basic Military Training slots (\$31,524 per slot), two helicopter flight engineer initial skills slots (\$32,315 per slot), and two pararescue initial skills training slots (\$147,348 per slot). The total cost of this training is \$1,021,356. The cost for rotary-wing training was an estimate based on a data comparison with fixed-wing training. This data was taken from the Secretary of the Air Force, Financial Management and Comptroller website and a personal e-mail transmittal

While the concept of recovering valuable resources may become more important in the future, as costs rise, it is not a concept that is new to the military as noted by this excerpt from the 1945 edition of *The Air Sea Rescue Manual*: “To save manpower valuable to the military Services. The rescue of one highly trained airmen saves not only his life, but also the time and expense required for his replacement.”²⁴

Coming at the conclusion of World War II and massive losses suffered by the United States Army Air Force, this comment may seem somewhat bizarre. By the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Brig Gen Buster Glosson, who was heading up the planning for the air campaign, seemed to fully grasp the concept from the 1945 manual.

Gen Glosson in his prewar briefing to American fighter pilots underlined that no target was worth the loss of an American aircraft. Glosson implied that our aircraft would be able to return to attack a target that had not been destroyed, but once an aircraft or aircrew had been lost, one was in an irrevocable situation. Glosson’s attitude stands in stark contrast to the attitude of army air force commanders in World War II, whose attitude was that any losses were justified so long as bombers attacked the target.”²⁵

The retention of a valuable resource certainly seems like a valid reason for conducting PR missions and contributes to the justification of the PR mission. However, it does not define the limits to which missions should be conducted to recover an asset. “As one US Air Force general said in 1972, at the height of the Bat 21 Bravo SAR, “As airmen or soldiers or sailors, we should expect that there are times when as one person, we must be sacrificed for the overall [mission].”²⁶ While true, capture of downed airmen contributes to the enemy’s ability to exploit the opportunity for intelligence or propaganda purposes.

Denial of Intelligence and Propaganda

The denial of intelligence and propaganda opportunities to the enemy can be vitally important. As noted in the last chapter, the events of 3 October 1993 in Mogadishu, and the resultant images broadcast on televisions around the world, had an impact on US national policy. The ability to deny the enemy the ability to exploit

with Mr. Mark Parsons, Headquarters Air Education and Training Command, Financial Management office. 17 May 2001.

captured US personnel can be significant. The negotiations surrounding the return of prisoners of war following the Korean War arguably extended the war for a significant period.²⁷ Several attempts at exploitation of prisoners of war occurred during the Vietnam War. These attempts were mostly unsuccessful but did draw attention to the plight of the POWs.

The attempted rescue of POWs from the Son Tay prison camp in North Vietnam was an example of an overt attempt to secure the return of at least a handful of prisoners by force. There were also behind-the-scene events that took place. One example was the attempt by Ross Perot to pay the North Vietnamese \$100 million for the release of the prisoners. Mr. Perot went so far as to travel to Laos and Paris in attempts to meet with the North Vietnamese, to no avail. Attempts by the US government to trade prisoners held in South Vietnam also failed. "If the Americans wanted the return of American prisoners, the Americans would have to trade something far more important than the communists prisoners in South Vietnam."²⁸ These American prisoners were bargaining chips to be used to coerce American concessions during negotiations to end the fighting.

The ability to hold American servicemen captive is a powerful tool for enemy nations and promises to continue to be so in the future. The detention of three American servicemen in Bosnia before the initiation of Operation Allied Force garnered world attention. Their negotiated release by a private citizen, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, was on the front page of newspapers throughout the world. The April 2001 detention of 24 American servicemen by the Chinese during a time of peace had national policy implications as various government officials debated the future of arms sales to Taiwan in retaliation for the holding of the servicemen.

