



USAF Combat Search and Rescue Recovery Forces

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Air Force personnel recovery (PR) efforts are often combined into a tailored combat search and rescue task force (CSARTF)—a proven mechanism that has significantly enhanced combat search and rescue (CSAR) operations. The size and complexity of the CSARTF depends on the mission requirements and the threat. The CSARTF typically has two elements: PR assets and augmenting assets. Included among both are dedicated aircraft, specially trained personnel and specific positions crucial to the PR mission.

A CSARTF is a mutually supporting package designed to protect the survivor on the ground before and during recovery, and the recovery force package from small arms, surface to air, air to air and air to ground threats. The assets will be tailored to meet specific CSAR requirements. The exact composition of the CSARTF varies with threats en route to, from, and in vicinity of the Isolated Personnel (IP). With proper planning, the CSARTF will be able to defeat or degrade the threat to an acceptable level of risk and enable the successful recovery of IP.

Due to changing threat conditions and/or IP status en route to the objective, the CSARTF may require numerous adjustments and further augmentation during recovery operations. As such, all of the Commander, Air Force Forces' aircraft should be prepared to be re-tasked to assist recovery operations. Additionally, the Personnel Recovery Coordination Cell (PRCC) should be prepared to request augmentation and support from the other functional/service components through the joint personnel recovery center.

DEDICATED PR FORCES

Vertical-lift Aircraft. Rescue helicopters are utilized for long range, low level, day/night marginal weather operations into hostile environments to recover distressed or IP. Missions are usually flown as multi-ship formations to provide mutual support, but may be executed with a single ship based on threat and other supporting assets available. Similarly, they may be employed as part of a larger composite force (e.g., embedded in a large strike air package) or launched in response to a PR event. Note, however, that vertical-lift assets would include both helicopters and tilt-rotor aircraft. Air Force Special Operations Forces (AFSOF) is occasionally tasked to employ tilt-rotor aircraft in support of Special Operations Command (SOCOM) PR, under the requirements of their component PRCC.

Fixed-Wing Rescue Aircraft. Fixed-wing rescue assets are another key element of PR. Their primary role is to extend the PR umbrella coverage and employ/extract Guardian Angel Recovery Teams. The depth of the battlespace and IP's location may require that helicopter refueling be conducted in a non-permissive environment. Besides aerial refueling, these assets are capable of airdropping or airlanding recovery teams and/or equipment to assist and/or recover IP. Additionally, fixed-wing rescue aircraft have an expanded communications capability, making them a natural communication relay platform, and their extended range allows movement of recovered IP over longer distances. AFSOF fixed-wing aircraft maintain comparable PR capabilities.

Guardian Angel (GA). GA is the only major weapon system that conducts all five execution tasks. GA provides recovery teams and operational support capabilities for combatant commanders. Air Force recovery teams (RT) are part of the GA weapon system. GA is an Air Force human/equipment based weapon system that provides the ground element of the PR forces and is designed to assist all five PR Execution tasks (Report, Locate, Support, Recover and Reintegrate). RT may have to deploy into uncertain or hostile environments and denied areas prior to, during, and after combat operations in support of the JFC's comprehensive PR plan. GA is a non-aircraft, equipment-based weapon system organized, equipped and trained to conduct all five PR execution tasks. GA is organized into two functional areas: Tactical Recovery Teams (TRT) and operational support.

TRT capabilities are employed by specially trained personnel to recover IP and/or sensitive equipment. TRT operators directly assist, control, enable, and/or execute operational air and space power functions in the forward battle space (AFPD 10-35). TRT operators include Combat Rescue Officers (CRO) and Pararescuemen (PJ), but may also include other specialists as required (e.g. explosive ordnance disposal). These operators employ by multiple means as either a stand-alone capability or as part of a task force to penetrate hostile or uncertain environments and denied areas. CRO/PJ operators function across the full spectrum of warfare supporting all phases of an operational plan during conventional and unconventional activities.

Rescue Mission Commander (RMC). The RMC is a distinct qualification for Airmen specifically trained in CSAR tactics, techniques, and procedures. The RMCs vested tactical control authority and responsibility include planning, locating, supporting, recovering, and reintegrating of IP; to include direct control and maneuver of supporting air, ground and maritime assets in the operational area. The RMC reports to the commander Air Force forces (COMAFFOR), or delegated authority, and communicates and coordinates the recovery effort. Combat Air Force rescue officers monitor this training qualification and exercise integration with capable assets.

