The Search for a Permanent Home:

Explaining the Organizational Instability of Air Force Rescue

BY

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APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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Lt Col Shawn T. Cochran, PhD 2 June 2015

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DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

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ABSTRACT

Air Force Rescue has experienced endemic organizational instability over the last three decades, reflected by multiple relocations within various major commands. The ongoing flux has negatively impacted Rescue's development and capabilities. Many of the issues that prompted relocation in the past are still unresolved, suggesting continued organizational instability in the future.

A persistent source of instability is Rescue's relationship with Air Force Special Operations, and the relocation debate has typically centered on maintaining Rescue as a stand-alone force versus subsuming the mission as part of Special Operations Forces (SOF). There is a built-in tension between the Rescue and Special Operations mission areas that creates a persistent source of instability and keeps the question from ever being settled fully. Overlaps in capabilities, similarities in mission equipment and personnel, and a shared heritage create a natural attraction and provide impetus to merge when separated. In particular, advocates of merging point to the potential cost savings. When the mission areas are merged, however, subtle yet significant differences and distinct purposes tend to become more obvious and drive the two mission areas apart. Typically, one mission area benefits from the merge while the other suffers. As result, organizational change always remains possible and a source of ongoing policy debate. Within the context of this persistent tension, each distinct decision affecting organizational relocation is best understood as the unique temporal confluence of four factors: 1) problem recognition and definition, 2) available solutions, 3) interested participants, and 4) windows of opportunity.

The Rescue-SOF debate is ongoing. Assessing the underlying dynamics of organizational instability and the drivers behind past relocation decisions is important not only for understanding this debate, but also for shaping future decisions and ensuring the optimal development and employment of Air Force Rescue over the coming years.

CONTENTS

PAGE

DISCLAIMER iii

ABOUT THE AUTHOR iv

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS v

ABSTRACT vi

INTRODUCTION 1

SHARED HERITAGE 12

RESCUE AND SOF MERGE AND SPLIT: 1983 & 1989 17

ANOTHER MERGE AND SPLIT: 2003 & 2006 27

A THWARTED MERGER: 2013 42

CONCLUSION 46

BIBLIOGRAPHY 51

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) leadership proposed that the Air Force relocate its rescue force from Air Combat Command (ACC) to AFSOC. As rationale, AFSOC argued it could save $2B over 10 years by cancelling the HH-60 helicopter modernization program and filling the gap with more CV-22 tilt rotor aircraft.[1] This bid failed, but if successful, it would have resulted in the sixth major relocation of the small but essential rescue force in 30 years.

This thesis seeks to explain the endemic organizational instability of the Air Force rescue mission, analyzing both general trends and specific relocations. In particular, the thesis addresses the long-standing, and still unresolved, tension between maintaining Rescue as a stand-alone force and subsuming the mission as part of Air Force Special Operations. Understanding this ongoing organizational saga is important in its own right given that the instability has had negative implications for the development and capabilities of the rescue force. As a more general case study, the story of Air Force Rescue also suggests insights into organizational decision-making within the Air Force writ large.

The Rescue-Special Operations divide is a source of widespread scholarly and policy debate. Most existing studies argue either that the rescue mission belongs in Special Operations or that the mission area should reside with a stand-alone force independent of Special Operations. Such analyses promote a certain policy preference in terms of what is "best" for the Air Force. In contrast, this thesis avoids any type of normative or opinion-laden argument and instead simply seeks to

[1] Ret Col Clair Gilk, Interview by the author, March 26, 2015.

explain the empirical phenomenon of organizational instability. Further, other studies emphasize the role of organizational culture, particularly in terms of explaining why mergers have been unsuccessful. This thesis purposefully looks to other causes of organizational change. While organizational culture is certainly important and has likely played a role, it is a relative constant and thus cannot explain the endemic instability.

In addressing the multiple organizational relocations involving Air Force Rescue, this thesis offers two broad arguments. First, there is a built-in tension between the rescue and special operations mission areas that creates a persistent source of instability and keeps the question from ever fully being settled. Overlaps in capabilities, similarities in mission equipment and personnel, and a shared heritage create a natural attraction and provide impetus to merge when separated. When the mission areas are merged, however, subtle yet significant differences and distinct purposes tend to become more obvious and drive the two mission areas apart. This dynamic of attraction-repulsion is a permissive condition under which organizational change remains possible and a source of ongoing policy debate. And second, each distinct decision affecting organizational relocation is best understood as the unique temporal confluence of four factors: 1) problem recognition and definition, 2) available solutions, 3) interested participants, and 4) windows of opportunity.

A Note on Terminology

The Air Force rescue mission has gone by many names over the years to include Search and Rescue (SAR), Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR), Combat Recovery, Combat Rescue, and Personnel Recovery Operations (PRO).[2] The preferred doctrinal label today is Personnel

[2] Military Air Transport Service (MATS) owned the first USAF dedicated rescue force, which was called the Air Rescue Service (ARS) from 1946 to 1966. In 1966 MATS

Recovery, an umbrella term that encompasses "the sum of military, diplomatic, and civil efforts to prepare for and execute the recovery and reintegration of isolated personnel."[3] However, this thesis employs the proper noun "Rescue" to describe the personnel recovery mission area and dedicated assets specifically residing within the Air Force.[4] This term is commonly used within the service and better encapsulates the Air Force's historic and current role in broader personnel recovery efforts. Further, the use of "Rescue" as a proper noun in this sense is distinct from references to "rescue" operations in general.

The term Special Operations Forces, or SOF, represents Air Force Special Operations forces unless otherwise specified. SOCOM is comprised of forces from each of the services. However, in the following discussion of organizational relocations within the Air Force, the term SOF refers to Air Forces Special Operations Forces or Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC). Further, the use of "SOF" or "Special

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became the Military Airlift Command (MAC) and the ARS was renamed the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS). Between1989 and 1992, it was renamed the ARS. Since 1992, there has not been a single organization that encompassed the Air Force's rescue force. The term Rescue will be used to represent all of the rescue squadrons that exist across Air Combat Command (ACC), United States Air Forces Europe (USAFE), Pacific Air Forces (PACAF), Air Education and Training Command (AETC), Air Force Reserves (AFR) and the Air National Guard (ANG).

[3] "DODD 3002.01 Personnel Recovery in the Department of Defense," 25.

[4] Rescue includes the forces and platforms dedicated to Rescue. Rescue's recovery vehicle has evolved from the H-5 Hoverfly, HH-19 Chickasaw, HH-43 Husky, UH-1 Huey, HH-3 Jolly Green, HH-53 Super Jolly Green, and HH-60G Pave Hawk. The HC-130 Kings refuel rescue helicopters, coordinate rescues, and infiltrate personnel. Specialized airmen known as the Guardian Angel Weapons System (GAWS), are combination of three specialties, the PJ (Pararescueman), Combat Rescue Officer, and Survival, Escape, Resistance and Evasion (SERE) specialists. In this context, the term Rescue excludes the many assets that are essential for combat search and rescue, but not dedicated to this role. These include aircraft like the A-10 that perform the "Sandy," Rescue Escort (RESCORT) and Rescue Mission Commander roles. In a large Combat Search and Rescue Task Force (CSARTF) fighter aircraft may provide Rescue Combat Air Patrol (RESCAP). The E-3, Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) fills the Airborne Mission Coordinator role, and the RC-135 Rivet Joint and the E-8 Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) offer essential for threat identification and intelligence. Satellite based sensors provide information that may be critical to execute a rescue. These weapons systems are essential for recovering isolated personnel, but they have been excluded from the debates about the mergers of Rescue and SOF.

Operations" as a proper noun in this sense is distinct from references to "special operations" in general.

The Rescue-SOF Attraction

The overlap in capabilities between Rescue and SOF, along with the similarities in equipment and personnel, draws the two mission areas toward each other. While neither dedicates itself to conducting the other's mission, Rescue and SOF are capable of performing both mission sets to at least some degree. In addition, Rescue and SOF have a shared heritage. Throughout the history of combat aviation, the two mission areas have overlapped repeatedly. Special Operations personnel performed the first helicopter rescue missions in the jungles of Burma (1944) supporting the British Chindits in World War II. The Son Tay prison raid (1970) is an important part of AFSOC heritage, but the raid was accomplished using rescue HH-53 and HH-3 helicopters because of the night, long-range, air-refueling capability these assets brought to the fight. Another significant SOF mission was the assault on Koh Tang Island to rescue the crew of the SS Mayaguez (1975). This assault was a combined Rescue and SOF mission in which five SOF-owned CH-53 helicopters, and six HH-53 Jolly Green rescue helicopters (HAAR capable with three gun positions) transported a Marine Corps assault force. The MH-53 was originally a rescue helicopter that later became a SOF helicopter. After the rescue force was neglected throughout the 1980s, SOF was tasked with rescue missions in Desert Storm (1991), the Balkans (1994-1999), and Afghanistan (2001-onward). More recently, Rescue has been assigned to support SOF in Iraq.

There are doctrinal and legal overlaps as well. Under Title 10, Section 167(j), special operations activities include theater search and

rescue.[5] Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 5100.01P directs the military departments, including SOF to "provide unique capabilities to the joint force commander across all domains" for personnel recovery.[6] Likewise, in accordance with Joint Publication 3-50, Personnel Recovery, SOF may be tasked to perform rescue missions for which they are either the best suited among available forces or the only force available.[7] Based on this guidance, SOF regularly trains to conduct rescue functions in support of its own operations and may be tasked to perform rescue missions for other members of the joint force.[8] Taken together, these factors provide persistent, underlying rationale for why Rescue should be part of SOF.