The denial of propaganda and intelligence opportunities to the enemy seems to be a valid reason for conducting PR missions. The future is unlikely to be much different from the past. Some think that with "The addition of female combat pilots to the ranks of military aviation, CSAR has become even more important as the political fallout from putting America's daughters in harm's way without adequate means of rescuing them cannot be ignored."²⁹ Whatever the justification for conducting PR missions, the denying to the enemy of information about US forces as well as the use of a political bargaining

chip cannot be ignored. As explained by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Hugh Shelton, “Simply put, if we can get them first, they can't be exploited.”³⁰

Impact on Military Morale

One of the most prevalent arguments offered regarding the necessity of CSAR is the positive impact it has on the morale of the aircrew that may need rescuing. The CJCS, General Hugh Shelton, recently stated, "Personnel recovery has another practical aspect -- it's the right thing to do...It's good for morale. By pledging to put every effort into recovering our highly trained soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines, we send a powerful signal about their importance and help sustain their spirit under the stress of combat.”³¹ There is ample evidence to support his assertions.

As noted in Chapter 2, World War II saw the beginnings of efforts to rescue downed pilots and crew. It was also during this time that people started to take note of the benefits to morale as a result of these efforts. Noted in the squadron history of the 1st Emergency Rescue Squadron was the fact that “the very presence of an Emergency Rescue Squadron promotes the realization that help and protection are there, should the exigency arise. This will give to the airmen an additional measure of confidence, so vital to mental composure, for no man is unafraid.”³² The history of rescue in 8th Air Force also recorded the benefits derived from the possibility of being rescued.

Because of enemy action, mechanical failure, human error, weather conditions and other factors, some of these planes are forced to descend at sea. When such landings are made, it is highly important that the crews be rescued if at all possible. Apart from the humanitarian necessity of saving life, the tactical importance of returning men to duty is apparent. In addition, the knowledge that they are prepared for such emergencies and that every effort will be made to assist them is a strong factor in maintaining high morale among crews which fly over water.³³

The US involvement in Vietnam would provide innumerable examples of heroic rescue actions that would result in improved morale on the part of pilots flying air strikes over hostile territory. At a 1997 burial at Arlington National Cemetery for the crew of Jolly Green 67, who were lost in the BAT 21 rescue effort in 1972, Lt Gen Dave Vesely encapsulated the feelings of so many pilots from the Vietnam War:

“All of us who have flown in harm's way know what a difference it makes to believe that every effort will be made to rescue us if we are

down...Today while we count the high cost, we should also count ourselves fortunate to be the beneficiaries of these, the best of men—men who gave their lives so ‘that others may live.’ ”³⁴

Another vignette from the Vietnam War addresses the same feelings from the soldier’s point of view:

“Or consider the words of a young soldier from Vietnam. In the confusion of a minor battle, little noted, and long forgotten, his buddy had been injured and left behind. Against the orders of his officer, the soldier went back and got him. The soldier was wounded in the process, and the recovered man died as he was being carried back. The officer was angry. ‘I told you not to go,’ he said. ‘Now I have lost both of you. It was not worth it.’ The wounded soldier replied, ‘But it was, sir, because when I got to him, he said, ‘Thanks, I knew that you would come’.”³⁵

The point of these two quotations is that the desire to conduct PR missions is timeless and is ingrained in the American fighting man’s soul. Because all servicemen realize this, there is a resultant increase in morale and efficiency. General Shelton summarizes this point well: "And in our armed forces we are committed to doing everything we can to bring our people home. This commitment is rooted in our values as Americans and in the bonds forged between those under fire." General Shelton goes on to say that soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines fight for their friends, not for the flag or the Constitution. "Part of this bond among warriors is the promise not to leave a comrade behind on the battlefield...a promise that extends to a shipmate at sea and a wingman who gets hit deep behind enemy lines."³⁶

There is a photo with a two-word inscription hanging in the Special Operations Aviation Training Company, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) headquarters building at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. This building is the home of soldiers undergoing training to become a member of the elite special operations aviation unit, a “Nightstalker.” It is a photo of the Desert One landing zone in Iran taken in the days after the failed mission to rescue the American hostages being held by Iranian militants. The charred remains of an American C-130 and two H-53 helicopters litter the desert floor. The soldiers of the 160th, a unit that was formed in the wake of the disaster at Desert One, do not see the remains of the destroyed aircraft when they look at the photo. What they see is a reminder that eight American bodies were left in the Iranian desert. The inscription on the photo reads: “Never Again.”

