

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

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EVALUATION OF WHY THE AIR FORCE DEDICATED PERSONNEL RECOVERY
MISSION SHOULD REMAIN WITH AIR COMBAT COMMAND.

By

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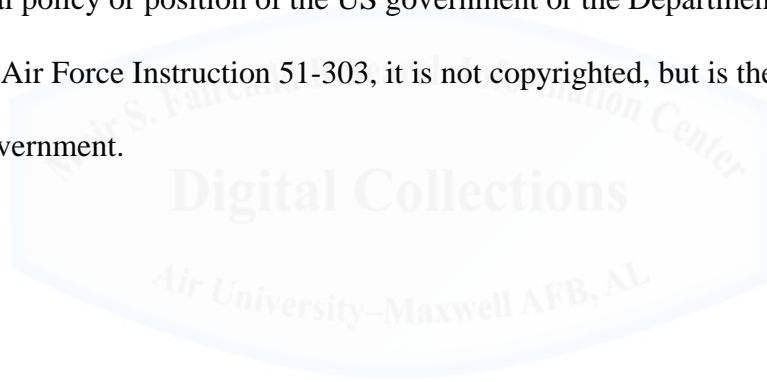


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ABSTRACT

Over the past 35 years, AF Personnel Recovery (PR) has experienced major organizational changes, resulting in an unsettled community unsure of its true home in the Air Force. The PR mission belongs in its current location within Air Combat Command (ACC) because of the importance to the joint forces air component commander (JFACC) that PR remains a theatre assigned asset supporting its primary customer, the combat air force (CAF). As such, the community of PR professionals must focus its communal identity on becoming members of ACC rather than Special Operations in order to settle PR in one command and develop an environment in ACC that will enable rescue to flourish. Through a qualitative problem/solution framework, this paper will analyze the origins of dedicated AF PR leading to the turbulent 35 years PR has found itself currently in. This background will give a solid base to where PR is lacking and aid in the development of solutions the AF and ACC can take to solidify PR's place in ACC. These include the establishment of a general officer in ACC to oversee all of the PR mission, increased funding and aircraft procurement for PR, clearer career paths for PR airmen, and the acceptance from the PR community that the mission belongs with ACC.

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In 2013, the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) began an effort to regain control of the Air Force's Personnel Recovery (PR) Forces seven years after they were transferred from AFSOC to Air Combat Command (ACC).¹ This attempted move of the Air Force's PR assets re-sparked an argument that has been raging for the past 30 years on where the proper home for PR should be. The PR (or often referred to as rescue) community finds itself split on those who believe the mission should remain with the Combat Air Force (CAF) and thus ACC, and those that find the similar airframes and missions in AFSOC produce the most suitable home. PR forces have endured far too many organizational changes in its recent history, and as such the community as a whole needs to accept that the optimal place for the survivability of AF dedicated PR is to keep the force in ACC.

Nature of the Problem

Air Force dedicated PR has had a long and storied history in the Air Force (AF). Originating in the air battles in Europe during WWII and participating in every major military operation through Vietnam, PR has always played a critical support role to Air Operations throughout its existence. For much of PR's history it enjoyed a stable organizational construct while belonging to the Air Rescue Service (later the Air Rescue and Recovery Service), an organization that existed for almost 35 years until the first of five major organizational changes began to disrupt that stability. But, since the early 1980's when rescue began bouncing from organization to organization, AF PR has seen a steady decrease in capability and a lack of a communal home as the PR forces have been swapped between Special Operations Forces (SOF) and CAF multiple times.

In 2003, Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) Gen John Jumper directed the AF align PR and SOF by transferring all dedicated PR assets from ACC to AFSOC.² The future CSAF, Gen T. Michael Moseley, an energetic proponent of AF rescue, disagreed with this move. Gen Moseley felt strongly that rescue should remain within the CAF where it could best serve the geographic combatant commanders (COCOMs) and support the combat airmen.³ As soon as Gen Moseley was in control of the USAF, he moved swiftly to realign the PR forces with the CAF by once again placing the mission under ACC in 2006.⁴ While AF senior leadership understood the move, the war-fighters in the PR community who had thought they had found a true home with SOF failed to understand the decision and still clung to hope for an eventual return to AFSOC.

AFSOC is a command of very similar aircraft and missions, with personnel frequently crossing between PR and SOF, seemingly making it a logical home for PR. The issue is that the PR mission must be aligned with the CAF in order to be efficiently deployed in support of the joint forces air component commander (JFACC). Therefore it is ill suited as a SOF mission because the resulting alignment with Special Operations Command (SOCOM) would remove rescue as an assigned asset to the JFACC.

The problem has arisen that with frequent moves to and from the SOF community, the PR community within the AF has become split on where the PR mission should remain. Many view ACC as a command of fighter pilots who do not understand and therefore will not advocate properly for the PR mission. Those in the PR community who see AFSOC as a favored destination have their eyes on the benefits to the people and the airframes and not the mission. At its core, the PR mission exists in the Air Force primarily to provide combat search and rescue (CSAR) support to the CAF. The PR mission belongs in its current location within ACC

because of the importance to the JFACC that PR remains a theatre assigned asset supporting its primary customer, the CAF. As such, the community of PR professionals need to focus on the creation of a shared identity as permanent members of one command, which should be ACC rather than AFSOC. The reason for this recommendation hinges on the considerable value of stability as the backbone of a critical force's self-recognition, which means an identity disrupted by no more organizational shifts, and one that, by virtue of the certainty of the command assignment, eliminates once and for all what has been a costly professional distraction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the recent turbulent history of multiple organizational changes and the effect they have had on the PR community, and to support the conclusion that for the survivability of the PR mission, dedicated PR must remain with ACC.

Of course, simply accepting ACC as a home will not address all of the shortfalls that the PR community sees every day. The PR professionals want to be a part of an organization where career paths are clear, advocacy for the mission is at its highest, and one voice speaks for the entire rescue community. This study will also propose several changes that must occur within ACC itself in order for ACC to become the permanent home of PR and to address these communal desires. This can be accomplished through improving communication to leadership on the usage of rescue assets, advocating for clearer career progressions, and pushing for a singular senior voice to speak for all of AF PR. The end result of such changes would be the improvement of the careers of those in rescue and the ability to ensure the PR mission flourishes under the watchful eye of ACC leadership.

Research Methodology

This paper will take a qualitative approach using a problem/solution framework to craft a solution as to how AF PR can establish a home in ACC. It will provide background of where and how the rescue mission's capabilities have developed and will demonstrate the stability PR forces had for almost 40 years under the ARS. The reader will then gain an understanding of the detrimental effects that eliminating ARS has had on the community's identity since 1993. In addition, the paper will demonstrate the effect on the PR community of the five major organizational changes while establishing the importance to the survivability of the mission under ACC leadership. Finally, it will offer recommendations as to how the PR community can effectively establish a successful home in ACC.

Research Question

The history of Air Force Personnel Recovery is a tale of two periods. From the beginning of the Air Rescue Service until the early 1980's, dedicated PR enjoyed a stable organizational structure. From the early 1980's until now, dedicated PR has suffered multiple organizational changes and a constant struggle to survive. For the future of the dedicated PR community and more importantly the mission, the AF must establish ACC as the permanent home. The question then becomes inescapable: How can the individuals affiliated with Air Force dedicated PR switch their communal identification from AFSOC to ACC?

