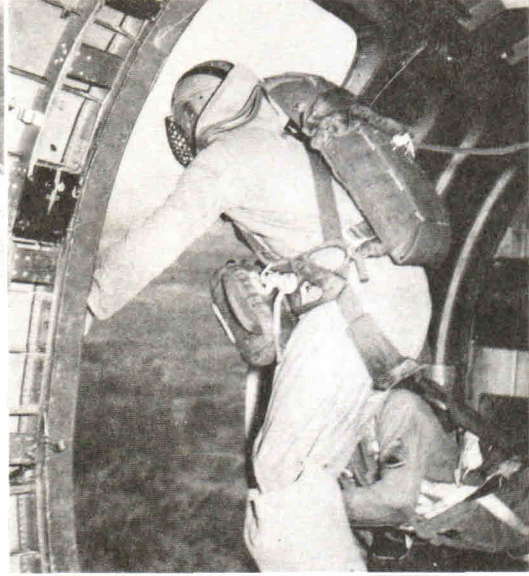




PARARESCUE

50 YEARS
PLUS





**PARARESCUE
50 YEARS
PLUS**

A COMMEMORATIVE HISTORY

FINE BOOKS PUBLISHING COMPANY

Charlotte, North Carolina



Colonel Richard T. Kight
Commander, Air Rescue Service 1946-1952

CODE OF AN AIR RESCUE MAN

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

I will be prepared at all times to perform my assigned duties quickly and efficiently, placing these duties before personal desire and comforts.

These things I do that others may live.

**Richard T. Kight
Brig. General, USAF Retired**

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge and appreciate the cooperation and assistance of all those members, family, and friends of the Pararescue Association who provided photos, tapes, orders, documents, memories, and valuable information during the preparation of this history.

This is a history of the U.S. Air Force pararescuemen and their contribution to the rescue mission, and accordingly, in most instances does not detail the participation or actions of others also involved. They, too, were important in accomplishing the mission, and without their assistance the pararescuemen could not have been successful. For this, these groups and individuals deserve our gratitude. The sole purpose of the Air Rescue Service is to save lives, and Pararescue work is but one phase of this aerial rescue team concept.

The history herein is not portrayed as complete, and represents only a general cross-section of the experiences of those men who served and the missions they accomplished. We present it in order to reflect some of the challenges, drama, excitement, fears, and courage of the men who risked so much to save others. We know there were equally important accomplishments and significant contributions of so many other pararescuemen through the years.

Seldom has there been a body of men more outwardly confident and pleased with themselves than the Pararescuemen of the United States Air Force. They were and are mercurial—not conventional—and many survive only in our memories, their equipment enshrined in museums and air parks.

Through the years there have been many upgrades in missions, tactics, and equipment to keep pace with the changes in technology. It is this evolution in training, organization, mission, and equipment which we wish to document in this history.

This book also attempts to document the pararescueman's devotion to the air rescue man's code, "That Others May Live." Pararescuemen have saved thousands of victims of various mishaps over the past fifty years. Some missions were exciting and fun; others heartbreaking even to the rescuers, but were carried out with dedication and professionalism.

Pararescuemen over the years have been commonly referred to, among other names, as paradoctors, paramedics, rescue specialists, and PJs. Because this book is not written as a chronological history, we have not attempted in all cases to refer to the moniker in use at the particular time, but rather to use the all-inclusive title Pararescueman or PJ.

We acknowledge and appreciate the vital contributions to the success of pararescue made by pararescue wives, families, and loved ones who so wholeheartedly and faithfully supported these men during the hardships imposed by long duty hours, prolonged temporary duty (TDY), and unaccompanied overseas and combat tours.

We especially acknowledge and express our gratitude and deep sympathy to those wives, children, parents, other family members, and others whose loved ones were lost while performing their duties that others may live.

