

## 33 RESCUE SQUADRON



### MISSION

### LINEAGE

33 Air Rescue Squadron constituted, 17 Oct 1952  
Activated, 14 Nov 1952  
Discontinued, 18 Mar 1960  
Organized, 18 Jun 1961  
Redesignated 33 Air Recovery Squadron, 1 Jul 1965  
Redesignated 33 Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, 8 Jan 1966  
Inactivated, 1 Oct 1970  
Activated, 1 Jul 1971  
Redesignated 33 Air Rescue Squadron, 1 Jun 1989  
Redesignated 33 Rescue Squadron, 1 Feb 1993

### STATIONS

Kadena AB, Okinawa, 14 Nov 1952  
Naha AB, Okinawa, 14 Apr 1955–18 Mar 1960  
Naha AB, Okinawa, 18 Jun 1961–1 Oct 1970  
Kadena AB, Okinawa, 1 Jul 1971

### ASSIGNMENTS

2 Air Rescue Group, 14 Nov 1952  
3 Air Rescue Group, 20 Sep 1955  
2 Air Rescue Group, 18 Jun 1957  
Air Rescue Service, 24 Jun 1958–18 Mar 1960  
Air Rescue (later, Aerospace Rescue and Recovery) Service, 18 Jun 1961

Pacific Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Center (later, 41 Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Wing), 1 Apr 1967–1 Oct 1970  
41 Aerospace Rescue and Recovery (later, 41 Rescue and Weather Reconnaissance) Wing, 1 Jul 1971  
Air Rescue Service, 1 Aug 1989  
18 Operations Group, 1 Feb 1993

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Twentieth Air Force, 14 Nov 1952–1 Mar 1955  
3 Air Rescue Group, 1 Mar–19 Sep 1955  
Pacific Air Forces, 24 Jun 1958–17 Mar 1959  
Detachment 2, Air Rescue Service [Pacific Recovery Operations Center], 18 Mar 1959–18 Mar 1960  
Detachment 1, Air Rescue Service [Pacific Recovery Operations Center], 18 Jun–8 Oct 1961  
Pacific Air Rescue Center [later, Pacific Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Center], 8 Oct 1961–31 Mar 1967)

### **WEAPON SYSTEMS**

SA-16, 1952–1960  
SH-19, 1952–1960  
SC-47, 1952–1956  
SA-16 (later, HU-16), 1961–1968  
SH-19 (later, HH-19), 1961–1964  
HH-43, 1964–1966  
C-54, 1966  
HH-3, 1968–1970  
HC-97, 1968–1969  
HH-43, 1971–1972  
HH-3, 1971–1975, 1982  
HC-130, 1972–1989  
HH-53, 1975–1982  
CH-3, 1982

### **COMMANDERS**

Maj Malcolm E. Frazee, 14 Nov 1952  
Lt Col Raleigh C. Smith, 7 May 1954  
Lt Col Donald R. Calof, 6 Jul 1956  
Maj Horatio L. Holton Jr., 1 Jul 1958  
Maj Bill C. Musick, 25 Jul 1958  
Maj Horatio L. Holton Jr., Oct 1958  
Lt Col Clyde W. Bradley Jr., 11 Nov 1958-18 Mar 1960  
Lt Col Ernest M. Mcgee, 18 Jun 1961  
Lt Col Robert P. Ash Sr., 8 Nov 1962  
Lt Col Kenneth J. Mask, 13 Dec 1963

Col Donald E. Godbey, 24 Feb 1964  
Lt Col Roy E. Jacobsen, 28 May 1966  
Lt Col Anthony Saenz Jr., 15 Jul 1968  
Lt Col Ronald L. Ingraham, 14 Aug 1968  
Lt Col Donald G. Simpson, 23 Apr-1 Oct 1970  
Lt Col Roy L. Crawford, 1 Jul 1971  
Lt Col Ned L. Cagle, 18 Nov 1972  
Lt Col James R. Lisko, 12 Jun 1974  
Lt Col James L. Butera, 11 Jul 1975  
Col Ryland R. Dreibelbis, 15 Jul 1977  
Col John H. Denham, 31 May 1979  
Lt Col Peter J. Connelly, 7 Jan 1981  
Lt Col Walter R. Peacock Jr., 9 Nov 1982  
Lt Col George H. Dash Jr., 13 Jun 1984  
Lt Col David M. Myers, 24 Jun 1986  
Lt Col Thomas A. Samples, 24 Nov 1987  
Lt Col James C. Johnson, Unkn  
Lt Col Herbert R. Smith, 1 Jun 1993  
Lt Col Michael J. Iltis, 26 May 1995  
Lt Col Derek Wheeler, 25 May 1996  
Lt Col Mark Bracich, 8 Jun 1998  
Lt Col Michael A. Corbett, 18 Jan 2000  
Lt Col Neil R. Elton, 26 Nov 2001  
Lt Col Billy D. Thompson, 29 May 2003  
Lt Col Gary W. Henderson, 17 May 2005

