

Why Pararescue was Created

Pararescue was established during World War II primarily because air power provided the ability to get anywhere and to be everywhere over the earth's surface. Pararescue was established because the rescue aircraft (fixed-wing or helicopter, or V-22) can only be in either a state of being flown or in a state of being landed. Airpower provides effective search for and transportation capabilities, but the effectiveness of airpower to do rescue is significantly lacking the moment survivors are encountered who are unable to help themselves.

In situations and circumstance of unable to help themselves survivors, there is a requirement to provide the capability having extensive medical training and survival skills. It was for this reason Air Rescue service in 1947 quickly established ownership of developing, training and equipping highly trained pararescue teams. Pararescue was already an established concept and capability from World War II, it just wasn't being managed properly by the theater and local commanders which is what the Clobbered Turkey incident (see summary below) and subsequent rescue mission (December 1947) so clearly and distinctly documents. Regardless, the effectiveness of the air rescue aircraft is significantly limited and most often useless without a well-trained, well equipped, and highly fit expertise to put on the ground on-scene.

The PJ is the capability to do something for those survivors who are unable to help themselves. These situations and circumstances where aircraft dropping kits and hovering helicopter was insufficient is what made PJs and keeps the capabilities PJs perform needed.

From the end of WWII to about 1955 there was an organization called the USAF Arctic Desert Tropic Information Center (ADTIC) which analyzed data from over 600 SAR incidents and wrote studies concerning time factors, risk vs gain to justify authorizing the going of a SAR mission, diplomatic clearances to get rescue to incidents involving the territory of another country, terrain factors, weather factors, injury and non-injury factors. The bottom-line is it is the studies written by this center and the Air Rescue Service in the 1940s and 1950s resulted in the two basic assumptions concerning survivors: There are always survivors who require emergency care and even those not injured are under condition of great stress and experiencing shock.

Data of the time (1944 to 1955) indicated in 82 percent of aircraft crashes or bailout no occupant will be seriously injured but 60% of all survivors will be injured to some extent. Records also included numerous accounts where supposedly able-bodied, logical-thinking survivors failed to accomplish extremely simple tasks in a logical order and thus hindered, delayed or even prevented their own rescue. The conclusion after conclusion of these studies was life expectancy of injured survivors' decreases as much as 80 percent during the first 24 hours following the crash or bailout, while the chances of uninjured survivors rapidly diminish after the first 3 days. The fine print of these studies stated these figures are averages from overall experiences and that each incident event will vary with local conditions such as terrain, climatic conditions, ability and endurance of survivors, emergency equipment available and SEARCH AND RESCUE AVAILABLE TO RESPOND.

Standardized training, equipment, procedures, and policies pertinent to Air Rescue were lacking prior to the Army Air Force establishing the Air Rescue Service effective 13 March 1946. When the Army Air Force established the Air Rescue Service effective 13 March 1946 it gave little

authority to this service to provide functional or operational oversight of units outside of the 48 contiguous states of the United States. The Air Rescue Service, however, was given functional responsibility to developed standardized procedures, standardized employment concepts and tactics and take advantage of every new developing technology to ensure the Air Forces has an effective and dependable air rescue capability. It was also given the responsibility to train assets to be assigned to overseas theaters.

Shortly before the 18 September 1947 establishing of the United States Air Force, The Air Rescue Service sought with deliberate purpose and intent and “got approval to constitute and activate USAF Pararescue teams in July 1947 and had the first team ready for field assignment in November 1947”.¹ However, during World War II pararescue missions were accomplished primarily in the China-Burma-India (CBI) combat theater and Canada and Alaska. The missions in Canada and Alaska before being organized as units of the Air Rescue Service in 1948 included the parachuting in of sled dogs and sleds.

There are several tragic crashes where use of pararescue probably would have saved survivors, but there is one crash and subsequent rescue operations that demonstrates importance of standardized procedures, standardized employment concepts and tactics and advantage of acquiring new developing technology. The crash of the Clobbered Turkey is one of several pivotal events showing more than good intentions are needed to successfully accomplish by parachute rescue operations.