Conclusion

The “why” is what is important when considering the justification of PR missions. This chapter has reviewed the commonly held beliefs for conducting PR missions. These beliefs are apparently sufficient for the DoD to justify conducting PR missions. The sanctity of human life argument is certainly compelling as well as the argument for preventing the loss of a valuable resource. The denial to the enemy of the opportunity to exploit American servicemen for intelligence or propaganda reasons is also an important consideration. However, the positive impact on morale from the prosecution of PR missions is perhaps closer to the true, if unrealized, reason why PR missions are justifiable. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Prisoners of War/Missing Personnel, Mr. Robert Jones, recently stated, “America expects us to make every possible attempt to rescue our personnel.”³⁷ Mr. Jones went on to state, “We will not leave anyone behind.”³⁸ To further the DoDs ability to reach this goal, the following chapter will attempt to formalize the reasons for conducting PR operations and outline some of the potential problem areas as the US moves into the 21st century.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

We have a moral and ethical obligation to those we put in harms way.

Mr. Robert Jones
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
Prisoners of War/Missing Personnel
21 Jan 2001

Introduction

The introduction to this paper asked the question, “Can Personnel Recovery (PR) missions be justified?” Based upon the review of the commonly held beliefs behind the rationale for conducting PR, there appear to be enough valid reasons. The paper next asked, “What price should the United States be willing to pay to recover its military members from hostile territory, or should the United States be willing to pay a price at all?” The answer is that the price is going to vary according to the situation. In short, it depends. Finally, this paper asked, “Is the life of one person worth risking the lives of many others?” Again, the answer is yes in some situations. A conflict occurs because some people feel the mantra today is “the war will stop for CSAR.” This is the incorrect approach for our government and the DoD to adopt. The war should not stop for CSAR, but prudent efforts can and should be taken to recover our airmen, soldiers, sailors, and marines, and they should have reasonable assurances that this is going to happen.

Challenges

Advocacy for the PR mission is one of the biggest challenges for the future. PR advocates need to be vocal in their efforts to ensure the PR mission receives the proper level of attention. Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.6, Combat Search and Rescue, states, “CSAR represents an important application of aerospace power across a range of military operations. It is a key element in sustaining the morale, cohesion, and fighting

capability of friendly forces.”¹³⁵ The challenge is to get this message to the people that need to hear it, both commanders, and the servicemen that may be on the recovery end.

The problem with advocating PR or CSAR is that many people simply do not understand the mission. While it is impossible to correlate the danger and difficulty of a mission to its relative importance, Greg Alan Caires writes:

Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) is perhaps the most challenging of all Air Force missions: flying low and slow at night, in bad weather and while using terrain to mask their approach, and often without the benefit of surprise, CSAR units operate near hostile air defenses that have already shot down U.S. or allied aircraft whose crews are already being hunted by the enemy. In light of such danger and risk, it is no accident that 18 of the Air Force's 21 enlisted Air Force Cross recipients received those awards for duties conducted during rescue operations.¹³⁶

Another problem is that some people feel it is not an important part of the effort. As previously noted, AFSOC Commander Gen Maxwell Bailey said that CSAR does not help CINCs win wars.¹³⁷ Ironically, at the same conference, Gen Bailey stated, “CSAR is my number one issue on a day to day basis.”¹³⁸ This schizophrenia about the mission has to be resolved. Retired USAF Colonel Darrel Whitcomb probably states it best when he writes, “The first and perhaps main point is that *CSARing is war fighting*—pure and simple. We cannot think of it separately. CSARing is just another form of battle.”¹³⁹ It is incumbent upon the PR advocates of today to push this message across.

The future is not bleak. Gen Handy recently claimed, “CSAR’s future in the Air Force is bright.”¹⁴⁰ Steps have been taken to ensure PR and CSAR receives an increased level of advocacy in the future. The efforts of the DPMO and JPRA should allow for advocacy at the highest levels of the DoD. In addition, CSAR continues to evolve within

¹³⁵ US Air Force, *Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.6, Combat Search and Rescue Operations*, (Washington D.C.: 30 September 1998), 34.

¹³⁶ Greg Alan Caires, “Air Force benefits from congressional, Pentagon support of fleet modernization”, *National Defense* (February 1999).