Literary Review

Since the elimination of ARS, the debate of where PR forces and the PR mission should reside has been ongoing. Multiple authors have addressed the tumultuous changes since 1993. In 1996, LtCol Joe Tyner authored a paper that argues for rescue to align under AFSOC by showing the lack of capability PR had throughout the 1990's due to the massive loss of resources

to AFSOC.⁵ Tyner argues that under AFSOC the mission would regain its capability and synergize assets under a command of like-minded airmen. This was a valid argument for the time, but Tyner failed to see the operational control and funding limitations that would be placed on PR under AFSOC. In 2004, Major John Cline demonstrated that this lack of capability resulted in an, "...overstressed, over tasked..."⁶ PR force, and due to the failure of PR forces to provide timely support in the beginning of OEF, the CSAF sent PR to AFSOC as a solution. Cline pushed for recognition that through increased PR representation among AFSOC leadership and better advocacy for PR issues, usage of CSAR in AFSOC could be successful.⁷ The argument for better advocacy alone is one that rises above a mere discussion of how AFSOC saw PR's struggles under ACC.

Just after the move back to ACC in 2006, Maj Clifford Latta provided a different perspective centering on the argument that when PR forces moved to AFSOC, they left behind a critical CSAR piece, the role of the airborne mission coordinator (AMC) and rescue mission commander (RMC). Latta argues that when PR assets were moved to AFSOC, it became helicopter centric and the capability of the combat search and rescue task force (CSARTF) to conduct its mission was degraded. Latta praises the move of PR back to ACC as the correct move to preserve the CSAR mission capability and advocates that under ACC one centralized rescue voice can be established benefitting the community.⁸ Though Latta's argument focused heavily on the AMC/RMC role, the benefit of aligning all components that make up the CSARTF under one command and the resulting efficiency in unifying these roles together can clearly result in a better PR package for the joint force. In 2010, Col Jason Hanover argued a similar point to Latta identifying the fact the Joint Doctrine states each service must be responsible for the recovery of their forces. This, Hanover argues, is the reason why PR in the

Air Force exists: to conduct the CSAR mission to recover combat airmen. Hanover also shows that PR is capable and does execute missions on the full PR spectrum, but the CSAR mission is the most important role it plays for the AF. Hanover advocates for better representation and a possible reorganization of PR to better support the community.⁹ Hanover's identification of the limits PR faces in ACC is still applicable today, and many of the recommendations made should still be explored to establish ACC as the permanent home for PR.

Most recently, Maj Mark Uberuaga addressed the conflicting environment that characterizes PR as a result of the constantly changing landscape and organizational framework.¹⁰ The conclusion drawn from this is that the debate of where PR should reside will be ongoing and, as a result, more focus should be brought to bear on how to best employ rescue forces.¹¹ This is an important point, but PR does reside in ACC and the argument is compelling that with current doctrine and alignment, ACC is the best home for the mission. Once accepted by the PR community, the organizational instability described by Uberuaga could be better dealt with.

The History of Dedicated Personnel Recovery

Combat Search and Rescue's Inception in WWII

"It is my duty, as a member of the Air Rescue Service, to save life and 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."¹²

The Code of an Air Rescue Man, created by the second commander of the Air Rescue Service (ARS), Brig Gen Richard Kight, epitomizes the foundational beliefs of Air Force Personnel Recovery. No matter what the risk to the individual executing the rescue mission, they will sacrifice themselves in order to save another. Another commander of ARS, Brig Gen Thomas

Dubose, was quoted as saying, “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 life. Its concept is typically American... we hold human lives to be the most precious commodity on earth.”¹³

As true as Brig Gen Dubose’s statement may be, the ironic fact is that CSAR was not an invention of the Americans, but rather a concept developed by the Germans. As early as 1935, the German Luftwaffe had boats assigned to recover aircrew that went down in the water and later implemented the use of early boat planes to expand on that recovery concept.¹⁴ In fact, many of the standard rescue equipment the Americans used and still use were originally invented by the Luftwaffe. It was not until the Americans entered World War II that the need for American CSAR became apparent. By this time, both the Germans and the British saw the immense value in recovering pilots and returning them to service. This especially rang true for the British Royal Air Force (RAF) during the Battle of Britain. The British could not train pilots as fast as they were losing them, so aircrew members became an immensely valuable commodity that they could ill afford to lose.¹⁵ Instead, recovering those pilots from the English Channel and returning them to flight service ensured the British could continue to fight the Germans in the skies over Britain. In the initial onset of U.S. involvement in the war, the Americans relied upon the British Air-Sea Rescue capability for their own forces. As casualties began to rise Gen Henry H. “Hap” Arnold, Commander of the U.S. Army Air Forces (AAF), saw the need for their own organic recovery capability.¹⁶

As the war progressed, new techniques and equipment significantly expanded the capabilities of the AAF Emergency Rescue Squadrons. The majority of the CSAR events during the war were focused on sea based rescues, but as the war in the Pacific raged on, the need for

land based rescue became apparent, especially in China. These requirements lead to the development of the helicopter as a critical rescue platform that would define CSAR operations for generations to come.¹⁷ By the end of the war, the accomplishments of the AAF's Emergency Rescue Squadrons provided more than simply the capability to return a downed pilot; they also provided a critical morale boost for all combat aircrews. The existence of AAF Emergency Rescue Squadrons reassured combat flyers that their lives were considered valuable by their commanders. Flyers knew that if they were shot down, rescue forces would do everything in their power to recover them and return them home safely.¹⁸

Post-War

Shortly after the end of combat operations, the debate began on how to organize these new critical rescue units. After much debate it was decided that the Coast Guard would be responsible for rescue along transoceanic routes and in the waters near the coast. Outside of those areas, the AAF would be responsible for global search and rescue operations.¹⁹ Thus, in 1946, the ARS was created and assumed responsibility for all existing Emergency Rescue Squadrons. Unfortunately, the ARS suffered from the same budgetary limitations as the rest of the U.S. military. The ARS had trouble expanding its capabilities and building itself as a distinct service in an era of diminishing budgets. The ARS would focus much of its efforts on peacetime rescue to ensure continual interest and investment. It would not be until the beginning of combat operations in Korea that military CSAR would receive renewed attention and funding within ARS.

Air Rescue Service

The ARS was truly the first organizational identity achieved by the members of AF dedicated PR. The efforts of the first few commanders of the ARS established much of the

heritage and communal identification still observed by modern day rescue squadrons. In the early years, the ARS truly set forth to create a community that stood counter to much of the focus of the rest of the AF. During the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the predominate focus and funding in the AF went to support strategic nuclear deterrence. In Lt Col Ioannis Koskinas' paper on the organizational culture and identity of the 23rd AF, he addresses this diverging of priorities between the ARS and the rest of the AF by stating, "...from the very early stages of institutional development, the ARS and USAF foci were incongruent: one concentrated on saving lives; the other on nuclear deterrence."²⁰ This divergent priority would leave the PR community struggling for resources throughout much of its existence, resulting in a focus on peacetime search and rescue to sustain the organization during the lean inter-war years. The AF did not see a need to invest into a combat capable rescue force when there were no combat operations going on. This would leave the ARS lacking in combat capability, a function that they would need to catch up rather quickly with the onset of the Korean War.