## **HONORS**

### **Service Streamers**

Korean Theater

### **Campaign Streamers**

Vietnam

Vietnam Advisory

Vietnam Defensive

Vietnam Air

Vietnam Air Offensive

Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase II

### **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

### **Decorations**

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards

1 Jul 1956–31 Dec 1958

15 Jun 1964–31 May 1965

1 Jun 1965–30 Jun 1966  
1 Jul 1966–31 May 1968  
1 Jun 1969–30 Sep 1970  
1 Jun 1973–31 May 1975  
1 Sep 1975–1 May 1977  
16 Jul 1977–16 Jul 1979  
17 Jul 1979–15 Jun 1981  
1 Apr 1984–31 Mar 1986  
1 Apr 1987–31 Mar 1988  
1 Jun 1991–31 May 1993  
1 Jun 1993–31 Aug 1994  
1 Sep 1995–31 Aug 1997  
1 Oct 1998–30 Sep 2000  
1 Oct 2000–30 Sep 2002  
1 Oct 2002–30 Sep 2004

Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation

1 Jul 1967–26 Jul 1969

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm

1 Apr 1966–17 Jan 1967

#### **EMBLEM**





33 Rescue Squadron emblem: On a Blue disc a Yellow crown garnished Red in the top of the disc, a Blue cross edged White and surmounted by a Green footprint bendwise in dexter base and a stylized White seagull surmounting a Light Blue representation of water in sinister base. (Approved, 21 Mar 1978 and modified in 1994; replaced emblems approved, 27 Apr 1960 and 7 Aug 1953. Approved, 21 Mar 1978)

#### **MOTTO**

THAT OTHERS MAY LIVE

#### **OPERATIONS**

Search, rescue and recovery, 1952–1960, 1961–1970, 1971–, including Vietnam, 1965–1967;

following the seizure of the *USS Pueblo* by North Korea, 29 Jan–16 Sep 1968; and search efforts and salvage operations, Sep–Oct 1983, after a Soviet fighter aircraft shot down South Korean airliner KAL 007.

18 Mar 53 The 33d AR Squadron launched SA-16, H-19, and SC-47 aircraft to rescue survivors of the Japanese ship *Ryosho Maru*, which had run aground on the small island of Tori Shima near Okinawa. ARS personnel, aided by United States Army personnel, rescued 31 of the 38 personnel aboard the ill-fated ship.

The 33d AR Squadron evacuated 29 crewmen from the Japanese vessel *Zenko Maru*, which had foundered on the Tori Shima reef. Captain Herbert L. Mattox, Jr., piloting an SH-19, later received the 1959 Cheney Award as a result of this rescue. 19 Oct 1959

17-18 Aug 1963 A ferry, the *Midori-Maru*, with 250 persons aboard capsized 15 miles west of Naha AB, Okinawa. The 33d AR Squadron RCC coordinated the rescue effort, which involved HU-16 and HH-19 aircraft from the 33d Squadron. At first light on 18 August the helicopters lined up 75 yards apart at 300 feet above sea level and swept the entire area. In all, a total of 106 survivors were rescued by surface craft, and 38 were rescued by helicopters from the several military services.

In accordance with the Joint Chiefs of Staff directive in May, directing the Air Force to send search and rescue units to Southeast Asia, two ARS HH-43Bs, their crews and mechanics, were sent from the 33d Air Rescue Squadron at Naha Air Station, Okinawa, to Bien Hoa. Because of the Yankee Team rescue requirements, they were diverted and rerouted to Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base on the Thai-Laos border. Arrangements also were made to have two U.S. Marine H-34s placed on alert at Khe Sanh in northern South Vietnam whenever a Yankee Team mission flew over Laos. Simultaneously, the 33d Air Rescue Squadron at Naha sent two HU-16Bs to Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base to perform as airborne rescue control ships during search and rescue missions.

