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56th RQS Pararescuemen

Ready to answer the call

48th Medical Group team

Continuing excellent care downrange



PLUS: Weather notification  Military child coalition

ON THE COVER:

Aerial Gunner Tech. Sgt. Mark Godwin, 56th Rescue Squadron, conducts a pre-flight check on an HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter, here.

The check helps identify hazards and potential problems before the mission Oct. 18.

(Photo by Airman John Easterling)

Rescue 56

Newest addition ever ready for the call

STORY AND PHOTO BY SENIOR AIRMAN KRISTI EMLER
48TH PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF WRITER

Pararescuers – or PJs - are a small, elite subset of the overall United States Air Force. There are roughly 360 PJs Air Force wide, in comparison to the Navy's 1,000 SEALs, and the Army's 10,000 Special Forces. This relatively small team has enormous responsibility.

The mission of a PJ with the 56th Rescue Squadron here is personnel recovery with emergency medical response capabilities. They deploy air, land and sea tactics in both peacetime and combat environments to provide trauma medical care for injured personnel on both fixed and rotary wing aircraft. A mission for the 56th RQS usually requires an HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter crew consisting of two pilots, an aerial gunner, a flight engineer, and two PJs. The numbers fluctuate depending on the complexity of the mission.

"If you like a physical and mental challenge, this is the job for you," said Staff Sgt. Kipran "Kip" Wise, a PJ with the 56th RQS, referring to the constant physical training in extreme conditions PJs conduct on a regular basis.

No stranger to pain, Sergeant Wise has broken his leg and wrist during training within a three year time span. Operational risk management is a major focus in PJ training. Constant risk management evaluation, coupled with protective equipment like helmets, goggles and gloves, are some of the ways PJs help prevent injuries and mishaps.

Sergeant Wise accomplished his recent training in Spain, the Sierra Nevada mountains and Austria. A seasoned veteran, having previously deployed to Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Iraq and Turkey, this Pasadena, Calif., native has certainly accomplished his share of missions within the last ten years. The number of missions a PJ conducts varies upon duty location—being at

the right place at the right time.

Maintaining certifications in numerous areas, like emergency trauma medical skills, diving, flying, and jumping from a HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter, requires constant training.

"We are trained on the Jaws of Life and had to use them on a recent mission in Iceland during the rescue of two individuals whose car had fallen 100 feet into a crevasse," said Sergeant Wise. "It took the team five hours to extricate the injured occupants."

"Bringing someone back to their families after having stabilized them is one of the most rewarding experiences," continued Sergeant Wise.

In June the 56th RQS transitioned from the 85th Group at Naval Air Station Keflavik, Iceland, to the 48th Operations Group here.

Part of the squadron's transition includes adapting to the many changes, like operating in cold weather conditions in Iceland to preparing for desert environments in upcoming Air and Space Expeditionary cycles. The differences in training include practicing desert tactics in an open terrain, higher altitude operations and high angle rescue capabilities.

"Finding new training locations within the United Kingdom for flying and jumping has proven to be a challenge with the transition," said Senior Airman Kristofer Abel, a 56th RQS PJ, who arrived at RAF

Lakenheath five months ago.

Also, as of Oct. 1, the 56th RQS is no longer required to maintain alert duties in Iceland. Sitting alert is a 24 hour, 365 day a year job that previously required on-call members to respond to any emergency rescue. "Last year alone we performed five rescues," said Master Sgt. Kenneth Howk, the squadron's pararescue superintendent.

Wanna be a PJ?

In contrast to other military branches, pararescuers receive specialty training at the start of their career, instead of over a ten year duration. Training consists of two years of pipeline training, then an additional eight schools for each specialty in seven locations. The starting point is the pararescue indoctrination course at Lackland AFB, Texas, consisting of over 10 weeks of extensive swimming, running, weight training and calisthenics to prepare for the demands of the PJ lifestyle and follow-on training. The pass rate for this course is twenty percent.

Think you have what it takes to be a PJ? For more information, contact your career field advisor for cross-training opportunities, or call the 56th RQS to talk to a Liberty Wing PJ about their experiences.

A crew from the 56th Rescue Squadron conducts pre-flight checks on an HH-60 G Pave Hawk helicopter before the day's training mission Monday.