Korean War

In 1950, when the North Korean's attacked their southern brethren, the ARS was forced to rapidly adjust its mission focus from conducting peacetime operations to producing combat capable rescue squadrons.²¹ During the Korean War, the 3rd Rescue Squadron (later re-designated a Group) distinguished itself by saving nearly 10,000 lives, with over 1,000 as combat saves and became the first unit to be awarded the Presidential Unit Citation during the Korean War.²² The success of the ARS during the Korean War highlighted the fact that combat rescue capabilities had to be maintained during peacetime to be ready for any and all tasking's.²³ The accomplishments of the ARS went beyond simply saving lives. The ARS provided the service members of the U.S. military a solemn promise that if they went down someone would

come and get them. Major Billy Thompson described the value of the promise in this way: "...the morale of American servicemen is positively affected by the knowledge that no one will be left behind, and this results in better performance."²⁴ ARS also provided a cost-saving benefit to the military by returning more aircrew to service, which reduced the high cost of training new aircrew to replace lost personnel. Thompson goes on to also show that the ARS provided a critical operational security capability by denying our enemies the opportunity to exploit downed service members through the gathering of intelligence or the use of propaganda that could have adverse effects on the American war effort.²⁵

The critical nature of recovering American service members cannot be over stated and the ARS did not take this responsibility lightly. Even with the successes in Korea and the demonstrated need to recover American personnel, the ARS once again fell on hard times in the inter-war years between Korea and Vietnam. At the end of combat operations in Korea, dedicated PR forces fell under the knife of budget cuts and as a result the ARS shrank from fifty squadrons and 7,900 personnel to eleven squadrons and barely 1,600 personnel.²⁶ During these years before the Vietnam War, the ARS worked diligently to make PR forces viable and applicable in a peacetime environment. The ARS leadership expanded the role of AF PR to include support to the space program. Additionally, the ARS was assigned the roles of local base rescue and the provision of helicopter support to the numerous missile silos' scattered throughout the U.S.²⁷ The ARS suffered from the prevalent mindset in the Air Force at this time that the Korean War was an anomaly and not a new standard for warfare.²⁸

War in South-East Asia

In 1964, when the first ARS and soon to be ARRS (in 1966 the ARS was re-designated the Air Rescue and Recovery Service)²⁹ units arrived in South East Asia (SEA) they, like many

in the AF, found themselves wholly unprepared for the task they would face in the coming months and years.³⁰ Much like Korea, though, the ARRS quickly built up the forces and tactics needed to conduct PR operations throughout the entire area of operations (AOR). By now the helicopter had become a mainstay in the ARRS fleet and a critical component of the CSARTF. In fact, the ARRS had developed a multitude of assets to conduct rescues across a broad spectrum of operations during the Vietnam War. By the end of the war the ARRS had seen the HH-43 Husky or “Pedro”, HH-3 Jolly Green Giant, HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant, SC-54 Rescuemaster, HU-16 Albatross, and HC-130 King all in service supporting dedicated PR. Vietnam would take the standard set during Korea and bring it a new level of PR operations. Many of the tactics still in use today were tested and executed in combat during the Vietnam War. One of the major benefits that resulted from Vietnam was the creation of the HH-53 Pave Low III concept. The ARRS pushed heavily for the acquisition of this aircraft; the HH-53 Pave Low III finally provided dedicated PR with an all-weather, long distance, heavy lift recovery vehicle. The HH-53 truly became the jewel in the crown of the ARRS representing the most technologically advanced airframe in the ARRS inventory.³¹

By the end of the Vietnam War the ARRS had saved 4,120 lives of which 2,780 were considered combat saves.³² The 3rd Air Rescue and Recovery Group (the lead Group for all PR forces in Southeast Asia) accrued, “...16 campaign streamers, five Presidential Unit Citations (PUCs), two Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards (AFOUAs), and two Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Crosses with Palm.”³³ In addition to the recognition the organization received, the ARRS fielded two Medal of Honor recipients and 38 Air Force Cross recipients.³⁴ More importantly, Vietnam proved that the ARRS needed dedicated PR assets to maintain a consistent combat capability even during times of peace.

Post Vietnam

In 1976 the ARRS celebrated its 30th anniversary of providing search and rescue capability to the USAF. It had survived two major budgetary cutbacks and proved itself not only in combat but in a multitude of rescues conducted in peacetime environments. The culture that had developed within ARRS was one quite separate from the rest of the AF. As already indicated, the ARRS ran counter to the primary focus of the AF at the time which continued to be nuclear deterrence, but when called upon in combat, the men and women of dedicated PR proved their value and necessity to the AF over and over again.³⁵ As the Vietnam War came to a close, the ARRS finally found itself with the potential of a promising future. For the first time in its existence, the ARRS was given support from AF Headquarters to maintain a combat ready and capable CSAR force during peacetime.³⁶ The HC-130, HH-3, HH-53's, and Pararescue Jumpers were combined into single squadrons as an effort to focus each squadron as a rapidly deployable combat capable unit. Even with the added advocacy for combat capability and full support that PR was gaining from the AF, ARRS was still tertiary to many of the higher priorities in the AF, and thus many initiatives were left unfunded.³⁷ One other aspect that left the ARRS lacking was the fact that no commander in its entire 30 year history had a PR background.³⁸ Many of the past commanders had taken to the mission and fought hard for the men and women of the ARRS, but the fact remained that officers from the airlift and bomber community were still held to a higher prestige than their ARRS brethren. Regardless, all the positive momentum dedicated PR was enjoying would soon change in the deserts of Iran.

Operation RICE BOWL

SOF in the United States military did not receive the attention that small communities such as PR had. Even with the history of success that SOF had in Korea and Vietnam, it

remained an outlying community within the DoD, and one that only received attention when the nation was at war. In November of 1979, SOF was called upon to plan and execute a highly risky and complicated plan, Operation RICE BOWL, to recover 63 hostages held by members of the Iranian Islamic Revolution. Air Force Special Operations Forces (AFSOF) was tasked to work with Marine pilots flying Navy RH-53 helicopters to infiltrate Iran and recover the hostages.³⁹ One major point to note was even though the ARRS had more capable platforms and experience in executing complex rescues, they were not asked to participate in the recovery attempt. This is an item many in PR point to as a slight to the community, but as LtCol Joe Tyner points out in his essay *AF Rescue & AFSOF: Overcoming Past Rivalries for Combat Rescue Partnership for Tomorrow*, the capabilities that ARRS touted may not have been as beneficial to the mission as they would like to think.⁴⁰ In fact the major capability that the ARRS pushed that would have made a difference, air refueling, would not have been a feasible option for the Iran rescue attempt.⁴¹ As it stood, on April 24th 1980, the team assembled to execute the mission, but even before they could reach the objective, too many RH-53's turned back and the operation was called off. As the remaining aircraft attempted to depart the desert landing site, Desert One, an RH-53 collided with an MC-130 resulting in the deaths of 8 service members.⁴²

The failure of Operation RICE BOWL would become a critical turning point in the futures of both PR and SOF. Congress would quickly put pressure on the military to bolster the capabilities of SOF and ensure an incident like Operation RICE BOWL would not happen again. The first move in the AF to bolster SOF was to take the ARRS' newly minted HH-53 Pave Low III and transfer the airframes to AFSOF to support the planning for Project Honey Badger, the re-attempt at recovering the hostages in Iran.⁴³ Project Honey Badger would eventually be

scrapped as the hostages would be released in early 1981. The damage for the ARRS had been done. Even with the termination of Project Honey Badger, the HH-53's that had been sent to support AFSOF would not return to the ARRS.⁴⁴ Instead, this would become the first of many moves to transfer airframes from ARRS to AFSOF.

23rd Air Force

Concurrently to the post-Operation RICE BOWL SOF emphasis, there were moves within the AF to consolidate all rotary wing assets under one command. In 1982, the AF 2000 report was released and one major finding was the need for strong support to AFSOF in the form of its own agency or to place it in a command as a numbered AF. HQ ARRS would argue that the best way to comply with this report would be to move AFSOF under the ARRS. By the end of 1982 the AF had agreed to combine SOF and rescue forces under one command. The organization created would become 23rd Air Force under Military Airlift Command (MAC). One major condition that the commander of Tactical Air Command (TAC), General Creech, pressed for inclusion into the plan was that rescue and SOF would maintain separate identities.⁴⁵ The resultant organization was a numbered AF with two components, ARRS and 2nd Air Division, which housed AFSOF. This is a minor note, but would become a major factor in the evolution of the culture of the short lived 23rd AF and the continual fight between PR and SOF.