14 Mar 66 HU-16 #51-0071, assigned to the 33d ARR Squadron, responded to F-4 crewmen downed in the Gulf of Tonkin: PLUTO ONE, F-4C 64-0740, Maj J. Peerson, pilot, and Capt L.C. Bryant copilot, both recovered. Captain David Westenbarger landed the HU-16 near the wet crewmen, and shore batteries opened fire and hit the aircraft. The crew abandoned the aircraft and it sank. The six survivors, four crewmembers and the crew of PLUTO ONE were picked up by a U.S. Navy helicopter. Two of the aircrew, Airmen First Class Robert Hilton and James Pleiman, lost their lives. Captain Donald Price, the navigator, aided some of the survivors to safety aboard Navy helicopters and narrowly avoided capture himself. Captain Price later received the Air Force Cross.

4 Aug-5 Aug 1968 Late at night, the 33d ARR Squadron was alerted that a Japanese fishing vessel, the *Miya Maru*, was sinking in the East China Sea with 12 crewmen aboard. An HU-16 was dispatched, and two pararescuemen and a survival kit were parachuted to the survivors. The HU-16 alerted a surface ship, which picked up the sailors and the pararescuemen.

Some Albatrosses of the 33ARRS at Naha Air Base, Okinawa, played an important part in the MERCURY and GEMINI space flights flying "splashdown" alerts over the Western Pacific. Committed to the effort was a mix of HC-97, SC-54, and HU-16B aircraft whose duties were search, Pararescuemen drops, radio relay, and if necessary, astronaut retrieval in open seas.

23 Oct 78 The 33d ARR Squadron assisted in the rescue of 19 persons from a sinking Indonesian lumber vessel offshore from Luzon, Republic of the Philippines.

HH-53C 69-5787: Ops, Feb 1979, 33 ARRS, Kadena AB, Japan, 4/5 killed; 1st helicopter trans-Pacific flight (lead), 1970; MRB struck drogue during aerial refueling, tail rotor pylon separated due to severe vibration, aircraft crashed into sea.

A C-130 from the 17th Special Operations Squadron and an HH-3 from the 33d Rescue Squadron, both based at Kadena Air Base, Japan, responded to a call from the USS Blue Ridge in July, and medically evacuated a sailor from the ship to Okinawa for treatment. 1992

In Afghanistan, Mercy Missions are a Part of War The 33Expeditionary Rescue Squadron is the elite of the military's helicopter crews, trained to carry commandos behind enemy lines and retrieve pilots shot down in combat. But in Afghanistan, those are missions they are rarely called on to perform. So instead, U.S. commanders have drafted them into the effort to win the support of the Afghan people. Specialists in flying over dangerous terrain on moonless nights and in foul weather, the Air Force crews offer ordinary Afghans in isolated villages an extraordinary service that the Taliban and al Qaeda insurgents cannot - a fast ride to a good hospital. In Afghanistan, mercy missions are a part of war.

04/18/2007 KANDAHAR, Afghanistan -- Capt. Josh Shonkwiler flew fast between jagged peaks, ignoring the automated voice in his headphones that emphatically chanted, "Low Altitude," and trying not to picture the little girl lying gravely wounded in the back of his helicopter. Or her older brother, who was on the next stretcher, his intestines held in place by a plastic bag taped to his abdomen. Capt. Shonkwiler tried not to think of the dozens of other people he and his Air Force medical-evacuation crew had picked up over the weeks they had been at war. "I've got kids of my own -- I don't want to see that," the 32-year-old Albuquerque, N.M., native said, after landing the helicopter outside the trauma ward at the coalition hospital at Kandahar Airfield. Capt. Shonkwiler and the rest of the 33Expeditionary Rescue Squadron are the elite of the military's helicopter crews, trained to carry commandos behind enemy lines and retrieve pilots shot down in combat. But in Afghanistan, those are missions they are rarely called on to perform.

So instead, U.S. commanders have drafted them into the effort to win the support of the Afghan people. Specialists in flying over dangerous terrain on moonless nights and in foul weather, the Air Force crews offer ordinary Afghans in isolated villages an extraordinary service that the Taliban and al Qaeda insurgents cannot -- a fast ride to a good hospital. In just over a year, the 33 and its fellow squadrons have notched more than 400 saves, recording each one

with a desert brown foot painted on their Pave Hawk helicopters. Of those, 37% have been Afghan soldiers or police and another 20% Afghan civilians.

