

Congressional Report

*Report on Search and Rescue Capabilities of
the Air Force in the Northwestern United States*

House Report 110-477, page 76



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Introduction

This report is being provided to the appropriate Congressional Committees as directed in House Report 110-477, page 76, dated December 06, 2007. This report addresses the Congressional request to submit a report on the Air Force's search and rescue capabilities in the northwestern United States. Specifically, the following areas are addressed in this report:

- (1) An assessment of the search and rescue capabilities required to support Air Force operations and training
- (2) A description of the compliance of the Air Force with the 2007 United States National Search and Rescue Plan (NSRP) for Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana
- (3) An inventory and description of the search and rescue assets of the Air Force that are available to meet the requirements of the NSRP
- (4) A description of the use of such search and rescue assets during the three-year period preceding the date when the report is submitted
- (5) The plans of the Air Force to meet current and future search and rescue requirements in the northwestern United States, including plans that take into consideration requirements related to support for both Air Force operations and training and compliance with the NSRP
- (6) An inventory of other search and rescue capabilities equivalent to such capabilities provided by the Air Force that may be provided by other Federal, State, or local agencies in the northwestern United States

Executive Summary

Per the National Search and Rescue Plan, the Air Force is the recognized Search and Rescue Coordinator for the aeronautical Search and Rescue Region (SRR) encompassing the continental United States. The Air Force accomplishes Search and Rescue Coordinator duties via the established Air Force Rescue Coordination Center based at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida which coordinates the use of Department of Defense and other federal assets in support of the National Search and Rescue Plan. In addition, the Air Force, along with other services and agencies, also provides aircraft and personnel to perform search and rescue missions, if requested, to local and state authorities on a case-by-case basis. Specifically for the northwestern United States, the Air Force has consistently provided significant contributions for both coordination of missions by the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center and actual accomplishment of missions with regionally based operational and training assets when requested.

Report

This report examines the search and rescue capabilities of the Air Force in the northwestern United States. For the purposes of this examination, the northwestern United States will be considered the four state region consisting of Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. Examined Air Force capabilities include helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, or personnel specifically trained or equipped for search and rescue mission execution. Other Air Force assets, such as those equipped with surveillance capabilities, could also potentially assist in search and rescue missions but are not examined in this report.

- (1) *An assessment of the search and rescue capabilities required to support Air Force operations and training*

In the northwestern region, the Air Force maintains two helicopter units with primary missions of supporting Air Force operations and training. These units consist of the 40th Helicopter Squadron



at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana and the 36th Rescue Flight at Fairchild Air Force Base, Washington. Both of these units utilize the UH-1N Twin Huey helicopter equipped with hoist and Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) systems. Also, an Air Force Reserve unit, the 304th Rescue Squadron, at Portland, Oregon provides a squadron of specially trained Pararescue (PJ) personnel able to augment rescue aircraft and perform and coordinate ground searches. These units may be available for civil search and rescue on a non-interference basis with their primary military missions. Specific descriptions of these three units are below:

36th Rescue Flight

Organized under the Air Education and Training Command, this unit consists of four UH-1N helicopters with the primary mission of supporting Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) student training at the Air Force SERE School and also providing evacuation capability of injured Department of Defense personnel from remote training areas.

40th Helicopter Squadron

Organized under the Air Force Space Command, this unit consists of eight UH-1N helicopters with the primary mission of providing a flexible, rapid response for intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) security. In addition, the helicopters provide surveillance and the rapid transport of personnel and components in support of ICBM operations.

304th Rescue Squadron

An Air Force Reserve unit, the 304th Rescue Squadron provides approximately forty-five Pararescue personnel to Air Combat Command. This unit provides capability for the Air Force's combat search and rescue (CSAR) mission and has been deployed in support of the Global War on Terror. Normally, these personnel are deployed with Air Force aircraft to perform the CSAR mission.

(2) A description of the compliance of the Air Force with the 2007 United States National Search and Rescue Plan (NSRP) for Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana

The NSRP recognizes the Air Force as the Search and Rescue Coordinator for the aeronautical Search and Rescue Region corresponding to the continental United States (other than Alaska). Specifically, the NSRP states the Search and Rescue Coordinator has overall responsibility for establishing a Rescue Coordination Center (RCC) for their region and for providing or arranging for search and rescue services within their region.

The Air Force, as the recognized Search and Rescue Coordinator for the continental United States aeronautical region, has established the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida to coordinate and arrange search and rescue missions. Department of Defense components have facilities and other assets which may be utilized for civil search and rescue needs to the fullest extent practicable on a non-interference basis with primary military duties according to national directives, plans, guidelines, and agreements. The Air Force, through the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center, coordinates and provides efficient utilization of Department of Defense assets for civil search and rescue operations.

With the establishment of the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center, the Air Force is in compliance with the NSRP and recognized Search and Rescue Coordinator duties for the aeronautical region of the continental United States. In addition, on a non-interference basis with primary Air Force missions, aircraft and personnel may be provided to assist in civil search and rescue missions.