<<http://www.lexingtoninstitute.org/defense/csar.htm>

¹³⁷ USAF Lieutenant General Maxwell Bailey, comments at 2001 DOD Personnel Recovery Conference, Arlington, VA, 23 January 2001.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Darrel Whitcomb, “Combat Search and Rescue: A Longer Look”, *Aerospace Power Journal* (Summer 2000), 29.

¹⁴⁰ USAF General John Handy, comments at 2001 DOD Personnel Recovery Conference, Arlington, VA, 23 January 2001.

the Air Force. Increased force structure and advocacy is on the horizon with the establishment of a Combat Rescue Wing at Moody AFB, Georgia in May 2001. The Air Force is also shifting eight HH-60Gs and five HC-130Ps from the reserve component to the active component. In addition, the Air Force has created a new career field, the Combat Rescue Officer, to improve advocacy of the mission.¹⁴¹ Finally, the Air Force is looking at new CSAR tactics such as treating CSAR as a time-critical target (TCT). ACC Director of Operations, Major General Donald Lamontagne, stated, “The first target on a TCT list should be a downed American.”¹⁴² If the PR mission receives sufficient advocacy and the changes in force structure and tactics prove beneficial, the largest problem for PR in the future may be determining how much risk is too much as the US Government and DoD are forced to justify PR missions in times of crisis.

Risk Assessment

The DoD owes the civilian decision makers a thorough risk assessment before committing forces to combat. Along those lines, “Combat rescue is inherently a risky business. Although risk can never be fully eliminated, it can be effectively managed and limited through a combination of careful planning, proactive troubleshooting, and the application of common sense techniques.”¹⁴³ Field Marshall Erwin Rommel said, “A risk is a chance you take; if it fails, you can recover. A gamble is a chance taken; if it fails, recovery is impossible.”¹⁴⁴ The DoD must ensure that through the proper planning for PR contingencies, the US Government is taking only risks, not gambles, in the execution of combat operations.

When conducting risk assessments associated with PR operations, it is important for PR planners to place their operation in context. There are several truisms to keep in mind that should not come as a surprise. These truisms are currently found in joint and service doctrine of the US military.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² USAF Major General Donald A. Lamontagne, comments at 2001 DOD Personnel Recovery Conference, Arlington, VA, 23 January 2001..

¹⁴³ US Air Force, *Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.6, Combat Search and Rescue Operations*, (Washington D.C.: 30 September 1998), 24.

¹⁴⁴ Center for Army Lessons Learned.

Commanders involved in CSAR operations must weigh all associated risks. They must decide how many personnel and how much equipment are worth placing in potentially isolated situations for the rescue of those currently isolated. In other words, commanders must judge whether the cost of executing the CSAR operation justifies the resultant benefits.¹⁴⁵

Offensive and/or defensive combat operations take precedence over CSAR operations. CSAR operations are subject to cost and benefit considerations and threat analysis in the same manner as any other military operation. The benefit to be gained from a CSAR operation should equal or outweigh the cost (actual or potential) associated with executing the operation. CSAR operations should not unduly risk isolating additional personnel, preclude execution of higher priority missions, routinely expose certain unique assets to extremely high risk, divert critically needed forces from ongoing operations, or allow the overall military situation to deteriorate. Regardless of the situation, commanders must balance the value of retrieving isolated personnel against potential costs.¹⁴⁶

Proper application of doctrine as it relates to CSAR, and PR in general, will ensure the military provides the government with an accurate assessment of the risk assumed. Performing this risk assessment will serve as a stepping-stone to ensure the military and the government maintain their end of a moral contract with the serviceman.

The Moral Contract

In reviewing the commonly held beliefs for conducting PR operations in an attempt to determine if PR operations are justifiable, one belief always seemed harder to grasp, but more important than the others. The argument for conducting PR missions due to the sanctity of human life and the casualty adverse nature of the US was compelling, but debatable. Why would a country that is obviously willing to kill the opposition place such a value on preserving the lives of its own citizens and soldiers to the point of risking additional lives? In addition, if in the process of attempting to recover this valuable resource, other, potentially more valuable resources, are lost, it would seem to defy the cost-benefit analysis. Finally, with the exception of the graphic scenes broadcast from Somalia, the propaganda and intelligence value that the enemy has gained from captured

>http://call.army.mil/call/spc_prod/staffspt/chap9.htm.