The B-29 "Clobbered Turkey" crashes December 23, 1947 with eight crewmembers on-board. The ensuing rescue operation demonstrated the importance of proper equipment, methods, and techniques. On 27 December 1947 a senior officer directs Lt Albert C. Kinney, Jr., USAAF (MC), First Sergeant Santhell O. London, and T/5 Leon J. Casey to jump to the crash site located 95 miles north of Nome Alaska. They were ill-prepared for what they encountered. The hostile environment (poor visibility, high winds 25 MPH to 40 MPH, and temperatures -40°F to -50°F) soon claim the lives of the three jumpers. Surface rescue teams rescue six survivors of the crashed B-29 on December 29th. Sgt London's body is found 500 yards from the wreckage on January 5th. On January 12th search teams find the body of paratrooper T/5 Casey seven miles from the crash site. They also find the bodies of Lt. Vern H. Arnett (pilot), Lt. Frederick E. Sheetz (Navigator), crewmembers of the “Clobbered Turkey” who decided two days after the crash to walk out of the wilderness to get help, about four miles north of the crashed B-29. The saga of the “Clobbered Turkey” ends when the flight surgeon’s body is found on 2 July 1948. Contributing causes for the tragic death of three parachutists include: lack of adequate training on how to survive in the hostile environment; survival equipment was not carried or available; flight surgeon had no jump or field experience; they jumped unaware the surface winds exceeded 30 mph; dragged by their parachutes, for miles, over the tundra. Rescue jumper equipment, procedures, and techniques would have prevented this useless loss of life.²

This is one of several tragic rescue operations that resulted in the Air Rescue units belonging to other commands to be aligned under the Air Rescue Service.

¹ Historical Report: Air Rescue Service, 1 January 1947 to 30 June 1947, pp. 30-34. Historical Report: Air Rescue Service, 1 July 1947 to 31 December 1947, pp. 10, 15, 20, 22, 25, 26, 28. MAC/CSEH (ARRS). War: The Concept of Aerial Rescue, pp. 134-136.

²Francis M. Dawdy, SMSgt Ret., Pararescue Superintendent; Service Period, 1942-69; Interview with author, 1 Jan 94. B-29 Overdue at Ladd Field, all available planes alerted; Fairbanks Daily News-Miner; 24 Dec 47, p. 1. Hope Dwindle for lost B-29 pair, Paratroopers; Superfortress rescue told by Nome man; Search Suspended; Fairbanks Daily News-Miner; 31 Dec 47. Five lost airman still hunted; Fairbanks Daily News-Miner; 2 Jan 48, p. 1. Fantastically inaccurate aerial maps partially blamed for superfort crackup; Fairbanks Daily News-Miner; 3 Jan 48, p. 1. Missing 'chutist named; Fairbanks Daily News-Miner; 6 Jan 48, p. 2. Squadron sends \$1,000 to widow of paratroop hero; Fairbanks Daily News-Miner; 10 Jan 48, p. 2. Dog Driver in Nome after rescue effort; Fairbanks Daily News-Miner; 10 Jan 48, p. 6. 'Where did you guys come from?' greets rescuers of airman; Flyer spots paratrooper; Anchorage Daily Times; 31 Dec 47, p. 1. Dog teams to be sent out to bring back survivors; Anchorage Daily Times; 29 Dec 47, p. 1. Paratrooper's body is found; Anchorage Daily Times; 6 Jan 48, p. 1. Funeral services held for rescue paratrooper; Anchorage Daily Times; 7 Jan 48, p. 3. Find traces of paratrooper; Anchorage Daily Times; 10 Jan 48, p. 1. Bodies of airmen recovered; Fairbanks Daily News-Miner; 13 Jan 48, p. 1. Saga of the "clobbered turkey" ended; The Nome Nugget; 5 Jul 48, p. 1, 2. Bush pilot locates paramedic killed in rescue attempt; Anchorage Daily Times; 3 Jul 48, p. 8.