After the creation of 23rd AF, ARRS attempted to start programs to purchase a new rescue helicopter to replace what was lost with the movement of the HH-53 to AFSOF. Unfortunately, the plan would suffer from budget constraints and eventually die with no long term solution for PR. On the other side of 23rd AF, AFSOF was slowly building capability but felt that the move under MAC would have a negative long term effect on the community. AFSOF saw the leaders of MAC as airlifters not combat warriors, and feared they would be

hampered by the restrictive nature of MAC.⁴⁶ During this period, 23rd AF was also embroiled in a fight to retain its rotary assets. In a 1984 MOA between the Army and the AF, 31 initiatives were proposed to transform service cultures.⁴⁷ Initiative 17 proposed that AFSOF rotary wing support be transferred from the AF to the Army; this would not sit well with MAC and 23rd AF leadership.⁴⁸ After much political fighting, Initiative 17 would eventually be scrapped and the AF would be given the green light to field more Pave Low III helicopters, essentially allowing the AF to continue to enhance its SOF capability.⁴⁹ Unfortunately for PR, the easiest way for the AF to build SOF capability was to take it from the ARRS fleet of aircraft.

Forward Look

Major General Robert Patterson would assume command of 23rd AF in September of 1985. Within a short time of assuming command, General Patterson began a program called *Forward Look* to investigate ways to improve the capabilities and effectiveness of the units within 23rd AF. The initial proposals in *Forward Look* would have been beneficial to both the PR and SOF communities. General Patterson's idea was to transform the four wings in 23rd AF into a newly minted Special Air Warfare (SAW) Wings.⁵⁰ The idea was to end the separation of the two communities and unite them into a single wing concept that could provide the combatant commanders a variety of capabilities. What is unique to this design is it would have eliminated the stratification for priority of SOF over PR and vice versa, essentially putting both mission sets on the same level unified in a single wing. Unfortunately, when *Forward Look* was briefed to the MAC commander the SAW wing concept was scrapped and the term SAW was replaced with special operations wings.⁵¹ This small detail would derail the efforts of Gen Patterson and further bolster the priority of SOF over PR.

When *Forward Look* was finally implemented in 1986, AFSOF would increase from one wing to three and gain all of ARRS's active duty HC-130's and the remaining non-Pave Low III HH-53's, essentially leaving PR with no active duty combat capable units.⁵² Less than one year later, Congress would approve the 1987 Defense Authorization Bill that would formally establish SOCOM and would eventually transform 23rd AF into a major command, AFSOC. This transformation would force the remaining PR assets back under MAC and formally tie AFSOC to SOCOM as its official air component. In seven short years, PR would be stripped of almost all combat capability, its prized all-weather heavy lift helicopter, and two of its wings. By 1989, PR was a shadow of its former self and would be left struggling to regain capability for the next decade.

PR's First Move to ACC

After the creation of AFSOC, MAC re-established the ARS as a direct reporting service to MAC Headquarters. MAC and ARS would quickly move to re-establish a replacement rotary wing aircraft selecting the HH-60 as the future of rotary wing PR.⁵³ While ARS struggled to rebuild its diminished fleet, SOCOM would be called upon to assume CSAR duties during the first Gulf War. SOCOM's performance in Operation DESERT STORM was commendable, but created animosity within the SOF community as they viewed the CSAR and PR missions as detracting from their primary mission of Special Operations.⁵⁴ Many in AFSOC viewed the lack of the ARS presence as a failure of the PR community to do its job. This obviously neglected the fact that the ARS had no combat capability in 1990-1991 and was absent based on lack of assets and not a lack of wanting to be the PR force provider.⁵⁵ Regardless, the process of having SOCOM cover CSAR tasking's would become a theme throughout the 1990's.

In 1992, Gen Merrill McPeak reorganized the entire Air Force into a new construct creating ACC as the primary combat force provider to combatant commanders. Gen McPeak already had an affinity to the CSAR mission that he gained during his time as the Pacific Air Force's Commander, and as such moved all dedicated PR assets into ACC in 1993.⁵⁶ This move would mark the end of the ARS and eliminate the last vestige of a singular senior voice that would speak for all dedicated PR units.

Throughout the 1990's, PR would struggle to re-establish itself as the primary combat rescue capability for the AF. ACC began efforts to re-establish a fixed wing PR squadron in the AF, but this process would take time. In addition, the slow procurement process of fielding the HH-60 would result in the PR requirements around the world continuing to fall on SOCOM's shoulders. Dedicated PR would eventually move into the Middle East supporting Operation NORTHERN WATCH and SOUTHERN WATCH, but this would come long after the Gulf War had ended. The major problem facing the PR community was the ability to rapidly deploy. ACC did not provide PR the capability to meet any major tasking within a moment's notice. Even by 2001, it would take PR a substantial amount of time to prep the forces and deploy the capability to an AOR.⁵⁷ With many of the modern engagements the U.S. found itself in, by the time PR was able to mobilize, the major engagement would be over and any potential CSAR operation with it.

Re-uniting with AFSOC

In 2001, four groups of terrorists attacked the United States in New York, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania. Within a month, the U.S. military began to posture to conduct operations in Afghanistan targeting the terrorist organization responsible. Once again the need for CSAR would be identified, but the AF PR capability would not be able to meet the

immediate demand. SOCOM would assume responsibility for the initial CSAR and PR capability within Afghanistan, and it would take over a month for AF dedicated PR to arrive and relieve SOCOM forces.⁵⁸ It would seem this lack of a rapid response was the last straw for the CSAF, Gen. John Jumper. In October of 2001, the CSAF ordered a review of the PR mission area.⁵⁹ There was a growing concern among SOF leadership over SOCOM being tasked to conduct CSAR and PR operations because dedicated PR was unable to rapidly deploy and the added requirement to SOF would reduce the capability of SOCOM forces to conduct their primary mission of special operations. This discussion led Gen Jumper to decide to move all of the dedicated PR units in the AF under AFSOC. On 1 October 2003, the transfer would become official, but much like 23rd AF in the 1980's, SOF and PR would still maintain separate identities. In fact this separation would go only so far, as the only true transfer was of administrative control (ADCON) to AFSOC. Operational control (OPCON) over PR assets would remain with the geographic combatant commanders. This also drove the necessity to maintain the separation of funding sources. MFP-11 funding streams (SOCOM dollars) would not be available for PR units. Instead the AF would provide MFP-4 funding (AF conventional funds) to AFSOC for the training and equipping of all PR assets.⁶⁰

At the time, many in the PR community praised this move. They saw it as an opportunity for the community to finally be a part of a command with leaders who flew similar airframes and executed similar missions. In fact, Gen Jumper saw it much the same way. One of the official press releases from AFSOC outlining the move, said, "Our forces use similar weapon systems, training and operating concepts to conduct personnel recovery missions. Placing these important missions under one organization will help us better care for our missions and the proud airmen that make them happen."⁶¹ This spoke to many of the shortcomings the PR community believed

they had in the fighter centric ACC. This move had the support of all major command leaders and SOCOM leadership. Not everyone in the AF agreed with this, though. Gen T. Michael Moseley, a staunch AF PR supporter and the commander of 9th AF and U.S. Central Command Air Forces until August of 2003 then Vice Chief of Staff of the AF, disagreed with the CSAF's decision. Gen Moseley felt strongly that dedicated PR must be aligned with the CAF, but Gen Moseley would be unable to do anything about this until his turn as CSAF.⁶²