¹⁴⁵ US Army Field Manual 1-111, *Aviation Brigades*, 27 October 1997.

><http://www.adtdl.army.mil/cgi-bin/atdl.dll/fm/1-111/app-d.htm>.

¹⁴⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-50.2, Doctrine for Joint Combat Search and Rescue*, 26 January 1996, IV-5.

soldiers or detained citizens has been extremely limited. In some instances, it seems to actually backfire on the one attempting to gain the advantage.¹⁴⁷ However, it is hard to dispute the positive impact on military morale gained from the successful execution of PR missions.

Regardless of any other rationale for conducting PR missions, it always comes back to the commitment to the serviceman.

Commitment to bring back our people is part of the American soldier's article of faith that willingness to accept risk or to sacrifice is based on two things: (1) such sacrifice is not needless and (2) the nation will make every effort within mission dictates to recover its soldiers from enemy territory. This keeps Americans fighting for each other and our way of life.¹⁴⁸

Retired US Army Gen David Grange is intimately familiar with PR operations. While serving as the Commanding General of the 1st Infantry Division, Gen Grange commanded the three US Army soldiers captured by Serbs on 31 March 1999. Because of this experience and others during his military career, Gen Grange believes the United States owes its service members a written commitment that every effort will be made to secure their safe return. The following is Gen Grange's thoughts regarding a "moral contract."

There is a moral contract that must exist between our service members and our country.

If a service member is separated or captured, there cannot be any doubt in his or her mind that the USA will do everything in its power to get that person back.

This is a very powerful feeling in combat, or in any other operational environment, because it touches the moral domain of trust, confidence, believing in the team, caring for each other and the drive to accomplish the mission regardless of what may happen.

We touch on the Code of Conduct, which provides the loyalty and trust requirements of the service member if captured, in basic training, and then maybe, now and then, throughout one's career in the armed forces.

In the Code it states: Article 1 – "...I am prepared to give my life," in

¹⁴⁷ The use of human shields and video of beaten prisoners by Iraq in the 1991 Persian Gulf War is an example of instances that galvanized world opinion against the perpetrator.

¹⁴⁸ Whitcomb, "Combat Search and Rescue: A Longer Look", 28.

Article 5 - "...I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and it's allies," Article 6 - "...I will trust in my God and in the USA."

That, however, is only one side of the trust and confidence contract. That is the soldier's side.

Where is our country's contract to the soldier? It is written here and there in policy statements and talked about by political and military leaders.

But, it is not expressed in a soldier document, like in the Code of Conduct where the soldier's responsibility to the country is written.

There must be something up close, which ensures every soldier that [our country will not let you down, we sent you in to do a tough mission and if it goes wrong we will get you back with every resource at our disposal].

In the Ranger Regiment, TF 160 and in a few other outfits, this is provided in a Creed at unit level - "I will never leave a fallen comrade to fall into the hands of the enemy." It is a belief, a way of life. It provides the trust, confidence and loyalty, that soldiers need when they are deployed on any mission. It is a combat multiplier, and intangible that provides situational power and drive under all adverse conditions.

I recommend that we develop, and provide, to every service member, a means to ascertain our country's commitment of total effort for recovery.

¹⁴⁹

Recommendation

The recovery of US personnel is derived from the trust between the government and the serviceman. The government has claimed it will make an effort to recover personnel and those personnel have come to expect it. Codifying this commitment would ensure PR receives the proper advocacy and attention, as well as give the serviceman the comfort that every reasonable attempt will be made to ensure that he is returned to US control as rapidly as possible. The justification for conducting PR missions is simple: The American soldier is counting on it. "The principal stakeholders, however, are Service members and their families. The mutual bonds of trust and loyalty between each

¹⁴⁹ US Army (Ret.) General David Grange, personal e-mail transmittal, 14 Feb 2001

Service member and the United States of America serve to strengthen both the individual and the overall fighting force.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Mission Area Analysis (MAA) and Business Process Reengineering (BPR) for Personnel Accounting and Recovery (Arlington, VA: ANSER, October 2000), I-5.