(3) An inventory and description of the search and rescue assets of the Air Force that are available to meet the requirements of the NSRP



The Air Force maintains a dedicated combat search and rescue force structure to enable recovery operations in denied enemy and hostile environments. Although these assets are heavily deployed in support of Global War on Terror operations, when available and on a non-interference basis with their primary military mission, they may assist in civil search and rescue operations such as disaster relief response. Also, other Air Force assets, such as those assigned to Air Force Space Command, Air Force Special Operations Command and Air Education and Training Command possess inherent capabilities to perform search and rescue mission execution if available and are included in this report.

HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter

Specialized combat search and rescue helicopter equipped with weather radar, Forward Looking Infrared, and hoist extraction systems. Air Force Pararescue personnel normally fly as aircrew to extract and perform medical care on survivors.

HH-60G helicopters are based at the following locations in the continental United States and Alaska and are able to support NSRP requirements if available. Although not specifically based in the northwestern United States, assets could assist for major requirements in any region of the United States, such as occurred during the Hurricane Katrina response.

| Location | Quantity | Command |
|--|----------|------------------------------------|
| Alaska – Kulis Air National Guard Base | 6 | Air National Guard |
| Arizona – Davis-Monthan Air Force Base | 6 | Air Force Reserve Command |
| Arizona – Davis-Monthan Air Force Base | 8 | Air Combat Command |
| California – Moffett Federal Air Field | 6 | Air National Guard |
| Florida – Patrick Air Force Base | 9 | Air Force Reserve Command |
| Georgia – Moody Air Force Base | 15 | Air Combat Command |
| New Mexico – Kirtland Air Force Base | 12 | Air Education and Training Command |
| New York – Gabreski Field | 6 | Air National Guard |
| Nevada – Nellis Air Force Base | 15 | Air Combat Command |

HC-130 Combat King fixed-wing aircraft

Specialized combat search and rescue aircraft equipped with weather radar, Forward Looking Infrared, and airdrop capability of equipment and Pararescue personnel. In addition, HC-130s can perform air refueling of HH-60G helicopters extending range and response capabilities.



HC-130 aircraft are based at the following locations in the continental United States and Alaska and are able to support NSRP requirements if available. Although not specifically based in the northwestern United States, assets could assist for major requirements in any region of the United States, such as occurred during the Hurricane Katrina response.

| Location | Quantity | Command |
|--|----------|------------------------------------|
| Alaska – Kulis Air National Guard Base | 4 | Air National Guard |
| Arizona – Davis-Monthan Air Force Base | 4 | Air Combat Command |
| California – Moffett Federal Air Field | 4 | Air National Guard |
| Florida – Patrick Air Force Base | 5 | Air Force Reserve Command |
| Georgia – Moody Air Force Base | 10 | Air Combat Command |
| New Mexico – Kirtland Air Force Base | 4 | Air Education and Training Command |
| New York – Gabreski Field | 5 | Air National Guard |

Pararescue personnel

Specialized combat search and rescue trained personnel normally utilized in conjunction with HH-60G and HC-130 aircraft. Pararescue personnel provide medical treatment to survivors as well as perform ground search and rescue missions in demanding environments. Pararescue teams also provide high altitude, maritime, confined space, and vehicle extraction capabilities.

| Location | Quantity of PJs | Command |
|--|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Alaska – Kulis Air National Guard Base | 29 | Air National Guard |
| Arizona – Davis-Monthan Air Force Base | 48 | Air Combat Command |
| Arizona – Davis-Monthan Air Force Base | 19 | Air Force Reserve Command |
| California – Moffett Federal Air Field | 32 | Air National Guard |
| Florida – Hurlburt Air Force Base | 36 | Air Force Special Operations Command |
| Florida – Patrick Air Force Base | 37 | Air Force Reserve Command |



| Location | Quantity of PJs | Command |
|---|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Georgia – Moody Air Force Base | 59 | Air Combat Command |
| Kentucky – Louisville International Airport | 13 | Air National Guard |
| New Mexico – Kirtland Air Force Base | 23 | Air Education and Training Command |
| Nevada -- Nellis Air Force Base | 30 | Air Combat Command |
| New York – Gabreski Field | 23 | Air National Guard |
| North Carolina – Pope Air Force Base | 36 | Air Force Special Operations Command |
| Oregon – Portland International Airport | 45 | Air Force Reserve Command |

UH-1N helicopter

Utility helicopter utilized for training and military support missions. Helicopters may be equipped with Forward Looking Infrared and hoist extraction systems at some locations. Medical technicians or Flight Surgeons are normally carried to perform medical care on survivors during search and rescue taskings.