For three years, PR resided with AFSOC deploying to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Africa, supporting the PR commitments of the various geographic combatant commanders. On the surface, the new environment for PR was favorable for the people and airframes. Much like their time in the ARS under MAC, AFSOC leadership not only knew more about the mission and airframes now under their command, but many of the senior leaders had come from the rescue community in the 1980's when AFSOC formally stood up. Often that is where the commonality would end. Many in AFSOC viewed the rescue mission as a detractor to their primary mission of SOF. This is a righteous viewpoint as well with the way that the AF had structured PR's move into AFSOC. PR's existence in AFSOC did not change the primary mission of AFSOC or SOCOM, it only added a community that AFSOC was now responsible for but could not utilize in support of their COCOM. This frustration was best explained by retired Col Damon Reynolds, "It was like paying for your girlfriend to get her hair and nails done, buying her a new dress, and then letting someone else take her out on a date. It didn't make much sense."⁶³

AFSOC and SOCOM had already grown frustrated with the PR mission throughout the 1990's and early 2000's when tasked to cover for the missing AF PR assets, but now with SOCOM's air component owning an entire community it could not use, tensions grew.

If the AF had adopted a construct similar to what was pitched in *Forward Look* and not maintained separate SOF and PR communities, this move may have lasted. The push to move PR into AFSOC for the people and airframes but maintain the mission with the CAF is likened to wanting to “have your cake and eat it too”. The AF wanted the benefits of both but disregarded the grey area into which they had shoved PR. Either the PR mission is aligned with the CAF, and thus resides in ACC, or it belongs to AFSOC and supports the same COCOM (SOCOM) that the rest of the command supports. In a short, the assumed benefits of PR’s time in AFSOC would not be fully achieved, and with Gen T. Michael Moseley taking command of the AF, the organization would once again change.

Gen Moseley moves PR back to ACC

In 2005, Gen T. Michael Moseley was promoted to CSAF, and one of his initial actions was to rectify his perceived mistake of the AF moving PR under AFSOC. Gen Moseley firmly believed that the CSAR mission is inherently a theater mission responsible to the JFACC and thus must be aligned with the CAF.⁶⁴ The thought behind this is the JFACC is ultimately the individual responsible to commit combat forces into harm’s way, and thus should have forces dedicated to them to recover the CAF when needed. This brings back the argument of why dedicated PR forces exist in the first place. Although AF doctrine shows the broad spectrum of PR missions that dedicated PR forces can be tasked to do, reality is dedicated PR exists to perform the CSAR mission. Joint Doctrine states that the geographic combatant commands are responsible for personnel recovery of all assigned assets in their AOR.⁶⁵ The AF is unique in that it operates completely in the air, and as such, it does not have units that can be “re-tasked” to recover an Isolated Personnel (IP). An F-16 cannot pick up its downed wingman. As such, for the AF to meet this requirement to perform CSAR for its own forces, it drives the requirement

for a dedicated community to conduct the mission. That is why dedicated PR exists in the AF- to conduct the CSAR mission. The spectrum of PR capabilities are simply the secondary missions PR assets can provide to the combatant commanders.

This is the viewpoint that Gen Moseley adopted in respect to AF PR. Gen Moseley saw that PR and SOF were similar, but ultimately two different missions, and as such Gen Moseley didn't think it made sense to have a CAF mission belonging to the JFACC assigned to SOCOM and AFSOC.⁶⁶ Once assuming the role as CSAF, Gen Moseley brought in the AFSOC commander and the ACC commander and told them to figure out how to transfer PR back to ACC. He further discussed this with the SOCOM commander, Gen Bryan D. Brown, an Army helicopter pilot and staunch believer that SOF rotary wing should only be in the Army.⁶⁷ Gen Brown's only concern with the move was to ensure the SOCOM capability would not be affected. Once assured of this, Gen Brown supported Gen Moseley's proposal.⁶⁸ In February of 2006, Gen Moseley made his announcement to the geographic combatant commanders in a letter stating that the AF CSAR assets need to be more accessible to the commanders. Gen Moseley proposed that the best way to do this was to move the community back under ACC. He further explained that ACC is the major force provider, and by moving PR under ACC, it would be imbedded into every Air Expeditionary Force requested. He ended the letter with his personal sentiment on PR as follows: "...I truly see CSAR as a moral, ethical, and warfighting imperative. Our military must always have the best combat capability to rescue its people... our warriors... wherever and whenever required, independent of their Service."⁶⁹ In a separate letter to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen Moseley registered his concerns about the funding and support of the CSAR community. Gen Moseley identified the troubling nature of the continual delay of the helicopter replacement program and the effect this delay would have on U.S. capabilities to support future

wars. He further highlighted the fact that CSAR is inherently an AF mission presented to support the respective COCOMS.⁷⁰

On 3 April 2006, the transfer became official, which made PR's official time in AFSOC two years and six months. The USAF release on the move re-emphasized Gen Moseley's sentiments by stating it, "...will ensure the Air Force core competency of Combat Search and Rescue is directly linked to the Combat Air Forces (CAF) and the personnel they support, thus consolidating the management of limited Air Force resources."⁷¹ Reality was, based on the construct the AF had created with the initial move, the AF's action was simply moving ADCON from AFSOC back to ACC. Not much in the construct of PR was affected. One of the other points the press release mentions harkens to an argument made by Lt Col Clifford Latta in his paper for Naval War College in 2006. In Latta's paper, he identifies one of the major issues with dedicated PR being moved into AFSOC is that it left behind pieces of the CSARTF, essentially splitting up those responsible for the mission. While the 2003 action moved the dedicated HC-130, HH-60, and Guardian Angel units, it left behind the airframes that were responsible for on scene commander (OSC), rescue mission commander (RMC), airborne mission commander (AMC), and rescue escort (RESCORT).⁷² When these responsibilities were split between AFSOC and ACC, it limited the opportunities for the AF to train as a complete CSARTF. Latta argues that for the CSAR mission to truly be successful, and in order to provide the COCOMS with the optimal product, the entire mission set needed to belong to one command. By moving the dedicated PR assets back to ACC, all the assets that may be tasked to support a CSARTF, including those not a part of the dedicated PR community, are now housed in ACC.⁷³

Gen Moseley's dedication to the importance of the CSAR mission and the timing of his rise to command within the AF enabled him to make this pivotal move in 2006, but this did not

solve all of PR's troubles. In the coming years, PR would see the program to replace the aging HH-60 (the CSAR-X program) canceled, a reduction in the number of HC-130J's purchased, and continued budget competition for the acquisition of new weapons systems in ACC, such as the F-22 and F-35. Maintaining the status quo in ACC will not provide enough resources for PR to sustain its current capabilities within a rapidly changing world.