Almost all of the rest have been coalition soldiers or contractors. It's an expensive ambulance service. The Pave Hawks cost more than \$15 million apiece, with special infrared equipment that turns the blackest night into lime-green day and allows them to fly when regular Army medevac helicopters are grounded. Training each pilot costs another \$1 million. But the military sees the rescue missions as a powerful weapon in a war that's as much over villagers as it is over villages. Saving the life of someone's child or spouse is "one of the biggest rounds we can fire," says Lt. Gen. Gary North, the top Air Force commander for the Middle East and Southwest Asia. "That's a story they'll tell forever."

Capt. Shonkwiler and his men prefer to forget. Day after day, they take off empty and return full, doing their best to block out the images of the people they picked up along the way. The crews carry walkie-talkies wherever they go and are required to be airborne no more than 30 minutes after they get an alert. Since they often fly at night, Capt. Shonkwiler and his co-pilot, Capt. Joe Epperson, were asleep in their modular barracks at the Kandahar base when the call came at noon on a Saturday last month. While the rest of the crew fired up the helicopter, Capt. Shonkwiler and a reporter raced down the taxiway to the command post, where Army Capt. Gema Robles was trying to make sense of the sketchy radio reports from a Canadian convoy. The first word was that a roadside bomb had injured two adults and a child. The child, she told Capt. Shonkwiler, had suffered abdominal wounds, leaving organs exposed.

"They're pretty badly hurt," Capt. Robles warned him. The injuries sounded serious enough that Lance Nussbaum, the squadron's 36-year-old flight surgeon from Great Falls, Mont., jumped aboard to help the crew's medic, Tech. Sgt. Roy Gomez, 30, a San Antonio, Texas, emergency medical technician. All three patients were on stretchers; only two could fit in the back of the Pave Hawk. "Doc, you go out and figure out who the worst two are," Capt. Shonkwiler instructed Dr. Nussbaum. The other litter would have to go in the escort helicopter routinely sent along to protect the medevac crew from ground attacks. The flight lasted less than 15 minutes. The Canadian troops had taken the wounded from the scene of the blast to a nearby patrol base, where they popped a purple-smoke grenade to mark the dirt landing zone. The pilots' view of the landing zone was blocked by the helicopter's steep upward angle. So Airman 1st Class Ryan Ballinger, the 24-year-old gunner, leaned out the left-side window. He and Staff Sgt. Brian Stamey, the 32-year-old flight engineer on the right side, counted down from 10 to zero to let the pilots know when the wheels were going to touch the ground.

Dr. Nussbaum and Sgt. Gomez ducked their heads under the whirling blades and trotted toward a waiting Canadian medic. It was worse than they had been told. A suicide bomber had detonated his explosives-packed car next to a Canadian convoy on Highway 1, a mile north of a village called Didar. The explosion had left a Canadian soldier with burns on his wrists and an Afghan man with shrapnel in his chest. But Dr. Nussbaum quickly determined that the most critical cases were a 12-year-old boy eviscerated by metal fragments and a girl, perhaps 6, who, it turned out, was the boy's sister. The shrapnel had torn into her throat and punched a hole in her chest. The Canadian medic, her fingers visible through her torn surgical gloves, stroked the girl's hand and cheek, as if to gently wake her from a nightmare. Attached to a strap that secured the girl to the oversized stretcher was a white tag. Written on it: "Girl is breathing



erratically" and "Patient is cold." Marked in purple ink on the girl's forehead were the child-size doses of morphine she had received.

Two burly Canadian soldiers slid her litter into the rear compartment, next to her brother's. The boy wore a Muslim skullcap decorated in red, blue, yellow and green imitation gems. Dried blood caked his face and arm. Every few minutes during the flight he turned his head and stared as Dr. Nussbaum and Sgt. Gomez pressed air into his sister's lungs with a plastic bulb. The girl drifted in and out of consciousness, a look of alarm on her face when she briefly opened her eyes. Dr. Nussbaum raised the tinted eye shield on his helmet so she could see his face, hoping to soothe her panic.