The Rescue-SOF Repulsion

Rescue and SOF missions, capabilities, and equipment overlap, but the mission areas are distinct and assigned forces have different purposes. SOF utilize unique modes of employment—often in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive areas—that may be time-sensitive, clandestine, in conjunction with indigenous forces and high risk.[9] The purpose of Air Force Rescue is to recover isolated personnel throughout the entire spectrum of conflict.[10]

Highlighting key differences, retired General Donny Wurster, a Rescue and SOF helicopter pilot and former commander of AFSOC, explains the two forces, "work for different people in combat and they are funded by different sources." Further, he points out, "In a rescue, the

[5] For specific details see "Unified combatant command for special operations forces," available online at https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/167, accessed 22 May 2015.
[6] See Department of Defense Directive 5100.01, "Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components," (21 December 2010), available online at http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/510001p.pdf, accessed 22 May 2015.
[7] "Joint Publication 3-50 Personnel Recovery."
[8] "Joint Publication 3-50 Personnel Recovery."
[9] "Joint Publication 3-05 Special Operations," 10.
[10] "Air Force Doctrine Document 3-50 Personnel Recovery Operations."

enemy chooses the time and place, and in a special operations mission, SOF chooses the time and place. SOF builds a plan that will not fail and Rescue says we will do anything to get our people back. SOF is dedicated to thorough preplanning and precision of execution, whereas, a rescue is like a brawl, in which you pound the other guy until you succeed."[11]

From a command and control perspective, Rescue is a theater asset that, unlike SOF, is the responsibility of the air component commander. When an aircraft is shot down, the air component commander assigns air assets to locate, support, and recover isolated personnel. The air component commander makes the call when to commit the assets he or she owns to recover the assets he or she has lost. In general, the air component commander prefers to "own" and fully control rescue assets. This becomes more problematic if these assets are tied to SOF.

Air Force Special Operations forces serve as the air component to United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM). As such, it receives funding from both the Air Force and SOCOM to organize, train, and equip. AFSOC is thus driven to focus on SOCOM operations and requirements, potentially at the expense of more conventional Air Force operations and requirements to include the need to provide dedicated assets to recover downed Airmen. Historically, SOF has chafed at having to commit its assets to long-term rescue alert. Taken together, these factors provide persistent, underlying rationale for why Rescue should remain separate from SOF.

Confluence Theory of Organizational Decisions

[11] Wurster, Interview by the author, January 26, 2015.

The attraction-repulsion dynamic inherent to Rescue is always present and keeps the debate alive but cannot account for individual relocation decisions. In his seminal work on organizational decision-making, James March argues that every policy decision represents a unique temporal confluence of problems, solutions, decision makers and choice opportunities. These disparate elements are linked "by virtue of the times of their arrival on the scene." And further, "The linkages change over time as problems, solutions, and decision makers move from one choice opportunity to another, and as choices are made. Thus, the results produced by the system depend on the timing of the various flows and on the structural constraints of the organization."[12] This confluence model is useful for understanding specific decisions to either merge or split Rescue and SOF. While the built-in tension between the two mission areas creates a persistent source of instability and keeps the question from ever fully being settled, each move reflects a unique confluence of the four factors within the "constraints of the organization."

Problems emerge when there are significant focusing events, crisis, and/or budget problems. The first step in problem definition is recognizing the difference between an issue and a problem. Organizations put up with issues every day. Rescue has a number of issues such as being underequipped for adverse-weather and contested area operations. Issues become problems when people come to believe they should do something about them.[13] Problems are not just the issues at hand, but the perceptual and interpretive elements that elevate issues to the level of attention at which point it is seen as a problem that needs to be solved.

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[12] James G. March, *Primer on Decision Making: How Decisions Happen* (Simon and Schuster, 1994), 201.
[13] John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies, Update Edition, with an Epilogue on Health Care*, 2 edition (Boston: Pearson, 2010), 109.

The way in which problems are defined helps advocates of some solutions and negatively affects advocates of other solutions.[14] An example is modernization of the rescue force. Does Rescue need a new HH-60 helicopter or does it need an aircraft with better speed and range? If the Air Force believes the speed and range of the HH-60 is acceptable for Rescue, the range of solutions to the problem of modernizing the fleet (i.e., the CSAR-X acquisition program) is more likely to exclude the CV-22 tilt-rotor aircraft.

Understanding how issues transition into problems can be unlocked by evaluating the values, comparisons, and categories that are used to frame the debates. The values decision makers bring to an issue play a substantial role in problem definition.[15] If you believe that time and distance are the most important factors in a combat search and rescue, your values may be different than someone who believes being able to hover over a survivor and provide mutual support in the terminal area are more important to mission success. In the debate about the organizational location of Rescue, differing values strain the conversation and often make it much more emotional and charged with opinion than it needs to be. Comparisons can also shape problem definition. When Rescue and SOF equipment are different, the comparison can quickly elevate to a problem because one or the other would potentially be tasked to assist with the other's mission. In terms of categorization, when the forces are categorized based on capabilities, the logical solution is to merge the mission areas. When they are categorized by their separate purposes, the favored solution is splitting the forces.

[14] Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies, Update Edition, with an Epilogue on Health Care*, 110.
[15] Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies, Update Edition, with an Epilogue on Health Care*, 110.

Problem recognition is a contextual process that rests on the perceptions of the key individuals and decision makers. What may be seen as a problem by some stakeholders might not be considered as critical to others. Rescue has known shortcomings in terms of adverse weather and contested area capability, but because Rescue has compensated for these limitations, they do not warrant the status of a problem for the Air Force leadership or Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). In general, as Kingdon observes, "Getting people to see new problems or to see old problems in one way rather than another is a major conceptual and political accomplishment."[16] And how the problem is defined and communicated fundamentally alters the nature of the debate and the types of solutions on the table.

Solutions emerge from ideas, acceptance of proposals, and analysis of alternatives. In the Rescue/SOF debate, these factors have been surprisingly persistent. When the forces were separate, mergers were proposed to gain efficiencies and improve capability. When Rescue and SOF were combined, separation revitalized the emphasis on the unique role of Rescue's support to combat aviators. Exclusive to this debate are the permissive conditions that persist because of the similarity, overlapping, and distinction of the mission areas. Often times the analysis of alternatives focuses on which organizational location, in AFSOC or with the CAF, would be best. The analysis emphasizes an either/or proposition and fails to address objectively the question of what the Air Force needs its Rescue force to look like in the future.

Key stakeholders or participants in decisions made about Rescue relocations include a range of government officials, political actors, corporate executives, and military leaders. At times, the Rescue-SOF debate has garnered the attention of high-level political actors. This was

[16] Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies, Update Edition, with an Epilogue on Health Care*, 115.

the case in the early 1980s when the lack of special operations capability resulted in the revitalization of SOF that came at the expense of Rescue. There was also a petition from a group of influential legislators that argued against the merger of Rescue and SOF in 2013. More often, though, the key participants in these debates have resided within military circles. These consistent stakeholders include the commanders of the Major Commands overseeing Rescue and SOF, the Chiefs of Staffs of the Air Force and the Army, and the commander of SOCOM.

Windows of opportunity, or "choice opportunities," arrive when issues gain sufficient attention to be elevated to problem status, when key personnel with similar values hold influential or critical positions, and/or when multiple political streams converge. In the Air Force, this typically has something to do with money. During the past 30 years, Rescue has been considered a financial opportunity or burden. When money gets tight, as in the fiscally constrained environment of 2013, problems are elevated, and solutions that promise to save money gain traction. Windows of opportunity open when issues become problems and key personnel feel compelled and empowered to take action. For Air Force Rescue, such confluence has resulted in multiple organizational relocations.

Overview

The remainder of the thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 describes how Rescue and SOF developed a shared heritage from World War I through Vietnam. Rescuing downed aviators began as an ad hoc occurrence in World War I and was an emergent capability in World War II and Korea. Due to improvements in helicopter capabilities and the desire to rapidly recover the high number of aircrew that were shot down in Vietnam, Rescue evolved into a very capable recovery force that was used for notable special operations missions.

Chapter 3 explains why Rescue and SOF merged and split in 1983 and 1989 respectively. After Vietnam, the Air Force drastically cut Rescue and SOF. The gap in the special operations capability became a major concern after the failed attempt to rescue American hostages in Iran in 1979. The merger of Rescue and SOF in 1983 succeeded in revitalizing SOF but decimated Rescue. The separation of the functions in 1989 left Rescue wounded but started the path to recovery.

Chapter 4 argues how the decisions of the 1980s affected the operations of the1990s and why Rescue and SOF went through another merge and split in 2003 and 2006 respectively. After Rescue moved to Air Combat Command (ACC) in 1992, it improved its integration with the CAF but fell short of fulfilling requirements through the 1990s. The use of SOF for rescue taskings throughout the 1990s burdened SOCOM and diluted AFSOC's ability to support joint special operations. Rescue transferred to AFSOC in 2003 but separated just three years later.