ANALYSIS, RECCOMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Analysis

ACC and the AF show their Dedication to PR

Many in the PR community were less than enthusiastic to return to a command that had a fighter-centric leadership structure. Under AFSOC, it seemed the opportunities for career progression were more favorable because of the commonalities between the communities, but in ACC very few PR leaders rose to senior levels in the command. For the mission, though, many senior leaders saw the move as a positive action for the future of PR. Lt Gen Donny Wurster, the vice commander of AFSOC during the 2006 move and the future commander of AFSOC, said in a talk to the Jolly Green Association that the AF had made the right decision. Gen Wurster keyed into the fact that by placing PR back in a major war-fighting command like ACC, it made a clear statement that PR is a, "...mainstream Air Force business and not a collateral duty."⁷⁴ He went on to show the subtle differences in SOF and PR mentality truly present two distinct communities. "The rescue attitude that there is nothing we won't do to try and get one of own back... is comparably courageous, but significantly different... than special operations culture of building a plan that will not fail."⁷⁵ This does not detract from AFSOC and SOCOM's ability to conduct PR and CSAR missions, but it highlights the differing approaches each community takes. One of the more poignant statements he made that day was that combat rescue is not a joint mission but an air one. It is an operation commanded by an air officer conducted deep into the combat zone. His thought is that with this unique nature of combat rescue, it is best served by being attached to the CAF it is tasked to support in combat.⁷⁶

PR as a Core Function

The Air Force itself also showed a renewed interest in PR when the next CSAF, Gen Norton Schwartz, and Secretary of the Air Force (SAF), Michael Donley, would raise the importance of PR by including it as one of the AF core functions in 2009. This move put PR on paper as an equal with the likes of SOF, global precision attack, air superiority, and agile combat support. This move was a huge win for the PR community. Doctrinally, it made PR an important air function that showed the value it brought to the AF. The other important distinction the elevation to a service core function brought was its establishment as Personnel Recovery and not just CSAR. The most critical piece dedicated PR assets bring to the AF is CSAR, but by making this distinction and enabling the PR doctrine to reflect a broad spectrum of operations, it brought the dedicated PR community out from just a CSAR role and into a realm of providing much more capability to the COCOMs. Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) ANNEX 3-50 shows this through the broader definition of PR: "...PR is an effort to recover people engaged in DoD activities that have become lost or separated in an environment in which they must take extraordinary action to survive and return to friendly control."⁷⁷ It goes on to attempt to change the predominate view that AF PR strictly picks up downed aircrew by demonstrating that through the recent experiences of Afghanistan and Iraq, AF PR forces are responsible for the rescue of many types of IPs. This distinction was a huge win for the PR community who throughout the 2000's (while operating in Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa) had been attempting to change the understanding of what the community does from CSAR to a broader spectrum of capabilities.

ACC also expanded its support of the mission by elevating it within ACC by establishing a PR directorate (ACC/A3J). This would establish a singular officer responsible for all PR

activities and the progression of the community. In addition to the establishment of the ACC/A3J directorate, ACC also saw the need for a dedicated PR exercise to address many of the shortfalls PR experiences at RED FLAG, the premiere CAF exercise held at Nellis AFB. The dedicated CSAR missions at RED FLAG are limited in nature and scope, and rarely provide an opportunity for the entire CSARTF package to train together for today's war. In the late 2000's, ACC pushed for a more PR centric exercise, and out of this grew ANGEL THUNDER. It is now an annual PR exercise held at Davis Monthan AFB that brings together the dedicated PR forces with CAF and mobility forces. This exercise enables the AF to truly sharpen its PR and CSAR capabilities, and enhance many of the shortcomings that were identified before, and during PR's time with AFSOC. Prior to ANGEL THUNDER, this kind of training environment was rare and truly did not enable the entire rescue package to train together. Once dedicated PR was under AFSOC, the ability and opportunities to train together became even more remote. ANGEL THUNDER was one of the many responses the AF and ACC implemented to promote PR within the AF.

PR Still Not at Home

Even with all of these "wins" for the PR community, there were still many troubling obstacles PR faced. First and foremost was the replacement for the aging HH-60G. Even before PR moved under AFSOC in 2003, there was already movement to replace the HH-60G with a more viable rescue platform. This program was titled the CSAR-X program, and in 2006 Boeing was awarded the contract to produce the HH-47 as the replacement for the HH-60G.⁷⁸ The new contract was short lived as Sikorsky and Lockheed-Martin successfully protested the award, and by 2009, the CSAR-X program was canceled all together.⁷⁹ This left a major problem for PR forces. The HH-60G needed to be replaced and the community was faced with having to start

over at square one. It would not be until 2012 before the AF would start a new program, the Combat Rescue Helicopter (CRH), to find a replacement for the HH-60G. In 2014, the AF would award the contract to Sikorsky for a new version of the HH-60G, the HH-60W.⁸⁰ This may seem like a win, but the award of the contract had come years after the point in which the HH-60G should have been replaced, and it will still leave many of the rescue units in the AF flying the aging HH-60G for another 10 years. In addition, simply replacing the HH-60G with a newer version does not address the need for heavier lift capability and longer flight durations into more contested environments.

The other aspect of the CRH and the HC-130 replacement, the HC-130J, is the number of airframes the AF is purchasing. According to Col Jason Hanover, in a paper for the Air Force Fellows, the original approved number of rescue tankers (HC-130) by the Combat Rescue Analysis of Alternatives (AoA) and validated by the Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC) was 78 to provide a moderate risk to support global PR operations. Due to the budgetary limitations the number was revalidated to 37.⁸¹ Many in rescue saw this as a direct result of competing for dollars with the F-22 and F-35 programs. A similar reduction has occurred with the HH-60 community as well. The JROC validated a requirement for 141 CSAR-X airframes to meet a moderate risk, but the new CRH program will only pursue the acquisition of 112 new airframes.⁸² Col Hanover correlates this reduction in airframes as a failure on the part of the AF and ACC to dedicate focus on PR and properly advocate and prioritize the mission.⁸³

Single Use Airframes

One of the arguments that have been used many times to attack the dedicated PR community in the AF is that the airframes assigned to PR are single-purpose, and thus are a waste of government funds in a tight budget environment.⁸⁴ Col Hanover argued that these

attacks come from a complete misunderstanding of not only the community but the mission of PR.⁸⁵ After the CSAR-X program was canceled in 2009, the Secretary of Defense, Robert M. Gates, posed the question: “whether this important mission can only be accomplished by yet another single-service solution with single-purpose aircraft.”⁸⁶ In response, an assessment team was assembled to address this issue. The findings from this team brought to light a few major points published in their *Assessment of Combat Search and Rescue Requirements in a Joint Context*. It stated that PR is not a single service mission, but is already conducted jointly and should continue to pursue joint interoperability. Even with the emphasis on joint integration, the team also identifies that each service needs to continue to organize, train, and equip for the recovery of their personnel. The assessment also identified that effective CSAR is truly conducted by a dedicated force, the exact community discussed in this paper. Finally, and one of the more important points, the assessment says from their research that, “CSAR aircraft should not be considered (and, in practice, is not) a ‘single-purpose aircraft.’”⁸⁷ The Assessment goes on to confirm that the number of aircraft in the original AoA, 171 CSAR Helicopters, is recommended.⁸⁸

This assessment was given the opportunity to completely shut down the dedicated PR community, but instead it validated not only the requirement for the AF to have a dedicated PR, but for it to truly meet the tasking’s and expectations set forth by leadership the original aircraft numbers were legitimate. Although CSAR remains the bread and butter for the dedicated PR community, the broader PR umbrella truly enables the crews to continually conduct joint operations. This has been a standard since the early years of the ARS. AF PR crews have never backed down from saving the life of any service member because they were not AF. This was especially true during Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. The HH-60

crews deployed to Afghanistan during the 2000's spent more of their missions supporting not only Marine and Army personnel, but also our coalition partners conducting non-CSAR role of CASEVAC/MEDEVAC.⁸⁹ In fact, very little of the PR support provided was dedicated to the recovery of AF personnel. This is a testament to the Joint nature of AF PR and the crews.