The ambulance was waiting when the helicopter touched down outside the Canadian-run field hospital at Kandahar Airfield, and Dr. Nussbaum and Sgt. Gomez escorted their patients inside to brief the emergency-room doctors. The flight crew went to the chow hall and discussed the mission over Salisbury steaks and green beans. Capt. Epperson, a rangy 26-year-old from Chattanooga, Tenn., said he avoids seeing or thinking about the patients he risks his life to save.

"I don't look back," he said. Later he explained: "I just want to focus on my job and remain emotionally detached. I hate saying it like that because it makes it seem like I don't care. But the best thing I can do is fly fast." That afternoon, Capt. Shonkwiler broke his own rule and visited the hospital to check on the children. "I'm just not good with blood and guts," he says. "It's not my job to go out and kill people. It's my job to go out and save people." Surgeons were stitching up the boy's abdomen. Within days he was sitting in a wheelchair. Under the bed next to him were a helmet and blast blanket in case the hospital came under rocket attack. His sister died on the way to the operating table.

The car bomb's shock wave had damaged one of the major blood vessels off her aorta. "There wasn't much we could do," said Cdr. Dennis Filips, the Canadian surgeon. Days later, the children's parents hadn't shown up. Perhaps they didn't know where their children were. Perhaps they couldn't find a way to get there. Perhaps they, too, were dead. Airman Ballinger couldn't stop thinking about the boy and his sister. That evening, he called his parents in South Bend, Ind.

Airmen and HH-60G Pave Hawk rescue helicopters assigned to the 33 Expeditionary Rescue Squadron at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, on Nov. 27 recovered the bodies of three civilians killed when their MI-8 helicopter crashed four days earlier in the remote mountains of eastern Afghanistan. Agence France Press reported Nov. 27 that the three victims were believed to be Ukrainian nationals flying a chartered mission for a company called Airfreight Gulf in support of Supreme Global Services Solutions, a Netherlands-based catering and logistics contractor supporting NATO's mission in Afghanistan. The helicopter presumably went down due to poor weather conditions. 2009

Air Force Identifies Airman Killed in Pave Hawk Crash TSgt. Mark A. Smith, 30, a flight engineer with the 33 Rescue Squadron at Kadena AB, Japan, died last week when his HH-60 Pave Hawk rescue helicopter crashed in Okinawa's Central Training Area, announced Kadena officials. "Smitty was a total professional and true warrior," said Lt. Col. Pedro Ortiz, 33RQS commander, in the base's Aug. 10 release "He led by example and was wise beyond his young age of 30,"

said Ortiz. Smith, a 13-year airman, was a native of Bakersfield, Calif. He joined the Air Force in July 2000 after graduating high school, states the release. He arrived at Kadena in the fall of 2011, subsequently deploying twice to Afghanistan where he participated in "numerous" life-saving rescue missions, according to the release. "Team Kadena has lost a hero," said Brig. Gen. James Hecker, Kadena's 18th Wing commander. "Our hearts are with Smitty's family, friends and loved ones," he said. Emergency responders rescued the three other airmen involved in the Aug. 5 mishap; they received medical care. The cause of the crash is under investigation. 2013

Welsh Awards Distinguished Flying Crosses at Kadena to five members of the 33 Rescue Squadron for their heroism in the air during a grueling and dangerous rescue mission in Afghanistan in 2012. Recognized by Welsh on Aug. 21 for their intrepid actions were: Capt. Michael H. Kingry, Capt. Gavin H. Johnson, 1st Lt. Matthew M. Pfarr, TSgt. Scott D. Lagerveld, and SrA. Robert G. Wells. These airmen were crewmembers of "Pedro 83" and "Pedro 84," two HH-60G rescue helicopters operating out of Bagram Airfield on Aug. 4, 2012. During a 7.5 hour, 320-mile mission on that day, they rescued six wounded New Zealand soldiers, along with an Afghan soldier, and Afghan national, in mountainous terrain while under direct enemy fire. They also enabled the return with honor of two coalition members killed in action. Welsh said it was an honor to recognize these airmen in front of their peers, noting that they embodied the spirit of airmen by coming to the aid of others under the most difficult of circumstances. "This is what they do," said Welsh. 2013

Det 1 Osan AB, ROK

Det 2 Kunsan AB, ROK

---

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES

Created: 13 Jul 2024

Updated:

Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency, U.S. Air Force, Maxwell AFB, Alabama.

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.