Chapter 5 briefly explains why the proposed merger in 2013 was thwarted. At the time, AFSOC claimed it could save the Air Force $2B in 10 years if it transferred the rescue force back to AFSOC. However, this time the confluence of problem definition, solutions, key participants, and windows of opportunity (or lack thereof) resulted in a failed bid. The thesis concludes with a summary of key findings and observations about the endemic, and unsolved, organizational instability of Air Force Rescue.

CHAPTER 2

SHARED HERITAGE

(WWI THROUGH VIETNAM)

Air Force Rescue and SOF exhibit a shared heritage going back to the earliest days of combat aviation, with the mission areas becoming increasingly blurred over the course of the Vietnam War. This shared heritage provides the context for all of the relocation debates and decisions since Vietnam.

In 1915, during the Allied invasion of Gallipoli, a British Royal Navy Air Service Nieuport fighter pilot made the first aviation combat rescue. On November 19th, on a bombing raid of the Ferrijik railroad junction, a Farman Bomber was struck by antiaircraft fire.[1] After making a successful crash landing, the pilot lit his aircraft on fire and made a run for it as enemy fighters approached.[2] The Nieuport pilot witnessed the crash landing and landed in the riverbed close to the Farman. The bomber pilot ran to the fighter and squeezed under the front cowling where an observer cockpit had been. The fighter took off amidst a hail of bullets and made it back to its base successfully. This dramatic first rescue resonated with Airmen at all levels, demonstrating the need to quickly recover downed pilots isolated in enemy territory before they are captured.

Rescue operations continued throughout the First and Second World Wars, but the complicated overlap between conventional rescue and the use of a Special Operations Force (SOF) to rescue its own came during WWII in Burma. British Special Forces were attempting to disrupt the Japanese defenses behind their lines by cutting their

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[1] George Galdorisi, *Leave No Man Behind: The Saga of Combat Search and Rescue*, 1st edition (Zenith Press, 2009), 5.
[2] Galdorisi, *Leave No Man Behind*, 6.

resupply railroad and harassing their troops.[3] Col. Orde C. Wingate, the SOF forces commander, requested support from the U.S. Army Air Forces for, "light planes to aid in the evacuation of ground casualties."[4] Responding to the request, General "Hap" Arnold recognized an opportunity to expand the role of the Air Service. This effort originally called Project 9 became the 1st Air Commando Group.[5]

On April 21, 1944, an L-1 evacuating three wounded British soldiers was hit by Japanese ground fire and forced to land. The Air Commando's YR-4 made the first combat helicopter rescues immediately after it arrived in Burma. This early helicopter barely had enough power to lift its pilot and one casualty, so the pilot made four separate trips to a sandbar a few miles away. At the sandbar, he transferred the survivors to an L-5 to save the men.[6] Ever since this first SOF rescue mission, helicopters have been a critical part of the Rescue and SOF heritage.

It was not until war broke out in Korea that the first standalone rescue force came into existence. Established in March 1946, this force was called the United States' Air Rescue Service and fell under Air Transport Command, which maintained responsibility for air search and rescue over land and along oversea air routes.[7] The nascent Service employed a wide variety of aircraft, most of which were left over from World War II. Though unproven at first, Rescue quickly demonstrated its utility and ushered in a new element of air power that would become an integral part of the USAF.[8]

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[3] Susan L. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), 29.
[4] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 29.
[5] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 30.
[6] Galdorisi, *Leave No Man Behind*, 103.
[7] Earl H. Tilford, U. S. Center for Air Force History, and Richard P. Hallion, *The United States Air Force Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia* (S.l.: Military Bookshop, 2013), 8.
[8] Forrest L. Marion, "That Others May Live: USAF Air Rescue in Korea" (Air Force History and Museums Program, 2004).

Rescue forces pioneered the employment of new search and rescue equipment techniques, which, for the first time as a standing procedure, included the rescue of stranded personnel from behind enemy lines.[9] Due to the high demand for the rescue capability, the Air Force transferred 25 extra H-5 helicopters from a "special operations" evacuation and utility squadron to increase the capability of the ARS.[10] The experience in the Korean War established the foundations of modern Rescue, but it also provides the first example of pulling resources from one function to serve the other.

During Vietnam, helicopter-equipped Rescue and SOF transitioned from nascent concepts to well-established mission areas. Helicopters in both mission areas were faced with the challenges of anti-aircraft artillery, heat-seeking and radar-guided threats. Rescue, which fell under operational control of Military Airlift Command (MAC), successfully demonstrated the requirement for a new helicopter that could face these threats and conduct rescues at night in the contested areas of Southeast Asia.

In order to be successful at a combat search and rescue mission, MAC leaders argued, "A requirement exists for an integrated system to enable a rescue vehicle to perform search and rescue under conditions of total darkness and/or adverse weather in all geographical areas including mountainous terrain. Additionally, the rescue vehicle must have a low level capability to penetrate hostile territory against radar directed weapons in the above stated environmental conditions."[11]

The Air Force agreed and the result was the transformation of Rescue's HH-53B/C helicopter into the HH-53H Pave Low III. The

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[9] Robert Frank Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea: 1950-1953,* 1st edition (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1961), 537.
[10] Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea,* 537.
[11] MAC ROC 19-70, 23 July 1970. Underlines in original.

special equipment and capabilities of the HH-53 Pave Low were as necessary for Rescue as they were for SOF. It was the most technologically advanced helicopter in the world and equipped with an integrated navigation system that utilized state-of-the-art inertial navigation units (INUs), Doppler navigation equipment, map display, terrain following/terrain avoidance radar (TF/TA) and a Forward Looking Infrared Sensor (FLIR).[12] The requirements for these capabilities were reinforced during the Son Tay Raid and the assault of Koh Tang Island.

With the help of the long-range, air-refuelable HH-53s, Rescue proved it was valuable in SOF missions. During the attempted Son Tay prisoner of war (POW) camp rescue, Operation IVORY COAST (21 November 1970), experienced Rescue pilots carried SOF forces to assault the POW camp northeast of Hanoi and bring back the prisoners.[13] Though unsuccessful in recovering the POWs, the mission demonstrated to the American POWs they were not forgotten, and it influenced the North Vietnamese to consolidate prisoners to Hanoi. The Son Tay prison raid is considered an important heritage mission for both Rescue and SOF.

The assault on Koh Tang Island in May 1975 was a special operations style mission that inserted a ground force in an attempt to recover hostages. The assault force relied on the Rescue and Special Operations helicopters. The integrated assault force on Koh Tang Island to rescue the crew of the SS Mayaguez combined Rescue and SOF forces

[12] Anthony Gambone, "That Others May Live: Pave Low III" (History Office Aeronautical Systems Division, Wright Patterson AFB, Ohio, n.d.).
[13] Benjamin F. Schemmer and Dick Rodstein, *The Raid*, Abridged edition (New York: Random House Audio, 2002).

into one.[14] Again, both Rescue and SOF share the heritage of this significant mission.

Despite their shared legacy and overlapping capabilities, the differences between Rescue and SOF missions were real and significant. Rescue is an air operation, conducted by Airmen to recover other Airmen at a time and place dictated by the enemy. SOF missions are designed to deliver a ground team to an objective and are carefully planned to find the path of least resistance, striking at the most opportune time and place to ensure mission success.[15] Within SOF, personnel recovery missions are often treated as a ground operation with a ground force commander, normally with PJs in support.[16] The balance between similarities and fundamental differences helped drive a series of post-Vietnam mergers and splits that begin in the 1980s.

[14] "Assault On Koh Tang" (Pacific Air Forces, June 23, 1975), AU 75-1514, Historical Research Agency.
[15] Wurster, Interview by the author, January 26, 2015.
[16] Maj Gen Donny Wurster, "Getting Rescue Right," May 5, 2007.

CHAPTER 3

RESCUE AND SOF MERGE AND SPLIT: 1983 & 1989

After Vietnam, the Air Force focused its attention on a potential nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Strategic and Tactical Air Commands' battle planners perceived combat search and rescue to be futile and special operations to be distasteful.[1] The lack of a vision for combat search and rescue resulted in underfunding in peacetime. The general disdain for helicopters in TAC led to a reduction in force from 10,000 personnel and 500 aircraft to only 300 personnel and 28 aircraft. These attitudes informed the decisions that led to a merger of Rescue and SOF in 1983 and split in 1989.

The 1983 Consolidation

During the 1970s, a significant organizational shuffle loomed. Tactical Air Command (TAC) could not support modernization of its fighter aircraft and a robust special operations capability, so it prioritized fighter aircraft over special operations. TAC relied on helicopters for range support, but being short on funds, requested assistance from MAC to equip it with helicopters for this role. TAC demonstrated its lack of support for SOF by zeroing out budget funding twice during this decade.[2] TAC aimed to divest what it considered extraneous resources, however, it did not want to cede control of its helicopter force to MAC. The overall result was a significant decline in SOF capabilities that became evident with the dramatic failure of Operation EAGLE CLAW.

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[1] Col Donald D. Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 18.

[2] Lieutenant Colonel, USAF, Ioannis Koskinas, *Black Hats and White Hats: The Effect of Organizational Culture and Institutional Identity on the Twenty-Third Air Force: CADRE Paper No. 24* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 104.