Rescue Escort (RESCORT). Based on threats to the IP and the recovery force, RESCORT is an integral part of CSARTF. RESCORT aircraft provide navigation assistance, route sanitization, and armed escort for the recovery vehicle(s). In increased threat environments, this assistance significantly improves the chances of a successful recovery. Ideally, RESCORT aircraft should be tactical aircraft capable of operating in the same environment as recovery vehicles. RESCORT formations should be proficient in rendezvous procedures, escort tactics at medium and low altitudes, and defense of the rescue vehicles during mission execution.

Airborne Mission Coordinator (AMC). An AMC coordinates the flying mission for forces designated to support a specific CSAR operation. The AMC may be designated by component PRCCs or higher authority to coordinate the efforts of several assets. The AMC serves as an airborne communications and data relay between rescue forces and command elements. The E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System, though heavily tasked, is the most capable AMC platform due to its extensive communications capability and ability to oversee the air picture. Other multi-crewed assets such as the HC-130 (rescue aircraft), Navy E-2 Hawkeye, and the E-8 joint surveillance, target attack radar system are also acceptable AMC platforms. The AMC coordinates refueling of air recovery assets. He/she also keeps the recovery force elements and PRTF commander/RMC informed of all pertinent information such as threats, aborts, and EW information. The AMC advises the PRTF commander, RMC, and COMAFFOR of mission support requirements, and coordinates the designation and use of appropriate fire support coordinating measures.

On-scene Commander (OSC). The OSC is the individual who initiates rescue efforts in the objective area until rescue forces arrive. Initially, the OSC may be the pilot of any aircraft in the vicinity, including the wingman of a downed aircraft. The OSC's initial actions are to attempt to establish communication, locate and authenticate the IP, and pass essential elements of information to the AMC. The OSC role will be transferred to the RMC or as directed by the RMC or AMC as required. After transferring OSC duties to the RMC, the original OSC may remain on station in a supporting role.

AUGMENTING PR FORCES

Forward Air Controller (Airborne) (FAC [A]). The FAC (A) controls air strikes in close proximity to the IP. A FAC (A) may be able to locate and authenticate the IP before the arrival of other elements of the CSARTF and may be able to function as the OSC until the rescue forces arrive. The FAC (A) may perform OSC duties until the RMC arrives on station. The FAC (A) may also provide a current and accurate assessment of enemy activity in and around the objective area.

Air Refueling Aircraft. Multiple aircraft refuelings may be required during prolonged CSAR operations. Sequencing of assets between refueling and marshalling points should be carefully managed in order to have all rescue elements available at mission execution time. For real-time CSAR execution, refueling support requirements are relayed through the AMC to the PRCC. The PRCC will orchestrate air refueling support with the tanker coordination cell.

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Platforms. ISR platforms, whether aircraft- or space-based, possess a tremendous capability for supporting CSAR efforts, especially for detecting and locating IP, as well as monitoring threat systems in the objective area. These assets are also suited to maintaining a listening overwatch on IP and monitoring IP frequencies when an immediate recovery is not possible. Ultimately, these platforms provide commanders and CSAR forces with the situational awareness to make the necessary decisions for the successful recovery of the IP.

Space Systems. In addition to space ISR assets briefly mentioned above, other space systems provide vital communications between the CSARTF, PR forces, and IP.

Additionally, space systems enable precise navigation signals during search and recovery operations.

Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD). SEAD forces minimize the surface-to-air threat to friendly forces executing a PR mission. Integrated and interoperable communications between SEAD forces, rescue forces, and ISR platforms are critical. When assigning SEAD platforms the threat environment should be defined for all rescue forces.

Joint and/or Coalition PR Forces. Other components and/or coalition partners may assist in the PR of isolated Airmen just as Air Force PR forces assist in the recovery of the joint or coalition personnel. Joint, Service, allied, and foreign publications govern how these forces are integrated within the PR architecture. Nonetheless, it is important, to keep in mind that AF PR construct assets are part of a greater PR system and that Airmen need to work closely with joint and coalition partners to recover any IP from hostile or uncertain environments and denied areas.