DEDICATION

As pararescuemen celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of a rescue mission in Burma, it is most appropriate that we write and publish this book. It is not only a record of the profession but it is also a tribute to its members and their families. We hereby dedicate this history to those men who accepted the challenges and rewards of a pararescueman, and for one reason or another, have gone on before us.



PARARESCUE Association

P.O. Box 13351
Albuquerque, NM 87192-3351

Dear Pararescuemen, Families, and Friends:

In August 1943, Lieutenant Colonel Donald "Doc" Flickinger, Sergeant Harold Passey, and Corporal William McKenzie made a parachute jump into the foreboding jungle of Burma to rescue a group of downed airmen. This mission set in motion events that led to the formation of a unique and elite military organization. That memorable jump, which occurred over fifty years ago, led to the Pararescue Association's desire to take on the task of publishing this book in order to commemorate that event and to preserve the color, adventure, and history that has shaped the Pararescue career field ever since.

Others have written of the individual exploits of the Pararescuemen, and histories have been published about the Air Rescue Service as a whole, but this is the first attempt to record the history of Pararescue itself. Clearly, many events and developments of historical interest and importance have occurred, and the men who served witnessed this history as it unfolded. We regret not being able to obtain all the great stories of the accomplishments and happenings over the years. Some have been lost, as players are no longer with us, some cannot be told for various reasons, and others were not known by the authors.

This, then, is a people's history. Some will undoubtedly denounce this work because of its lack of footnotes, and no documentation to prove its correctness, but these are not our goals. This book is written by PJs for PJs and others interested in Pararescue. We hope our readers, on the other hand, will enjoy reading about these men and the evolution of their training, tactics, and equipment. Pararescuemen have lived without a written history far too long. Here is one which will help document who they were, what they did, and the sacrifices they made.

It is our way of marking the Golden Anniversary of our elite corps and paying tribute to those who accept the challenge of saving lives as we begin our second fifty years.

Without the dedication, time, and perseverance of those members who helped compile, write, edit, and type this history, our efforts to publish this book would never have reached fruition. Our sincere thanks to them.

William V. Vargas, President
Pararescue Association

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Chapter 1 THE NEED BECAME OBVIOUS

“Gallant is a precious word; they deserve it.”

Eric Sevareid

The development of the airplane opened up the entire planet for man to travel. But with the opportunities of flight came numerous hazards and perils. He could now span the oceans and visit vast uninhabited areas, some of which were yet to be made passable to surface travel. Yet as he flew over extremely remote and hostile areas, he learned that should his airplane fail, and even though he might survive the landing, his chances of survival and once again reaching civilization remained in question. In such instances emergency surface vehicles and ground teams were, simply and sadly, unable to travel into these remote, uninhabited areas and effect a timely rescue.

World Wars I and II greatly accelerated the numbers of airplanes flying throughout the world and with it the numbers of persons exposed to potential disaster. Proportionate to that growth was the increased value of airframes, crews, and cargo. Airframes represented technological advances of the era; crews became increasingly costly to train and possessed valuable experience; and cargo, payrolls, and classified equipment and materials, which if recovered by an enemy, could seriously affect the defense of nations. Further, in times of hostilities and conflict, it was proven that aircrews performed their missions more bravely and effectively knowing every effort would be made to recover them in the event they were disabled.

By the 1920s, aircrews were equipped with emergency parachutes, and in October 1922, U.S. Army Lieutenant Harold R. Harris bailed out of his disabled aircraft over Dayton, Ohio, becoming the first American military airman to be saved by his parachute. Nations, therefore, recognized the necessity to possess rescue capabilities, and in order to fulfill the diversity of that challenge, such a rescue operation would have to be deliverable from the sky.



Heinkel (HE-59) aircraft used by German Air Sea Rescue as early as 1935.