Problem Recognition

In 1980, President Carter attempted to end the Iran Hostage Crisis with Operation EAGLE CLAW. Rescue units were sitting alert in Turkey should the need to conduct evacuations arise.[3] The mission was deemed very-high risk due to the long-distances and extensive turmoil in Iran, and Rescue's forces were never launched. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown instead chose to use SOF for the recovery. Planners omitted the rescue crews and their HH-53s from the response equation. Instead, they selected Navy RH-53 helicopters because they could launch from an aircraft carrier and operate in desert sand.[4] The mission was a disaster when one of the helicopters collided with an MC-130 at a forward refueling point site known as Desert One. The mission's failure exposed significant deficiencies in joint operating capabilities and it elevated the decline in Air Force SOF from issue to problem.

Available Solutions

In 1980, General Robert Huyser, the MAC Commander, penned a message to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF), General Lew Allen, Jr., outlining a plan for consolidation of SOF and Rescue. General Huyser argued, "I strongly believe that if all helicopters and SOF C-130s were consolidated under MAC, a stronger, more viable force could be projected in response to international contingencies without the intercommand difficulties and personnel disruptions which have occurred in the recent past."[5] He elevated his plea and lobbied the

[3] Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, 18.
[4] Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, 19.
[5] Message, 121645Z NOV 1980, personal, eyes only, CINCMAC to CSAF and VCSAF, 12 Nov 1980.

Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, directly for the consolidation of SOF into MAC as shown in the following memo dated 25 June 1981:

> I recommend the Air Force consolidate all helicopter and certain C-130 assets under MAC as a single manager. Currently, Air Force helicopter management is fragmented among five commands causing redundancy in capability and undue competition for scarce resource. By far, we are the most experienced and largest operator of those assets-clearly, we can save money. My proposal involves consolidation of helicopter and mission-related C-130s, plus various range/test support aircraft, including AFSC's [Air Force Systems Command] H-53s and C-130s.... In my estimation, we would increase flexibility through alignment of all forces under an established MAC/ARRS CONUS and overseas organizational structure, which exists in all theaters. This consolidation would allow the Air Force to speak with one voice on current and future helicopter and certain C-130 requirements as well as force structure. In addition, it would enhance career progression, thereby contributing to aircrew retention. I urge you to take the initiative in the area as it appears in the "too hard" category below your level. I will be in retired status by the time you get this report, so my only interest is proper management of assets.[6]

The key points of General Huyser's argument were that a merger could save money, increase flexibility, speak with one voice, and enhance career progressions to improve aircrew retention. This argument highlighted the potential gains of a merger but did not anticipate the disadvantages and challenges that would emerge in the mission areas.

Key Participants

General Huyser's opinion was counter to General Ralph Saunders, the Rescue commander from 1974 to 1979, who was dedicated to maintaining Rescue's heritage and unique organizational identity. Saunders was concerned that a consolidated Air Force helicopter

[6] CINCMAC to SECDEF, letter, 25 June 1981.

organization would be vulnerable to being subsumed by the Army. He also viewed Rescue as a humanitarian organization that should not perform covert combat operations.[7] Despite being opposed to a merger, General Saunders recognized TAC was draining his resources and thought that if a consolidation occurred, Rescue should take the lead role.

The subsequent Rescue commander, Brigadier General Cornelius Nugteren, took command on 29 September 1979 and was more open to the idea of consolidation. In November, he briefed the CSAF, General Allen, that it was logical for the ARRS, which owned three-fourths of the USAF helicopters, to become the single-manager of all USAF helicopters.[8] General Nugteren viewed Rescue and SOF as supporting elements and a good fit in MAC.

General William Mall was the ARRS commander from 21 August 1981 to 28 February 1983. He argued a merger would be the best way to revitalize Air Force Special Operations. He played a critical role in the merger and subsequent restructuring of Rescue and SOF in the new Twenty-third Air Force.

Window of Opportunity

In order to evaluate the advantages of restructuring, the CSAF commissioned a study called *Air Force 2000* in 1981. This study recommended changing AFSOF into a numbered Air Force within a MAJCOM or placing it under HAF as a Special Operating Agency, stating the primary benefits would be an increased ability to compete in the AF budget process.[9]

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[7] Koskinas, *Black Hats and White Hats*, 102.
[8] Koskinas, *Black Hats and White Hats*, 105.
[9] Koskinas, *Black Hats and White Hats*, 114.

Meanwhile, the pressure to improve SOF grew stronger. A 1982 *Air Force Inspection and Safety Center Functional Management Inspection on USAF Special Operations Capability* reported that AFSOF was currently "insufficient to meet operation readiness requirements."[10] This report also recommended that the Air Force combine Rescue and SOF under a single organization or numbered air force within a major command in order to revitalize SOF.[11]

Since the late 1970s, the Air Force had considered combining the like mission areas in order to gain efficiencies and deal with budgetary constraints. The failure of Operation EAGLE CLAW provided the decisive push. Despite earlier resistance, in 1983, there was sufficient development of the problem; and new leaders supported change. In particular, the CSAF, MAC commander, and ARRS commander agreed the merger was the most expeditious way to revitalize SOF.

The Path Toward a Split: 1983 to 1989

The Twenty-third Air Force activated under MAC on 1 March 1983, combining Rescue and SOF with a goal of maintaining and bolstering both key mission areas. This move allowed SOF to flourish as it absorbed Rescue's best asset, the HH-53 Pave Low. Conversely, Rescue began to wither on the vine. This imbalance motivated a split just six years later.

Problem Recognition

SOF's inclusion in MAC resulted in another layer of competition for limited resources, and Rescue's leadership could not compete with the national effort to revitalize SOF nor MAC's desire to design and build the

[10] "History, Twenty-Third Air Force, Vol. 1, 1983," 1.
[11] "History, Twenty-Third Air Force, Vol. 1, 1983," 1–3.

C-17.[12] Through a series of quick and painful blows, the ARRS, now a subunit, found itself without any operational assets and its mission relegated to the coordination of rescue activity within the US and the supervision of the Search and Rescue Satellite System.

To address the transfer of the HH-53 Pave Lows, the Secretary of the Air Force approved a plan to purchase HH-60D Nighthawks to help rebuild Rescue. In 1982, the 55th ARRS had received nine UH-60As, which were eventually upgraded to HH-60G and called the Pavehawk. They were the first of 243 HH-60s that had been programmed to rebuild Rescue.[13] The HH-60Ds were supposed to be equipped much like the Pave Lows, including terrain-following and terrain-avoidance radars and forward-looking infrared (FLIR) sensors. However, the Air Staff cancelled the program in 1985 and Rescue never received the HH-60D. There was not enough money or support for Rescue to rebuild it fleet.[14] Leadership among all the ranks began to worry that the rescue capability was at risk of being fully lost if it remained organizationally tied to SOF.

Solutions

In order to correct the deficiencies and organizational problems within the Twenty-third Air Force, the key leaders considered two solutions. The first was to integrate the mission areas more effectively and the second was to separate them. With the stated intent of integrating the mission areas, General Robert Patterson, who took

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[12] Koskinas, *Black Hats and White Hats*, 119.
[13] Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, 24.
[14] Throughout this period Rescue attempted to regain the combat capability it lost in the transfer of its Pave Lows to AFSOF. The HH-60D Nighthawk was approved to fulfill this need. The Nighthawk was designed with the same capabilities of the Pave Low. Even though it was funded in 1984, the Nighthawk program was cut in half and then cancelled in 1985. The AF did take possession of 9 HH-60s, assigned them to AFSOF and transformed them into the MH-60G, which is the same aircraft USAF Rescue flies now, identified as the HH-60G Pavehawk.

command of the Twenty-third Air Force in 1985, proposed a program called *Forward Look*. He argued that Twenty-third Air Force needed to focus on capability rather than mission and that Rescue and SOF capabilities were complementary. He proposed a new term, Specialized Air Warfare (SAW), as an umbrella term for "special operations, rescue, counter-terror, and certain reconnaissance missions."[15]

In order to fulfill this idea, General Patterson would restructure the Twenty-third Air Force into four multi-mission wings, one in the Pacific, one in Europe and two in the United States. The use of a new term accounted for the sensitivity between the two mission areas and did not show favor to either Rescue or SOF. Unfortunately, when the idea was briefed to the MAC commander, General Duane Cassidy, the term "Specialized Air Warfare" was adjusted to "Special Operations Wings," which again disenfranchised Rescue's leaders.[16] In spite of its original intent, General Patterson's *Forward Look* proposal expanded SOF and continued the decline of Rescue.

Alternatively, separating the mission areas was proposed as a way to keep Rescue from being completely subsumed by SOF and relieving the newly-established Special Operations Command (SOCOM; 1987) of the responsibility. Leaders across the Air Force began to realize the decline of Rescue's capability was affecting the service helicopters provided to fighter wings. In addition to this internal factor, when SOCOM was established its first commander did not want to be responsible for Rescue. When the Twenty-third Air Force became the air component to SOCOM, Air Force Special Operations served two bosses and SOCOM demonstrated an aversion to Rescue. Even though the law specified Theater Search and Rescue was one of SOCOM's core mission areas, he did not want to be responsible for the mission.

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[15] Koskinas, *Black Hats and White Hats*, 148.
[16] Koskinas, *Black Hats and White Hats*, 149.