| Location | Quantity | Command |
|--------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Florida – Eglin Air Force Base | 2 | Air Force Material Command |
| Florida – Hurlburt Air Force Base | 2 | Air Force Special Operations Command |
| Maryland – Andrews Air Force Base | 19 | Air Force District of Washington |
| Montana – Malmstrom Air Force Base | 8 | Air Force Space Command |
| New Mexico – Kirtland Air Force Base | 6 | Air Education and Training Command |
| North Dakota – Minot Air Force Base | 8 | Air Force Space Command |



| Location | Quantity | Command |
|---------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------|
| Washington – Fairchild Air Force Base | 4 | Air Education and Training Command |
| Wyoming – F.E. Warren Air Force Base | 9 | Air Force Space Command |

The Air Force Special Operations Command also has aircraft possessing an inherent capability to perform search and rescue missions. Normally, these assets are heavily deployed and tasked in support of Global War on Terror operations but, if available, may perform civil search and rescue support in the continental United States.

MH-53 Pave Low helicopter

Specialized helicopter optimized for special operations infiltration into deep, denied areas. Equipped with radar, Forward Looking Infrared, and hoist extraction systems. This aircraft will be permanently retired in October 2008.

CV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor

Tilt-rotor aircraft for special operations mission execution. Equipped with radar, Forward Looking Infrared, and hoist extraction systems. This aircraft is currently being fielded.

MC-130E/HP/W

Fixed-wing aircraft equipped with radar, Forward Looking Infrared, and airdrop capability of equipment and personnel. In addition, MC-130s can perform air refueling of configured helicopters and CV-22s extending range and response capabilities.

| Location | Quantity |
|---|---|
| Florida – Hurlburt Air Force Base | 13 - MH-53 helicopter* 4 - CV-22 tilt-rotor 18 - MC-130 |
| New Mexico – Kirtland** and Cannon Air Force Base | 4 - CV-22 11 - MC-130 |

* MH-53 will be retired by October 2008

** Assigned to Air Education and Training Command

(4) *A description of the use of such search and rescue assets during the three-year period preceding the date when the report is submitted*

During the period 2005 through 2007, the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center coordinated and arranged for 7,175 missions utilizing federal assets for search and rescue execution in the United States. In addition, the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center managed over 21,000 incidents during this timeframe resulting in the saving of 980 lives.



Air Force aircraft and personnel performed numerous search and rescue missions since 2005 including searches for overdue or missing aircraft and lost persons and rescues of injured civilians. Notably, during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Air Force amassed a large task force of rescue assets from the Active Duty, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve consisting of over 30 helicopters, 2 HC-130 aircraft, Pararescue, and Special Tactics Teams which were responsible for saving over 4,300 lives.

Specifically, for the northwestern United States, Air Force assets performed 70 search and rescue missions in this time period resulting in the saving of numerous lives. These missions were performed by the 36th Rescue Flight, 40th Helicopter Squadron, and 304th Rescue Squadron.

(5) The plans of the Air Force to meet current and future search and rescue requirements in the northwestern United States, including plans that take into consideration requirements related to support for both Air Force operations and training and compliance with the NSRP

The Air Force continues to examine and refine search and rescue capabilities ensuring compliance with the NSRP as well as the most efficient utilization and location of resources for operations and training in a fiscally constrained environment.

Recently, the Air Force relocated the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center from Langley Air Force Base, Virginia to Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida to maximize the ability to integrate with other Air Force command and control functions ensuring maximum support for search and rescue missions in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington.

In addition, Air Force Space Command recently increased the quantity of UH-1N helicopters at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana to enhance the support capabilities for ICBM operations. As noted earlier, these aircraft are able to perform search and rescue taskings on a case-by-case, non-interference basis with their primary mission of ICBM support.

The Air Force will continue to ensure, with consideration to the full spectrum of federal, state, and local assets in the northwestern United States, adequate search and rescue capabilities, including the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center, are available for mission coordination and execution.

(6) An inventory of other search and rescue capabilities equivalent to such capabilities provided by the Air Force that may be provided by other Federal, State, or local agencies in the northwestern United States

The following table highlights other assets in the northwestern United States capable of search and rescue mission taskings:

| Location | Type | Organization | Remarks |
|---------------------|---------------|---------------------|---------|
| Idaho - Boise | UH-60 | Army National Guard | |
| Montana - Helena | UH-60 & CH-47 | Army National Guard | |
| Oregon - North Bend | HH-65 | Coast Guard | |
| Oregon - Astoria | HH-60 | Coast Guard | |
| Oregon - Salem | UH-60 | Army National Guard | |



| Location | Type | Organization | Remarks |
|---|-------|---------------------|---|
| Oregon - Pendleton | CH-47 | Army National Guard | |
| Washington - Naval Air Station Whidbey Island | MH-60 | Navy | |
| Washington - Port Angeles | HH-65 | Coast Guard | |
| Washington - Fort Lewis | CH-47 | Army Reserve | CH-47 - High Altitude Rescue Capability |
| Washington - Spokane & Gray Army Air Field | UH-60 | Army National Guard | |