While many nations, including the United States and Canada, experimented with various rescue concepts, perhaps Germany was foremost in developing air rescue techniques and equipment. As

early as 1935, the Luftwaffe modified fourteen of the elder Heinkel 59 (HE-59) float planes for rescue. Medical equipment, respirators, electrically heated sleeping bags, a floor hatch with collapsible ladder, and a hoist to lift the injured were incorporated into these aircraft. Further, the Germans developed considerable early rescue procedures and equipment. Combat aircraft carried inflatable rafts and sea marking dye to make spotting of survivors more certain.

At strategic sea locations, Germany stationed large buoys or floats containing survival equipment, such as bunks, blankets, clothing, food, fresh water, and flares for four men. These buoys, however, served to save both German and British airmen alike, and were periodically checked by both nations. The decision as to whether a man would go home, or off to a prisoner of war camp, depended upon which nation reached the buoy first.

By 1941, Great Britain, which needed every pilot it could muster to protect its shores, had formed air and sea rescue units. Early in 1940, the British had depended upon pre-positioned surface vessels, and whatever operational aircraft might be available, in anticipated crash areas. But aircrew losses made it imperative that an improved rescue system be developed. As a result, a joint Royal Air Force (RAF)/Royal Navy (RN) rescue organization was established. The RAF became responsible for search activities, and the RN for making actual recoveries.

By late 1941, executive control for all air-sea rescue operations was vested in the Air Officer Commander in Chief, Coastal Command. Sir John Salmond, ex-Chief of Air Staff, was appointed Director of Air-Sea Rescue. When the United States entered the war in 1941, the problem was greatly intensified. With more men and planes, the Allies went on the offensive in Europe, and aircrews were soon flying deep into enemy territory. The U.S. Army Air Corps (AAC) accepted responsibility for aircrew recovery on land; the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard for rescue at sea. The British trained the first American rescue unit as a part of the RAF 65th Fighter Wing flying P-47s. This group flew the first “All American” rescue mission in July 1943. It remained an integral part of British forces throughout the war and eventually the U.S. Army Air Corps set up their own rescue control center in the attic of a grammar school. Its code name “Saffron Walden,” became a familiar call sign to aircrewmembers and rescue personnel throughout the theater.

Eventually the U.S. and Great Britain formulated a joint agreement whereby the United States would furnish twenty-five P-47s and their pilots specifically qualified for search and rescue work. These American flight crews were later transferred to Keesler Air Field, Mississippi, as instructors in the Emergency Rescue School then being formed. Their airplanes were equipped with droppable



P-47D used by 5th Emergency Rescue Squadron at Halesworth, England early in World War II. Note yellow stripe around engine cowling denoting rescue.

“Air Sea Rescue” agency. Individual efforts were beginning to prove the feasibility of parachuting rescuers into those remote areas which prevented rescue by other means.



PBY-1 Catalina, an early mainstay of U.S. Air Sea Rescue.

As reliable as aircraft were in the recovery of downed personnel or in penetrating crash sites, conditions often precluded their utilization. An additional capability had to be found, and that was the airborne parachutist. The first successful parachute jump had been made from a tower in 1783 by the French physicist Sebastien Lenormand. It was not until 1918 though, that a U.S. Army sergeant perfected the art of free fall parachuting from an aircraft in flight.

By 1924, the U.S. Navy required some of its parachute riggers and dirigible crewmembers to perform free fall parachute jumps. Also, in the early 1920s General Billy Mitchell arranged the first display of airborne might at Kelly Field, Texas. Six American soldiers dropped by parachute from a Martin Bomber, and less than three minutes after deploying, had assembled their weapons on the field and were ready for action. Unfortunately, the U.S. Army leadership that witnessed the feat dismissed it as a stunt, and questioned the feasibility of the operation.