Key Participants

Four key leaders influenced the separation of Rescue and SOF in 1989. General Patterson took command of Twenty-third Air Force on 20 September 1985.[17] Unlike his predecessor, he had Rescue and SOF experience. As an AC-130 gunship pilot, he brought special operations credibility and shrewdness to the force. His *Forward Look* proposal aimed to integrate the mission areas by building a combined capability based force. He refuted allegations that he favored SOF, stating he did more for the Rescue community than would have been done otherwise by the MAC staff.[18]

General Merrill McPeak was the Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) Commander from July 1988 – October 1990. Soon after he took command in the Pacific, he expressed concern about the transfer of his rescue squadrons to special operations. He argued the redesignation would leave his command without any dedicated rescue forces. To rectify this problem General McPeak pushed to rejuvenate and enhance Rescue.[1] He brought the issue to the Air Force General's Corona meeting in February 1989.

General Duane Cassidy was the MAC Commander from September 1985 – October 1989. General Cassidy also wanted to revitalize Rescue, and he argued the first step was to separate the organization from the Twenty-third Air Force.

On 3 November 1988, the first SOCOM Commander, General James Lindsay, outlined his position on CSAR. In the memo he stated,

> 1. Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) is not a mission for which Special Operations Forces (SOF) are trained, organized, and equipped. SOF force structure and

[17] Koskinas, *Black Hats and White Hats*, 147.
[18] Koskinas, *Black Hats and White Hats*, 153.

resourcing are based on special operations requirements. Significant resource shortfalls, particularly in air assets, currently exist, and any use of SOF for CSAR in general war in support of other than their own SAR/CSAR requirements would be at the further expense of special operations requirements.

2. Theater SAR/CSAR requirements dictate the establishment of a standing rescue force, separate from SOF.

3. On the other hand, the recovery of personnel from hostile, denied or politically sensitive territory is a special operation, specifically a subset of the special strike mission.

4. Examples of appropriate taskings include the raiding of a POW camp (i.e. Son Tay) or the recovery of personnel collected by a SOF operated escape and evasion network.

5. Accordingly, it is the view of this headquarters that…it is inappropriate to assign overall theater CSAR responsibilities to the theater SOC, assign SOF units the dual mission of both SO and CSAR, or to place SOF air assets on standing alert to meet short notice CSAR commitments.[19]

Window of Opportunity

General Lindsay's aggressive, vocal efforts undermined Twenty-third Air Force's organization and perpetuated a point of contention. In 1989, General Larry Welch was the CSAF, and under his leadership, the Air Staff published the Rescue Force Structure Plan (RFSP). It addressed the new post-Goldwater-Nichols Act realities and specified the Air Force should retain operational control of its Rescue force. The publication of the RFSP coincided with growing concern in the Pacific about the linking of Rescue to SOF, especially from General McPeak, the PACAF commander, who led an effort to fix the issue.[20] At Corona in February of 1989, key Air Force leaders agreed to relocate Rescue by withdrawing

[19] Koskinas, *Black Hats and White Hats*, 154.
[20] Koskinas, *Black Hats and White Hats*, 155.

the mission area from the Twenty-third Air Force and reactivating the Air Rescue Service on 1 June 1989.[21]

[21] Koskinas, *Black Hats and White Hats*, 155. The Air Force key leaders were the CSAF, MAC Commander, PACAF Commander and TAC Commander.

CHAPTER 4

ANOTHER MERGE AND SPLIT: 2003 & 2006

The transfer of the Air Force Rescue from Air Combat Command to Air Force Special Operations command in 2003 was the result of a causal chain tracing back to the growth of SOF and the neglect of Rescue in the 1980s and the ramifications of those circumstances in the 1990s.

The Path Toward Another Merger: 1989-2003

After separation in 1989, the standalone Rescue force focused on rebuilding, while SOF was still tasked with rescue at the expense of special operations missions. SOCOM tired of this responsibility, but nonetheless, it continued to be tasked with the "extraneous" mission throughout 1990s. During Operation Desert Storm and the conflicts in the Balkans, the conventional Rescue force was at first not combat capable and later not available, which meant SOF carried the rescue alert. Command and control relationships and the different approach SOF took towards rescue frustrated Air Force leadership. In particular, the "non-rescue" of Corvette 03 in Desert Storm and the Scott O'Grady rescue (by the US Marines) in Bosnia reinforced the belief that Rescue should be controlled by the air component.

On 19 January 1991, during the first week of Desert Storm, Corvette 03, an F-15E, was shot down by an SA-2 near Al Qaim in Western Iraq.[1] The aircraft, crewed by the Col David Eberly and Major Thomas Griffith, Jr., was part of a 24-ship package that received a late notice retasking to find and destroy Scud missile sites in western Iraq.[2] The wingman reported that Corvette 03 was missing, but they were unsure of their location or status. The Joint Rescue Coordination Cell

[1] Col Donald D. Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 122.
[2] Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, 2012, 122.

wanted to launch a CSAR immediately, but Special Operations Command Central wanted more information before committing its forces into a heavily defended area without a known location or proof of life.[3] After three days on the ground, Eberly and Griffith were captured by the Iraqis and became prisoners of war.

The non-rescue of Corvette 03 led to accusations that SOF was not there for Air Force pilots when needed.[4] When SOF was tasked with the responsibility of CSAR they were not operationally controlled by the air component. This violated the principle of war known as "unity of command" because when the air component wanted to launch a rescue the SOCCENT pushed back, arguing that there was not any proof of life or known location and that sending assets was not prudent until this information was ascertained. This highlighted the difference between a rescue force owned and operated by fighter and bomber pilots and one owned by Special Operations. It also highlighted the difference in a "deep air operation" combat search and rescue mission and a SOF mission in which a ground team is delivered to a specific area to recover the survivors.

Problem Recognition and Definition

By February 1993, Rescue had benefited from the broader Air Force reorganization, which resulted in its move to the Combat Air Force, with squadrons in Air Combat Command, PACAF, and USAF in Europe (USAFE). Rescue also benefited from the acquisition of the HH-60G and improved to the point where it could take the alert in Saudi Arabia from SOF.[5] Moderate improvements aside, the high deployment rate and operational tempo quickly overtasked dedicated Rescue forces and made

[3] Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, 2012, 126.
[4] Whitcomb, *Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm*, 2012, 255.
[5] Lt Col John Fuss, "USSOCOM J-3 Briefing on AFSOC CSAR Commitment," April 12, 1994.

them unavailable when the United States' attention shifted to the Balkans.

In response to the unrest in the Balkans in the 1990s, the US, UN and NATO launched Operations PROVIDE PROMISE, DELIBERATE FORCE, and ALLIED FORCE. Since conventional Rescue forces were unavailable, European Command tasked SOF to provide rescue coverage for these operations. These taskings, on top of the recent commitment in Turkey, strained the stateside and overseas SOF capabilities. In April 1994, SOF briefed SOCOM that the EUCOM rescue tasking degraded AFSOC's capability to train and support SOF training.

AFSOC representative Lt Col John Fuss argued, "Because our aircraft are deployed, we have lost the ability to support many important missions and our joint capabilities have diminished…Demand for our services has overcome our ability to provide those services. The CSAR mission has drained our assets and is causing diminished aircrew training and non-participation in joint SOF exercises."[6] The degradation of the rescue capability that resulted from the decisions in the 1980s were coming back to bite the Air Force. AFSOC leaders were pleased to be involved in combat operations in Desert Storm, but the subsequent CSAR alert drained SOF's ability to do its own mission.

The challenges to both communities during Desert Storm and the Balkans fueled the debate about the proper organizing, training, and equipping of Rescue forces. Rescue's move from Air Mobility Command (AMC) to Air Combat Command shifted its focus towards a better integration with the combat air forces and demonstrated the CSAF's desire to rebuild and revitalize the rescue capability. However, the continued pressure for SOF forces to take on rescue missions despite lacking the force structure to handle these additional missions prompted

[6] Fuss, "USSOCOM J-3 Briefing on AFSOC CSAR Commitment."

discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of shifting Rescue back under SOF control.

Available Solutions

In a February 1994 white paper, SOF leadership argued that Rescue was broken and it could be fixed if it were considered a special operations mission.[7] Instead of being "tasked" to take on rescue missions, the paper said, the SOF community should own the capability and fully rebuild it, noting, "it seems unlikely that the USAF will be able to meet its own mandate for CSAR capability in a timely manner."[8] SOF leadership continued that combatant commander requests for the better-equipped SOF to conduct rescue would continue for two reasons: first, HH-60s lack the range to operate unrefueled, and second, HC-130s lack the survivability to operate in non-permissive environments. In contrast, SOF was uniquely equipped and its personnel highly trained with the inherent capability to conduct rescue missions.

The white paper proposed three options for meeting Rescue's future needs. The first option was for the Air Force to aggressively rebuild its rescue capability to fulfill its joint responsibility. The second and third options required a change in doctrine to make SOCOM the CSAR force provider for the combatant commands. Option two was for Rescue to maintain a separate identity while owned by SOCOM. Option three was for Air Force SOF to subsume the rescue mission and perform it with special operations forces whenever needed, arguing that "additional training hours, per aircraft, may not be required since the infiltration/exfiltration procedures would be the same for the CSAR mission as they would be for the special operations mission." This

[7] AFSOC/XPP, "CSAR: A Special Operations Mission," White Paper, (February 8, 1994).
[8] AFSOC/XPP, *CSAR: A Special Operations Mission*, 1.

argument lay dormant until the right opportunity for change would present itself.