Who Should Pay for it

The requirements can be validated and the need continually shown, but the obstacle the PR community continually struggles with is the lack of a want for anyone to pay for the assets needed. This is a battle that has been ongoing since the end of WWII. During the first 20 years of existence of the ARS, PR found itself as an easily cut community when the budget got tight. It was not until the need arose in Korea and again in Vietnam that the AF actually dedicated appropriate funding into the PR community to prepare a combat capability. Even after the end of Vietnam when the AF mandated that a combat capable PR force would be maintained, the PR community would struggle for funding and, in fact, find most of its assets torn away in the 1980's with the renewed interest in AFSOF. In an interview, Lt Gen Donny Wurster stated that one of the primary questions that needed to be asked was "who pays for it?" In effect, the question was whether it is a joint mission or an AF mission?⁹⁰ Gen Wurster argued that if it is a Joint mission, it should belong to SOCOM and funded as such. But if it is an air mission, it belongs to the AF. Gen Wurster, much like Gen Moseley had argued in 2006, believed that CSAR specifically is an air operation flown by airmen supported by airpower and as such should belong to the JFACC. Circling back to a previous point, CSAR is the primary mission of dedicated PR assets in the AF and as such is the reason the AF has the capability. In order to maintain that capability and mission, it must remain with the AF and tied to the CAF. If the AF were to hand the mission and community over to SOCOM, it would no longer be a dedicated

force supporting the CSAR mission, but merely SOCOM assets redirected to support a PR or CSAR event, much as SOCOM has handled all the CSAR and PR missions they have conducted since the early 1990's.

What does this mean for ACC? If ACC and the AF want to maintain this dedicated PR community, then they must plan for and fund the community appropriately to meet all COCOM requirements and demands. Anything short of this would be failing to meet a requirement the AF has set forth. Unfortunately, with the reduction of airframes and slowed procurement of replacement aircraft, the dedication to the mission has been lacking on the part of ACC and the AF.

PR Community Enticed Once Again by AFSOC

One of the major obstacles the PR community as a whole faces in fully establishing itself as a member of the CAF and ACC is the continual attempts to reunite PR with AFSOC. In 2013, AFSOC made a bold move to regain control of the PR community by advocating for PR to reunite under AFSOC, and the PR fleet would be supplemented with CV-22's to conduct the mission.⁹¹ At the time the AFSOC Mobilization Assistant to the Commander and Vice Commander from January thru June of 2013, Maj. Gen. George Williams, argued that by reducing the HH-60 buy and utilizing the CV-22 as a PR/CSAR platform, it would save the AF billions.⁹² ACC rejected the claim, asserting that if the mission were in AFSOC, there would be doubt as to the priority the CSAR mission would be given as opposed to SOF requirements.⁹³ Ultimately the proposal was rejected when Congressional members stepped in to block the potential move, but the continual unrest in the PR community remained. This attempt came only seven years after PR rejoined ACC.

Since 2006, the pre-dominate feeling in the community has always been split between those that believe the mission belongs in ACC, and those that feel it would be better suited in AFSOC. Attempted moves, such as the one in 2013, do nothing to solidify the community within ACC; in fact, attempted moves such as this continue to fuel the hopes of those who want to reunite with AFSOC.

Even after the 2013 attempt to regain rescue, yearly rumors persist within the PR community of an eventual return to AFSOC. These rumors have an underlying detrimental effect on the ability of the PR community to commit itself to ACC.

Recommendations

PR Community Accepts That the Mission Belongs to ACC

In order for the PR mission to flourish under the guise and lead of ACC, the members of the PR community must first and foremost accept that the mission truly belongs with ACC. The desires of many to reunite PR with AFSOC generally come from the perspective of the benefits to the Major Weapons Systems (MWS) within PR and to the people. There are most certainly benefits to a command like AFSOC taking lead over a group of similar MWS and like-minded airmen, but does that benefit the mission? The PR community must take a step back and separate themselves from the personal viewpoint and evaluate what best serves the mission of PR.

Joint PR Doctrine states, “Each Service Chief and Commander, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), is responsible for organizing, training, and equipping their force for PR, and providing forces and processes, as required, to accomplish the five PR execution tasks, consistent with DOD guidance and operations plans (OPLANs).” As discussed before, PR is the overall mission set as assigned by AF Doctrine. CSAR is a subset of the

overall PR umbrella and per doctrine is, "...how the Air Force accomplishes rescue/recovery tasks."⁹⁴ Our sister services meet the requirements as defined in Joint Doctrine by training assets to conduct PR as an additional responsibility. The Army conducts PR operations as a responsibility of every soldier.⁹⁵ This enables the Army to redirect any Army team in the field to conduct a PR operation to recover one of their own. The Marine Corps adopts a similar viewpoint that the entire Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) is capable of conducting recovery operations, but it does go further in that groups within the MAGTF are trained to conduct the tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel (TRAP) mission.⁹⁶ The Navy also trains their units to conduct PR as an additional mission. There are units that specialize in CSAR, but again this is not their dedicated mission.⁹⁷ What these services share is that they have the assets available that can be re-tasked to perform PR or CSAR as necessary, negating the need to stand up a dedicated force.

The AF, on the other hand, lacks the ability to re-task units. When combat forces are projected into enemy territory it is usually fighter or support aircraft. None of these assets have the capability to change their mission and execute a recovery of an isolated airman. The only way for the AF to accomplish a PR or CSAR tasking is by having its own dedicated assets that can respond to a PR mission and recover an isolated airman. This is fundamentally why dedicated PR exists in the AF. AFSOC does have similar airframes that could execute a CSAR or PR mission, but those assets belong to SOCOM in theatre, and thus are responsible for the PR and CSAR requirements of SOCOM and not the geographic COCOM. When one looks at how the AF projects its forces in combat it is the CAF that predominately is sent forward into the battlespace to conduct strike missions, and it is these assets that are most vulnerable to requiring CSAR assets to recover them if they are shot down. Putting these pieces together, the AF has

dedicated PR because it lacks the assets available to be re-tasked to support a CSAR mission and those assets that they will predominantly be supporting are from the CAF. This is why the push since 2006 has been to marry up PR with the CAF, because PR forces are supporting the CAF in combat operations. This does not negate the capability of PR forces from supporting joint partners, but without the need from the CAF for support, the existence of dedicated PR would be under question.

This reality that needs to be clear to all in the PR community is that they exist to support the CAF as set out per Joint Doctrine. Ultimately, then, what is best for the mission of PR and CSAR is that it remain tied to its primary customer, the CAF, and, as such, remain within the confines of ACC. Clearly understanding this dichotomy of all those airmen within the PR community would hopefully lead to more of a dedication to finding solutions to improve its state within ACC. The PR community should start to look within, and after accepting their place in the AF, start working through ways to go “full in” on ACC and solidify a future with the major combat command.

A Rescue General

Obviously, the PR community can not completely change their stature within ACC on their own. Support from ACC leadership is needed to enable and foster growth of the community. One of the ways that ACC can show their dedication to the mission is by establishing a clear, singular voice to speak for all of PR- AD, Air National Guard, and Reserve forces. During the 40 years that PR resided in the ARS, it enjoyed the fact that there was one commander of all PR forces that could not only speak in advocacy for all of PR, but would also ensure the entire community was moving in the same direction. Even though this senior officer was never a rescue officer himself, each one of the commanders embraced the PR community

and fought heavily for the survival and sustainment of the mission. Since ARS was disbanded, the PR community has lacked this. As a result, the ability for PR to advocate for itself has become much more difficult, and in recent years the community has seen the Air Reserve Component (ARC) and AD diverge on where they thought the community should be going. This diverging of priorities becomes detrimental to the community because if PR cannot agree on a direction from within, the commanders within ACC who have no experience with PR will have less of a willingness to advocate for any of the proposed directions.