However, General Mitchell’s demonstration also was witnessed by Soviet and German officials who had the foresight to accept the theory for future study. The Soviets developed parachuting into a sport activity, and by 1930, incorporated it into its military. Germany, meanwhile, undertook feverish activities to develop an airborne infantry capability into its military organization. In 1939, both countries utilized their airborne troops to spearhead assaults, thus proving the effectiveness of a parachute army. Finally awakening to reality in 1940, the United States military began an all-

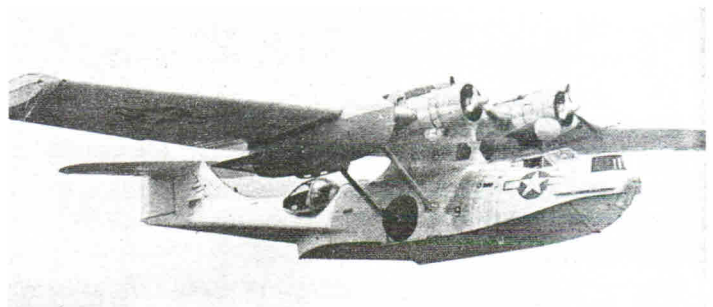
dinghies and smoke floats. The British were to furnish six Warwick bombers equipped with droppable lifeboats, and two Walrus amphibians. The U.S. Navy (USN) and U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) contributed greatly during this era by developing capabilities for water recovery and upgrading flying boat technology from the PY-4 and PY-5, to the improved high wing, twin-engine PBY-1, Catalina. The Catalina became the mainstay of search and rescue throughout World War II.

Military planners began to recognize the value of a trained and equipped, centrally controlled, worldwide, American

out program of preparedness, but much controversy raged among the branches as to which would assume command of the proposed Airborne Infantry.

(Authors’ Note: Pararescueman Jim Potter received his jump training as a member of this Parachute Test Platoon in 1939 and 1940.)

The ultimate successes of various countries’ airborne operations proved the effectiveness of the parachute as a transportation system and especially suited to rescue operations. Even after placing help on the scene though, most rescue efforts involved injured persons who not only needed medical attention but also assistance in survival and traveling back to safety. Subsequently, special emphasis also was placed upon getting the victims back to safety in such a fashion as to deliver them to definitive care in as good as, or better, physical condition than they were found. Special training was needed in the utilization of survival techniques and equipment, such as the parachute itself. After it transported an airman or a rescuer to the ground, the parachute could then further be used for survival, medical, and many other needs to help get them all back home. Only through adequate training could an individual become a qualified rescuer.



PBY Catalina carrying the AR-8 Lifeboat under its wing. Two such plywood lifeboats could be carried and dropped by parachute to survivors at sea.



B-17 carrying the A-1 Lifeboat.

By 1943, United States military began to establish emergency rescue units in other parts of the world. Some units utilized the PBY Catalinas, carrying parachute-equipped life boats under the wing. Later, B-17s were modified to carry a self-contained parachute-delivered life boat. These units operated mostly in areas presenting great water hazards; some had personnel assigned who were parachute and medical qualified.

Water rescue dominated search and rescue efforts prior to 1943, but as time went on, land rescues received increased attention. In the China-Burma-India theater (CBI) most aerial activity was over

jungle and mountain areas around the Himalaya Mountains, known as the "Hump," much of which was occupied by enemy troops. A unit composed of medical and other personnel, picked especially for their physical stamina, knowledge of the jungle, and dedication to rescuing aircrews down in the jungle, was established at the village of Chabua in eastern India in 1943. When an aircraft went down in the jungle, an element of this unit traveled overland to the crash site. Several rescue missions of this type were successfully carried out. They often used old, nearly worn-out combat aircraft and equipment, and assigned personnel served on temporary duty status.

With British experience as a guide, and supplemented by United States Army Air Force foresight and direction, an official "Air Rescue Service" continued to develop. The first American unit in the Mediterranean area consisted of five OA-10 Catalinas. These aircraft took off from the United States for Malta via South America and Africa, but since they were in such poor mechanical condition, only three made it to their final destination. Here they operated under RAF control and were instrumental in saving fifty-six lives during 1943. However, the Catalina was not designed for flying in and around the steep mountain ranges found in the Mediterranean theater. This terrain hindered its use as a viable air rescue aircraft.