In September of 1997, the Air Force began an analysis of alternatives (AoA) to address the most poignant issues of its rescue force. Because Rescue was facing an equipment service life problem, the AoA outlined six objectives:

(1) Identify best Combat Rescue concept (2010-2030)
(2) Update required mission capabilities
(3) Document mission area deficiencies
(4) Examine nonmaterial and systems solutions
(5) Identify and baseline most cost effective solutions
(6) Set size and distribution of next generation force[9]

The AoA determined CAF CSAR forces (including those in the Air Force Reserve Command and Air National Guard) should be the primary recovery assets in the future because they were the best trained and prepared. Rescue's biggest, most immediate need was to once again modernize its helicopters. Two years later, in 1999, the Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC) found the HH-60G was, "deficient in areas such as survivability, range/combat radius, payload capacity/cabin volume, battle-space/situational awareness, mission reaction (deployment) time, adverse weather operations and service life limit."[10]

In order to modernize Rescue, the Air Force launched CSAR-X program to acquire a new helicopter. The new helicopter was intended to have a high service life, low threat susceptibility, tactical adverse-weather penetration, high combat radius, improved situational awareness, high

[9] Col Lee Meador, "USAF Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR)," December 2000.
[10] Defense Industry Daily Staff, "CSAR-X: And Boeing Makes One…for a Little While," *Defense Industry Daily*, November 13, 2006, http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/csarx-and-boeing-makes-one-hh47-wins-10b-competition-updated-02788/.

payload space, and low reaction time.[11] In short, with the CSAR-X, Rescue would finally become a modern, world-class force able to meet the future needs of the Joint Force.

In 1999, as the JROC was calling for the replacement of the HH-60G, former MAC commander General Duane Cassidy claimed that the CV-22 will do "almost anything you can imagine," that it will have a major role in combat rescue, and further, "It will be an amazing airplane."[12] To many, the CV-22 addressed the shortfalls specified by the JROC. Officially, the CV-22 Osprey did not compete in a direct head-to-head competition to be the CSAR-X. Within SOF, however, the idea that the CV-22 was the real answer to all of Rescue's problems carried a tremendous amount of weight.

After the Al Qaeda attack on September 11, 2001, the United States responded with force in Afghanistan. Operations there did not commence until rescue assets were in place to recover a downed aviator or special operator should the need arise. Rescue was not able to deploy as quickly as SOF and again the MH-53 picked up the rescue mission until the HH-60s got to the theater in 2002.

Key Participants

In 2003, four key leaders were responsible for the transfer of Rescue to AFSOC. The CSAF General John Jumper felt strongly that moving Rescue to AFSOC would make it easier to manage the similar maintenance, logistics, and personnel of the mission areas. He said he did not think Rescue fit in ACC and that it would be a better fit in AFSOC.[13] Further, General Jumper pointed out Rescue's shortcomings

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[11] Meador, "USAF Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR)."
[12] Major Tom Currie, "The CV-22 'Osprey' and the Impact on Air Force Combat Search and Rescue" (Air Command and Staff College, Air University, 1999), 23.
[13] General T. Michael Moseley, Interview by the author, April 22, 2015.

during Allied Force, where successful rescues were achieved by SOF, not dedicated Rescue assets.

General Paul Hester, the AFSOC Commander from January 2002 to July 2004, expressed that the intent of the 2003 merger was to better integrate Rescue with SOF, standardize the PJ force, and make management of the mission areas more efficient.[14] He said that by bringing Rescue into AFSOC, Rescue could work more effectively with SOF and this would be beneficial for the SOF-centric fights in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.[15] He explained, "Training Rescue to do special operations would provide a broader capability that could better serve the conventional and SOF communities."[16]

General Charles Holland and General Hal Hornburg held key positions during the move. General Holland was the SOCOM Commander from October 2000 to September 2003. His role as an Airman in charge of SOCOM created a unique opportunity to accomplish this merger. General Hornburg was the ACC Commander from November 2001 to January 2005. He acknowledged that ACC did a poor job budgeting for Rescue even though ACC units are the most in need of its support.[17] Further, the ACC Commander trusted General Jumper and General Hester and was convinced that the move would benefit the Air Force.[18]

Window of Opportunity

[14] General Paul V. Hester, Interview by the author, April 2, 2015.
[15] Hester, Interview by the author.
[16] Hester, Interview by the author.
[17] Adam Hebert, "CSAR, Under New Management," *Air Force Magazine* 86, no. 8 (August 2003).
[18] Hester, Interview by the author.

The confluence of these individuals in key leadership positions created a rare opportunity to transfer Rescue back to AFSOC. On 30 April 2003, the Air Force released a statement announcing the transfer. It stated, "The transition to AFSOC from Air Combat Command is meant to consolidate the management of CSAR and to take advantage of the synergies of combining like aircraft and missions."[19] It went on to say, "There is a lot of commonality within the forces of SOF and CSAR…We're going to consolidate oversight and management so our men and women on the ground have the assets, training and focus they need to do their mission."[20]

Regarding the move, General Hester commented, "CSAR as a professional community, and Special Operations as a professional community, have joined on the battlefield to produce combat power and combat professionalism for our combatant commanders. The introduction of CSAR to AFSOC will mean little change to the organizations or individuals in these units. This realignment will be transparent, outside of the patch change on uniforms. There will be no change on how forces are presented to combatant commanders."[21]

This was an important point for General Donny Wurster, a SOF helicopter pilot who started his career in Rescue. General Wurster was the Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC) Commander at the time who later became the AFSOC Commander. He supported the move given that General Hester did not argue Rescue should not be commanded by the JFACC, be funded by MFP-11, or any of the things that would be so-called "hot buttons" for him.[22] General Wurster agreed with General Hester that the move could improve the management of the

[19] Master Sgt. Scott Elliott, "AFSOC Taking Combat Search, Rescue," *Air Force Print News*, April 30, 2003.
[20] Elliott, "AFSOC Taking Combat Search, Rescue."
[21] "Rescue Mission Moves to AFSOC" (AFSOC News Service, October 3, 2003).
[22] Wurster, Interview by the author, March 16, 2015.

force, grow Rescue leadership, and improve overall Rescue effectiveness.[23] In giving up control of Rescue, ACC commander General Hornburg claimed, "The synergies to be achieved with the move outweighed any negative factors."[24]

At the time, Rescue was deployed to both Afghanistan and Iraq. The timing seems odd until one considers the gradual build-up of multiple issues, the focus on SOF for current overseas operations, and the rare occurrence of an Airman serving as SOCOM Commander. General Hester admits that the discussion would have been much more difficult if General Holland's successor, an Army special operations pilot, had been at the helm of SOCOM.[25] This confluence once again brought a merger to the fore as the solution for a number of problems. As in the 1980s, the relocation of Rescue to AFSOC was meant to consolidate the management of Rescue's assets and take advantage of the synergies of combining like aircraft and missions.

The Path Toward Another Split: 2003-2006

Not everyone was happy with the merger in 2003. General T. Michael Moseley, the Combined Force Air Component Commander (CFACC) at the time, opposed the move unequivocally.[26] As CFACC, he felt strongly that Rescue belonged back in ACC.[27] His "solution" was ready, just awaiting an opportunity.

Problem Recognition and Definition

General Moseley witnessed firsthand how Rescue had been in place before the opening of hostilities began in Iraq in 2003—a first since

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[23] Hebert, "CSAR, Under New Management."
[24] Hebert, "CSAR, Under New Management."
[25] Hester, Interview by the author.
[26] Ret Col Paul Harmon, Interview by the author, March 13, 2015.
[27] Moseley, Interview by the author.

Vietnam. With General Moseley still in charge of AFCENT, Rescue recovered the crew of an F-14 in western Iraq in April 2003.[28] Rescue also conducted four adverse weather missions on nights when Army medevac helicopters were grounded.[29] This feat was significant since HH-60Gs do not have effective equipment for conducting rescue missions in adverse weather. Without a terrain following/terrain avoidance capability, "they depended on the skill and daring of the CSAR aircrews to do things like descend below a 100 foot cloud deck over a lake and wire hop to the objective, or fly through a blinding sandstorm at 30 feet above the ground for 20 minutes to reach a crash site."[30]

The transfer of Rescue to AFSOC in 2003 was primarily a transfer of Administrative Control (ADCON). Rescue's forces were still presented to the COCOMs as Rescue not SOF. This meant that AFSOC was responsible for all of the organizing, training, and equipping of the Rescue force, but it did not employ Rescue in combat. Instead, Rescue's assets were "chopped," or allocated, to the air component when deployed for theater missions and TACON or Direct Support to SOCOM when supporting special operations. Retired Col Damon "Gump" Reynolds explained, "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 just didn't make sense."[31]

Another issue was the notion that this reorganization realigned the rescue mission under one command. The move left out many of the key assets required to execute a rescue, including the On-Scene Commander (OSC), Rescue Mission Commander (RMC), Rescue Escort (RESCORT)

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[28] Lee Lt Col dePalo, "USAF Combat Search and Rescue: Inefffective Utilization in the Global War on Terror" (Air War College, Air University, 2005), 14.
[29] dePalo, "USAF Combat Search and Rescue: Ineffective Utilization in the Global War on Terror," 15.
[30] dePalo, "USAF Combat Search and Rescue: Inefffective Utilization in the Global War on Terror," 15.
[31] Reynolds, Interview by the author.

and the Airborne Mission Coordinator (AMC). In his Naval War College thesis, Lt. Col. Clifford Latta, Jr., argued the move of the Rescue squadrons away from the CAF led a lack of unity of effort required for a CSAR task force.[32]

The future of the rescue force, regardless of the move to AFSOC, still hinged upon the CSAR-X competition that was underway. It is widely believed that the EH-101 or the S-92 was the replacement helicopter of choice, but during this time, the HH-47 also entered the competition. Some viewed the potential selection of the HH-47 as a source of tension between Rescue and SOF. If the HH-47 won the CSAR-X competition, the resultant addition of 141 heavy lift helicopters to the Air Force inventory had the potential to disrupt the balance within the broader special operations community, lessening the prominence and prestige of the US Army's premier rotary-wing special operations force, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR).[33] The confusion about Army, Air Force, and SOCOM roles and missions persisted throughout this debate. SOCOM again remained unenthusiastic about owning the responsibility to support conventional forces. The only resolution to this problem appeared to be another split.