In a recent discussion with a member of the ACC/A3J staff, this concern was voiced from their point of view that the ARC and AD are pursuing different capabilities and assets in efforts to improve how PR executes this mission. This is in large part due to funds the ARC has access to (National Guard and Reserve Equipment Appropriation) that AD does not. Due to the fact that these groups are going in separate directions, the PR community is differing in capability between the Active and the ARC. If we were to have a single voice to set the direction for PR, then these Reserve funds could be better used to ensure PR as a whole is pursuing solutions to improve the capability of PR that is in harmony across the ARC and Active force.

The remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) community within ACC is also facing similar obstacles. Recently members of the RPA community had a chance to sit down with current ACC commander, Gen Carlisle, in a town hall format to discuss ways to “fix” their own community. Several shortfalls were identified, but one specific need was establishing a general officer in charge of the career field. The participants identified that by establishing this senior officer it will enable the community as a whole to implement long-term improvements.⁹⁸ The needs the RPA community have identified are the same that PR has felt since ARS was disbanded.

Col Jason Hanover made a similar suggestion in 2010 in his paper for the Air Force Fellows. At the time, Col Hanover suggested that a method to improve advocacy and establish strong leadership for PR was to establish a NAF within ACC that would be solely dedicated to the PR mission.⁹⁹ It would have established that singular voice that not only spoke for all of PR regardless of AD or ARC, but it would improve the advocacy for the mission within ACC elevating its leadership to a new level. Fiscally the NAF idea is no longer a viable option, but the need for that singular leader still remains.

In order to improve the PR community and establish a common path for both the ARC and AD, ACC must establish a General Officer to act as the lead officer in charge of everything PR. The current construct with ACC/A3J leaves this responsibility to an Colonel who truly does not carry the weight needed to advocate among the general officers from the fighter community within ACC. If a general officer were established and ensured that this officer would always be a member from the PR community, it would go a long way to educating and advocating PR within the fighter heavy command. It would improve the chances of acquiring the funding needed to support global PR if a general officer were at the table as compared to the chief of a directorate. It would also give the community a chance to not only survive into the future, but bring the PR community together to ensure it moves in the same direction.

An additional benefit to having a general officer in charge of PR, is that individual can actively educate COCOMs on what the PR community can bring to the fight. This increased advocacy can go a long way to enabling COCOMs on using PR forces for more than just alert cycles, and get the PR forces more engaged in the fight within a theatre. Many of the limitations PR has felt while deployed has come from a lack of understanding the forces' capabilities and how alerts can be mitigated while supporting our joint and coalition partners.

Defined Career Paths

One of the other areas of concern the RPA community voiced with the ACC commander was the lack of a strategic plan for the career field. The RPA community feels that their career paths are not clearly defined.¹⁰⁰ In many respects, these concerns are shared by the PR community as well. For example, a pilot in the HC-130 has three bases to choose from in his career, and if he stays within PR, he will simply bounce around those three bases with, perhaps, a stop at ACC HQ. But it is very unclear how any PR officer can make general officer. This often results in PR officers leaving for other airframes where they may have a better chance at long term command opportunities. In order to retain the best in the PR community, ACC needs to develop a strategic plan for the officers and enlisted that at least provides the opportunity for the select few that rise to the top to make general officer within ACC. In addition, the community itself needs to improve its process of mentoring and guiding young officers and enlisted in the steps they need to take to become the future leaders of the AF.

Funding

Finally, the AF and ACC needs to provide more robust and solidified funding to the PR community. If the AF is going to rely on this community to meet its Joint Doctrine requirement of PR support for its forces, the appropriate funds need to be provided to ensure the capabilities are maintained to meet any and all tasking's. If increasing the numbers of airframes to be purchased is not fiscally feasible, then the parameters of what it means to provide global PR support needs to be revisited to ensure that a moderate risk is met. That may result in reducing the overall requirement to two or three theatres, but that must be defined in order for the PR community and ACC to ensure they are meeting objectives set out by the CSAF and the SAF.

The PR community as a whole should not have to rely upon end of year or fall out funding to procure new equipment to meet the demands of modern warfare. For instance, Situational Awareness Data Links have been a mainstay for much of the CAF throughout the 2000's and continually progress in capability to support the warfighter without the use of verbal communications. This technology has only just been implemented in the PR community within the last 5 years. Items such as this need to receive a higher priority within ACC and the AF to ensure its premiere recovery force has all capabilities to recovery any and all airmen that may need recovering.

Conclusion

The brave men and women of the AF dedicated PR community have served their fellow Airmen and joint partners for over 70 years. For half of that duration, they enjoyed their own service that fought for the community and did everything possible to ensure the capabilities remained ready when called upon, but since the early 1980's, that community has suffered heavily from continuous organizational changes. In fact, even as this paper is being written, rumors are flying, once again, about an attempt to reunite the PR community with AFSOC. The intent of this paper was not to diminish the benefits AFSOC may present to the PR community or that AFSOC and SOCOM cannot execute the mission. The intent is rather a focus solely on the PR mission itself, with a recognition that the most optimal place for it is within ACC. If a move were to be made to reunite PR within AFSOC, the only way that would truly work is by ending the heritage of dedicated PR and making the PR and CSAR mission an additional tasking for AFSOC and SOCOM. This would require the rescue units of the AF to convert to be special operations units tasked to support SOCOM. This would put an end to the 70+ year heritage of PR and the AF would lose the sole focus on the mission that doctrine currently requires.

Once the PR community accepts that the “mission” belongs with ACC, the communal focus can begin to shift from the hopes and desires to reunite with AFSOC to how the community can improve PR within ACC. ACC itself will have to play a large part in achieving this solid future through focused efforts to improve the careers of those within PR, and promoting more robust funding to ensure its PR forces can meet any and all tasking’s. In addition, by assigning a general officer in charge of the PR mission, the community can focus its efforts in a more harmonious fashion to utilize both reserve and active funding to improve the capabilities of PR. That general officer can also go a long way to educating and advocating for the proper use of PR forces throughout the world by educating the COCOMs on what PR can bring to the table.

I have been extremely proud of the 10 years I have served as a PR Airman. This community brings with it a long history of dedication to a mission that rises above a simple tasking to its commitment to save lives. The community of PR professionals should be proud of not only what has been accomplished in the last 20 years, but for what the community, as a whole, has accomplished in the last 70. For a solid future of dedicated PR, the community and ACC must come together to bring about the solutions necessary to ensure the mission can be accomplished with the right equipment, and to assure that airmen want to stay in PR because they have a defined career path. PR can no longer afford to endure any more organizational changes; its future is with ACC, and now is the time to pave that path for another 70 years of outstanding PR service. The airmen of the AF and our joint partners deserve to know that there will always be a force ready to live up to the motto, “These things we do THAT OTHERS MAY LIVE.”¹⁰¹

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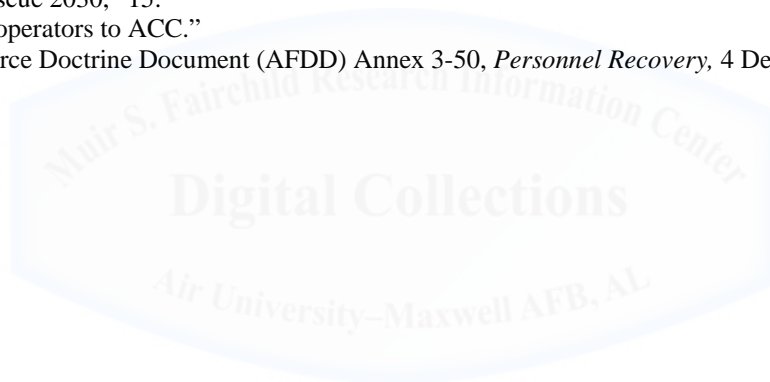
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