Meanwhile, back in the States in 1943, about twenty-five individuals of the U.S. Army Air Force, U.S. Coast Guard, and Canadian Air Observer Schools were given parachute training at the U.S. Forest Service Smoke Jumpers School in Missoula, Montana. The First, Second, Third, and Fourth Air Forces organized base-level rescue units within the United States to provide rescue coverage over land. The Coast Guard patrolled the coastal water areas.

About half of those trained as parachutists were flight surgeons from the Second Army Air Force, headquartered at Colorado Springs, Colorado. Under the jurisdiction of that headquarters, and closely connected with this training activity, was the establishment of the Second Air Force Emergency Rescue Section at Colorado Springs, with seven strategically located control center airports. The U.S. Forest Service became an active participant in establishing these units. Smoke jumpers of the Forest Service were often part of rescue crews and aided in locating, reaching, and evacuating downed airmen. Fighting forest fires was, and remains, their main occupation, but many survivors of various disasters owe their lives to the smoke jumpers who parachuted to their aid and assisted their return.

Three paradoctors were assigned and on call twenty-four hours a day for rescue coverage of the mid-Western United States, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Canadian border, and from the Mississippi River to the western boundaries of Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, and Montana. One of the paradoctors, Captain Ernest Van Patten from Fort Dodge, Iowa, received his parachute training through the Smoke Jumpers Center and U.S. Army Airborne School at Ft. Benning, Georgia. The USCG also established rescue units with parachutists assigned, the first being at Ketchikan, Alaska.

The Canadian Air Observer School members, Owen Hargreaves and Scotty Thompson, who attended the U.S. Forest Service Smoke Jumpers School in 1943, formed the nucleus of a Canadian civilian Para Rescue team. Mr. Wilfred "Wop" May, the civilian manager of an observer and navigator training program, organized the team to provide rescue coverage for the students and others, espe-

cially those in the war effort, flying over the remote areas of north-west Canada. In June 1944, three civilian Para Rescue men were enlisted into the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and were tasked with setting up a Para Rescue School. Their first class graduated 30 April 1945. Other than for a period after World War II, their Para Rescue teams have since been actively engaged in the work of "that others may live." While American and Canadian pararescue



Captain Van Patten, a paradoctor assigned to the 2nd Air Force Emergency Rescue Section, Peterson Field, Colorado Springs, Colorado, parachutes to the aid of a downed flyer. Circa 1944.

forces have suffered the ravages of budget cuts, at various times, from both their countries' governments, both have survived, cooperated jointly on SAR missions, and shared new ideas and knowledge. They even share the competitive spirit in international exercises and competitions.

In October 1943, the newly activated 1st Emergency Rescue Squadron (ERS) began to assemble and in February 1944 departed for Casablanca, Morocco. By the first of April, the unit was established and operating its nine OA-10s, three L-5s, and three B-25s. The 1st ERS remained in the Mediterranean area until after the invasion of Southern France when it was ordered to return to the United States for possible utilization in the Asia-Pacific Theater. By the time it returned, the 1st ERS had saved 244 downed aircrew personnel.

Rescue was accorded greater emphasis on 27 January 1943, when General Nathan F. Twining, 13th Air Force Commander, and fourteen companions went down at sea on a flight from Guadalcanal to Espirito Santo. The ensuing operation involved U.S. Army Air Corps, Navy and Marine aircraft, and Navy vessels. After six days at sea, all personnel were rescued by a Navy PBY off the New Hebrides Islands. The search had been so extensive, however, that combat resources had been diverted from the war effort. The commanders began to see the need for a dedicated rescue force.

Thus the 2nd Emergency Rescue Squadron was activated in the Pacific, and by September 1944, up to a strength of sixteen Catalinas. Soon the 3rd Emergency Rescue Squadron arrived and