Available Solutions

During this period, Rescue could have followed two paths. First, is that it could have continued to evolve into a force that provided support to theater and special operations commanders, following the path envisioned by General Jumper, General Hester, and General Holland. Alternatively, the 'experiment' could be short lived, and proponents of a

[32] Lt Col Clifford Latta Jr., "U.S. Air Force Air Combat Command Takes Control of Rescue Forces: An Opportunity to Re-Energize the Unity of Effort" (Naval War College, 2006).
[33] Wurster, Interview by the author, March 16, 2015.

dedicated conventional rescue capability would find a way to relocate Rescue once again.

Key Participants

General Moseley is known as a Rescue advocate. According to one senior Rescue leader, "Nobody cared about Rescue as much as he (Moseley) did."[34] As the air component commander (9AF/CC and AFCENT/CC) during the start of OEF and OIF, General Moseley was keenly aware of the issues of the Rescue force and mission area. General Moseley interacted with Rescue throughout his career. He was assigned to Kadena Air Base, which had a Rescue squadron in the early 1980s. From 1987-1989, he was the commander of the F-15 division of the Weapons School shortly after the HH-60 Weapons Instructor Course was stood up. He had the opportunity to command HH-60s as the 57 Wing Commander from 1996-1997.

General Moseley adamantly believes combat search and rescue is a CFACC responsibility, a theater mission, and that the mission area belongs in the combat air force.[35] He opines the CFACC is responsible for the forces he sends into the deep airspace of the theater and that it is his responsibility to go pick his forces up if they dismount from their aircraft. He says this is "a moral imperative. It is pass/fail."[36] General Moseley believes there is a difference between PR and CSAR. He thinks that any service can accomplish personnel recovery, but that this is different from CSAR, which is a long-range, threat-penetrating, flexibly-executed mission. He says the missions are different, but people confuse them because they use similar platforms. Rescue and SOF are two different missions that leverage different skills for different purposes.[37]

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[34] Retired Colonel Damon Reynolds, Interview by the author, March 24, 2015.
[35] Moseley, Interview by the author.
[36] Moseley, Interview by the author.
[37] Moseley, Interview by the author.

Further, Moseley argues that the right organization location must depend on the most effective combat organization. Having CSAR in the CAF is the more effective because CSAR is a theater mission that belongs with the CFACC. CSAR does not exist to support SOF, so it does not make sense for SOCOM to organize, train and equip a force that it won't use in combat.[38]

General Bryan D. (Doug) Brown, the SOCOM Commander from 2003-2007, is recognized as being a huge proponent of Army-based rotary-wing forces and an opponent of Air Force-based rotary-wing assets. During Operation HONEY BADGER in 1980, he commanded the C Company and worked tirelessly to build up the task force.[39] At the outset of Desert Storm, Lt Col Brown was the commander of the 1st Battalion of the 160th SOAR. He did his best to ensure his unit was tasked with important missions over the AFSOC MH-53s.[40] When Brown was assigned as the air component commander of the JSOTF at Ar Ar, Saudi Arabia during Desert Storm, he was a member of the "soldiers should fly with soldiers" clan.[41] He supported the notion that the Air Force should not play a role as lift for Special Operations.

Window of Opportunity

General Moseley became Air Force Chief of Staff in September 2005 and he took action to move Rescue back to ACC immediately. In a recent interview, he observed, "One of the first things I did was bring the AFSOC Commander and the ACC Commander up. I told them to figure out a way to transfer Rescue back to ACC."[42]

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[38] Moseley, Interview by the author.
[39] Darrel D. Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride: A History of the MH-53 Pave Low Helicopters in War and Peace* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2012).
[40] Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 298.
[41] Whitcomb, *On a Steel Horse I Ride*, 324.
[42] Moseley, Interview by the author.

General Moseley announced his decision to relocate Rescue to ACC right after the warfighter talks with SOCOM where General Moseley and General Brown had the opportunity to meet. General Moseley said that he and General Brown spoke about the transfer and although General Brown initially had some reservations, he did not have a problem with it. General Moseley said, "I told him I was going to move it back and he said he wanted to be assured it wouldn't affect his lift and I said it wouldn't."[43] General Moseley convinced General Brown by saying, "Your missions, at times, become priority one for the theater. My combat search and rescue guys need to be separate from that because when we dismount somebody at three hundred miles, we don't have time to go finding where all the SOF guys are to send somebody out there to pick them up."[44] General Brown's compliance negated any meaningful resistance that General Moseley might have faced and immediately after the meeting he announced that the transfer would take place.

On 25 February 2006, the transfer announcement cited General Moseley's commitment to recover downed aviators and laid out the need for the Air Force to maintain a dedicated rescue force, ideally situated permanently within ACC. In a recent interview, General Wurster, the AFSOC Vice Commander at the time, agreed moving Rescue back to ACC was a well-thought-out and reasonable plan. He said,

> Rescue and SOF work for different people in combat and they're funded by different sources. The mission of rescue is closely tied to the combat air forces it supports. Rescue of an Airman from deep in enemy territory is inherently an air function. The Joint Forces Air Component Commander owns the aircraft that was lost, he owns the aircraft that will support the search and rescue task force, and he owns the airpower that will enable our daring rescue crews to get to the area, find the survivor, and recover him or her to friendly control. Combat rescue is a deep air operation and a core

[43] Moseley, Interview by the author.
[44] Moseley, Interview by the author.

> task within our airpower responsibilities. Consequently, as we enter the 21st century, our leaders must understand that CSAR is not a nice to have capability. It is a requirement for a nation that relies on decisive air power, precision engagement, and dominant maneuver. Moving rescue forces back into Air Combat Command was the right thing to do at that time.[45]

In sum, the most critical factor behind the decision to relocate Rescue from AFSOC to ACC in 2006 was General Moseley's promotion to Chief of Staff of the Air Force. This essentially provided a window of opportunity for Moseley to redefine the problem and apply his pre-determined solution, reversing the decisions and actions of his predecessor.

[45] Wurster, Interview by the author, March 16, 2015.

CHAPTER 5

A THWARTED MERGER: 2013

The 2006 relocation of Rescue to ACC put to rest any doubt regarding the Air Force's commitment to maintaining a dedicated rescue force that could "be mobilized faster during a national crisis, integrated into combat training, and tasked to support all AEF rotations."[1] Although Air Force leadership in general seemed satisfied with the move as a long-term solution, AFSOC leaders began to see things differently. In 2013, AFSOC made a strong effort to take control of the Air Force rescue mission once again, a bid that ultimately failed.

Problem Recognition and Definition

In November of 2006, Boeing's HH-47 won the CSAR-X contract. This came as a shock to most people who were outside the program. Even General Moseley said he was surprised by the decision. Shortly afterwards Sikorsky and Lockheed-Martin won a protest of the decision just four months later. This protest delayed the program, and it slowly lost steam amidst ongoing budgetary debates. By mid-2009, the Air Force announced it was cancelling the program altogether. This left the aging rescue fleet, worn from incessant operations in the deserts of Afghanistan and Iraq, with no plan in place for modernization. In October of 2012, however, the Air Force solicited industry for bids to build the Combat Rescue Helicopter (CRH) as a replacement to the HH-60G.

In 2007, Rescue began providing personnel recovery for special operations missions in Iraq, adding to its theater combat search and

[1] Secretary of the Air Force, Office of Public Affairs, "USAF Release on CSAR Transfer from AFSOC to ACC," February 27, 2006, http://www.airforcemag.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/Reports/2006/February/Day28/CSAR.pdf.

rescue responsibility for the CFACC. This tasking relieved SOCOM of the strain of providing alert helicopters to cover its missions and freed up more of its helicopters for direct action assaults. As the Global War on Terror matured, Rescue was tasked more frequently to cover SOCOM's forces. This drove Rescue to adapt to the SOF personnel recovery tactics and strained its operational tempo.

With a focus on the uncommitted funds for the CRH acquisition program, AFSOC leadership began pointing to a number of persistent issues facing Rescue and suggesting CRH to be an unwise investment. The nation had been at war for twelve years and Rescue and SOF had been heavily tasked and employed throughout. During this period, however, there had been very few conventional CSAR missions executed to recover downed aviators. A rescue force focused on, and equipped to support, the CAF customer was being underutilized and thus a luxury the Air Force could ill-afford during a time of growing fiscal constraints.