APPENDIX

Congressional Medal of Honor Citation, Master Sergeant Gary Gordon

Rank and organization: Master Sergeant, U.S. Army. Place and date: 3 October 1993, Mogadishu, Somalia. Entered service at: ----- Born: Lincoln, Maine. Citation: Master Sergeant Gordon, United States Army, distinguished himself by actions above and beyond the call of duty on 3 October 1993, while serving as Sniper Team Leader, United States Army Special Operations Command with Task Force Ranger in Mogadishu, Somalia. Master Sergeant Gordon's sniper team provided precision fires from the lead helicopter during an assault and at two helicopter crash sites, while subjected to intense automatic weapons and rocket propelled grenade fires. When Master Sergeant Gordon learned that ground forces were not immediately available to secure the second crash site, he and another sniper unhesitatingly volunteered to be inserted to protect the four critically wounded personnel, despite being well aware of the growing number of enemy personnel closing in on the site. After his third request to be inserted, Master Sergeant Gordon received permission to perform his volunteer mission. When debris and enemy ground fires at the site caused them to abort the first attempt, Master Sergeant Gordon was inserted one hundred meters south of the crash site. Equipped with only his sniper rifle and a pistol, Master Sergeant Gordon and his fellow sniper, while under intense small arms fire from the enemy, fought their way through a dense maze of shanties and shacks to reach the critically injured crew members. Master Sergeant Gordon immediately pulled the pilot and the other crew members from the aircraft, establishing a perimeter which placed him and his fellow sniper in the most vulnerable position. Master Sergeant Gordon used his long range rifle and side arm to kill an undetermined number of attackers until he depleted his ammunition. Master Sergeant Gordon then went back to the wreckage, recovering some of the crew's weapons and ammunition. Despite the fact that he was critically low on ammunition, he provided some of it to the dazed pilot and then radioed for help. Master Sergeant Gordon continued to travel the perimeter, protecting the downed crew. After his team member was fatally wounded and his own rifle ammunition exhausted, Master Sergeant Gordon returned to the wreckage, recovering a rifle with the last five rounds of ammunition and gave it to the pilot with the words, "good luck." Then, armed only with his pistol, Master Sergeant Gordon continued to fight until he was fatally wounded. His actions saved the pilot's life. Master Sergeant Gordon's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest standards of military service and reflect great credit upon him, his unit and the United States Army.

Congressional Medal of Honor Citation, Master Sergeant Randall Shughart

Rank and organization: Sergeant First Class, U.S. Army. Place and date: 3 October 1993, Mogadishu, Somalia. Entered service at: ----- Born: Newville, Pennsylvania. Citation: Sergeant First Class Shughart, United States Army, distinguished himself by actions above and beyond the call of duty on 3 October 1993, while serving as a Sniper Team Member, United States Army Special Operations Command with Task Force Ranger in Mogadishu, Somalia. Sergeant First Class Shughart provided precision sniper fires from the lead helicopter during an assault on a building and at two helicopter crash sites, while subjected to intense automatic weapons and rocket propelled grenade fires. While providing critical suppressive fires at the second crash site, Sergeant First Class Shughart and his team leader learned that ground forces were not immediately available to secure the site. Sergeant First Class Shughart and his team leader unhesitatingly volunteered to be inserted to protect the four critically wounded personnel, despite being well aware of the growing number of enemy personnel closing in on the site. After their third request to be inserted, Sergeant First Class Shughart and his team leader received permission to perform this volunteer mission. When debris and enemy ground fires at the site caused them to abort the first attempt, Sergeant First Class Shughart and his team leader were inserted one hundred meters south of the crash site. Equipped with only his sniper rifle and a pistol, Sergeant First Class Shughart and his team leader, while under intense small arms fire from the enemy, fought their way through a dense maze of shanties and shacks to reach the critically injured crew members. Sergeant First Class Shughart pulled the pilot and the other crew members from the aircraft, establishing a perimeter which placed him and his fellow sniper in the most vulnerable position. Sergeant First Class Shughart used his long range rifle and side arm to kill an undetermined number of attackers while traveling the perimeter, protecting the downed crew. Sergeant First Class Shughart continued his protective fire until he depleted his ammunition and was fatally wounded. His actions saved the pilot's life. Sergeant First Class Shughart's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest standards of military service and reflect great credit upon him, his unit and the United States Army.

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