AFSOC leadership argued that the current rescue structure has an active duty and air reserve component (ARC) mismatch. Former 1st Special Operations Wing Commander, Brigadier General James Slife, says that because 60% of the rescue force is in the ARC, short-notice deployments are problematic. This increases the operations tempo of the active duty and results in the need to blend rescue squadrons together to meet force request requirements.[2] According to AFSOC leadership, Rescue is also plagued by the challenge of operating on the small scale. With 97 total aircraft fleet wide, the force epitomizes the high-demand/low-density asset description.[3]

Available Solutions

[2] Brigadier General Jim Slife, Interview by the author, March 5, 2015.
[3] 10 U.S. Code § 688a, "Retired members: temporary authority to order to active duty in high-demand, low-density assignments," available online at https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/688a, accessed 22 May 2015.

As a solution, AFSOC leadership proposed not only merging the two mission areas, but also cutting the CRH program in order to buy more CV-22s. During rescue missions, speed can be a critical factor; AFSOC claimed the advantages the CV-22 would make it a better platform for rescue than traditional helicopters. The CV-22 can fly twice as fast and significantly farther that an HH-60. The merits and disadvantages of the CV-22 relative to traditional helicopters is an important point of contention in the current debate. Opponents of the CV-22 argue that its extreme rotor-downwash and lack of ability to provide mutual support in the terminal area prevent it from being an acceptable recovery platform.[4] The CV-22's speed and range are enticing capabilities, but the lack of ability in the terminal area to provide mutual support and conduct low hovers over survivors are critical limitations. To many, AFSOC's efforts to push the CV-22 as a rescue platform appear to be driven by a desire to get more money and buy more CV-22s, and not by a desire to save the Air Force money and increase rescue capability.[5]

Key Participants and Window of Opportunity (or lack thereof)

AFSOC Commander Lt General Eric Fiel pushed hard for the merger, as well as the cancellation of CRH. ACC Commander General Mike Hostage opposed either action. At first, Air Force CSAF General Mark Welsh seemed undecided. But on 26 June 2013, six U.S. Senators, led by Richard Blumenthal (D) of Connecticut, sent General Mark Welsh, the CSAF, a memo that expressed their concern about the transfer of Rescue back to AFSOC. They said, "It appears the move to AFSOC is motivated not by mission imperatives but by financial pressures, in

[4] This author believes the AF should conduct an operational test to evaluate the HH-60 and the CV-22 across multiple mission scenarios and environments from the both the aircrew and ground perspective in order to determine the actual limitations, disadvantages and advantages each platform.
[5] Moseley, Interview by the author.

particular because AFSOC would conduct CSAR missions with a significantly smaller fleet of CV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft rather than continue with Air Force plans to acquire a new Combat Rescue Helicopter (CRH)."[6] AFSOC could not answer this inject of high-level political support for maintaining the status quo. At the 2013 Corona Conference, AFSOC formally proposed the relocation plan; but this time, the confluence of factors weighed against relocation, and the decision was made to leave Rescue in ACC…at least for now.

[6] Richard Blumenthal, "2013 Letter from Senator Blumenthal to CSAF General Welsh Regarding CSAR," June 26, 2013.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Rescue and SOF were born out of the same heritage, and the mission areas have overlapped throughout their existence. General Henry “Hap” Arnold created the first air special operation forces to assist the British Chindits with unconventional warfare behind the Japanese lines in Burma during World War II. These air commandos evacuated casualties in light fixed-wing aircraft and in 1944 completed the first combat search and rescue with a helicopter. In Vietnam, the mission areas existed as separate entities, but Rescue owned the first helicopters designed for long-range, night, adverse-weather, contested operations. Because of these capabilities, Rescue was tasked to conduct the Son Tay raid and the assault on Koh Tang Island. Both of these missions were hostage recoveries conducted in line with special operations tactics. The Rescue-SOF debate has been with us ever since.

Each subsequent decision to relocate Rescue reflected a unique confluence of problem recognition and definition, available solutions, key participants, and windows of opportunity. And with each decision, these factors weighed and balanced differently. The 1983 decision to merge Rescue and SOF demonstrated how an unexpected crisis or focusing event can rapidly transform routine issues into problems. The failure of Operation EAGLE CLAW gained the attention of the nation. It elevated the issue of a neglected special operations force that had laid dormant in the Air Force to a problem that warranted an immediate solution. The problem was framed by this focusing event during a fiscally constrained context. However, the transfer of Rescue's HH-53 Pave Low to AFSOF was a short-term solution that came at the expense of the rescue force. When the Air Force decided to merge the mission areas to improve SOF

and gain efficiencies, it failed to correctly address the negative impact this had on Rescue.

As SOF grew under Twenty-third Air Force control, Rescue waned. In 1989, the two entities were split because the Air Force recognized it had neglected its commitment to rescue its downed Airmen. Again, a problem was defined, a solution was offered, key leaders agreed, and the window of opportunity opened. The key leaders attempted to rebuild Rescue by reactivating the Air Rescue Service and procuring new aircraft. The two mission areas regained their independence from each other administratively, but the decimated rescue capability would result in a reliance on SOF to perform the rescue mission throughout the 1990's and into the Global War on Terror.

Throughout the1990s, SOF performed many rescue taskings. The reorganization efforts in 1989 and 1992 were not sufficient to revitalize Rescue enough to ensure it was as capable at performing its mission as SOF. Rescue steadily improved its capability and availability, but the reliance on SOF for rescue resulted in a reinvigoration of the idea that SOF and Rescue should be merged to gain efficiencies and eliminate the redundant and an underutilized and underequipped specialized force. The issues slowly percolated up to the level of a problem throughout the decade. During the 1990s, factors never aligned in favor of a merge. However, a window of opportunity emerged in 2003 when key leaders were in the right positions to address the problem with the merger of the mission areas. In 2003, the CSAF, ACC/CC, AFSOC/CC, and the SOCOM/CC trusted each other and felt that the time was as good as it would ever be to merge the mission areas.

General Moseley moved Rescue out of AFSOC and back into the CAF in 2006 because of the distinctness and uniqueness of the rescue

mission.[1] This relocation stands out in terms of lack of impetus beyond a mere shift in key personnel. Moseley had opposed the move to AFSOC in 2003 but was not in position to block the move. All that was required to bring about a reversal of the 2003 decision was for him to ascend to the position of CSAF. The underlying issues had not changed in three years. But Moseley framed the problem differently and, by 2006, was in position to apply his preferred solution.

As the Global War on Terror matured, Rescue adapted to the vastly different environments of the desert campaigns and reduced number of downed aviators. Rescue transitioned from a force that existed to recover downed Airmen to one that provided global personnel recovery capability to the combatant commands. The assumption of a Casualty Evacuation role in Afghanistan and the support to SOF in Iraq vastly increased the utility of this specialized force. Unfortunately, the failure to complete the acquisition a new rescue helicopter nagged at the Air Force. When AFSOC retired the MH-53 and brought on the CV-22, a new asymmetry emerged that resulted in a reevaluation of the relevance of the dedicated rescue force.

These changes came to an apex in 2013 when AFSOC proposed a merger of the Rescue and SOF that would supposedly save the Air Force $2B over 10 years. AFSOC defined a problem and offered a solution before the Air Force awarded the CRH contract. However, AFSOC's argument was not sufficient to convince the right leaders to pursue another re-organization. Windows of opportunity open when issues gain sufficient attention to be elevated to problem status, when key personnel with similar values hold influential or critical positions, and when multiple political streams converge. Perhaps if AFSOC had defined the problem in a way that was more attractive or impactful to the key

[1] Moseley, Interview by the author.

stakeholders another transfer would have occurred. AFSOC's solution did not sway key personnel or leverage a convergence of outside political forces, and thus the CSAF decided to maintain the status quo.

This thesis sought to explain the endemic organizational instability of the Air Force rescue mission, analyzing both general trends and specific relocations. The Rescue-SOF debate, with the associated questions of organizational relocation, is not going away any time soon. Understanding the underlying dynamics of organizational instability and the drivers behind past relocation decisions is important if one hopes to shape future decisions.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

During this research I felt a strong desire to make an argument about the best location of rescue and had to work to keep opinion out of the mix and remain focused on objectively explaining organizational instability. Throughout the process, my thoughts vascillated on whether or not Rescue should reside in AFSOC or ACC. Many of the extant arguments for each are compelling. However, after examining the issue in depth, I can now say I am agnostic about where the rescue force resides. I believe the challenges we face in Rescue can be effectively addressed in AFSOC or ACC. The problem is not necessarily its organizational location, but rather the instability and the failure of repeated moves to solve long-terms problems and answer long-term questions. The relocations have typically fixed short-term organizational and funding problems, but they have neglected issues that eventually flare up as problems again at a later date.

As a rule, endemic organizational instability is not healthy, regardless of the cause of this instability. Again, the Rescue-SOF debate is not going away any time soon, suggesting the instability

of the past will continue into the future. To mitigate this trend, influential leaders across the organizational divide need to get past the myopic and emotionally-charged question of who should "own" Rescue and recognize that the conventional Air Force and SOF require similar, yet different personnel recovery capabilities. This presents a challenge, one that is not solved simply by changing patches every few years. Instead of the current focus on which organization is best, and on who should have access to what pot of money, the debate should center on objectively determining how to best develop and employ Air Force Rescue and on determining the best way to present rescue forces to combatant commanders in the future.

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