

Pararescue to be an Aircrew Operations career field or an Aircrew Protection career field?

Aircrew or not aircrew?

A summary of the historical background relevant to answering the question

The Pararescue specialty although always being connected with the operations career group¹ has had a career field² functional (or utilization) designation that moved from Aircrew Protection in 1975 to Aircrew Operations and moved back in 1993 to Aircrew Protection. It is the specific occupation classification description more so than the AFSC's career group and career field designates that identifies the mandatory qualifications of the specialty all members awarded the specialty must meet. Compelling the undergoing of training for such full-time qualification requiring competent order (Aeronautical Order for aircrew and parachutist duties and M-series orders for diving duty) necessitates intent most, if not all, personnel awarded the AFSC will frequently engage in doing and be required to perform these duties frequently and regularly. Much of the mandatory classification qualification requirements are traceable back to 1947 and it quickly being realized the mere fact an individual was a qualified jumper didn't necessarily make him a good candidate to perform Pararescue duties.³

The operation utilization of Pararescue personnel since 1947 is to be the final link to the survivors and evaders by penetrating by parachute or helicopter insertion/extraction (landing, hoist, fast rope, rope rappel, rope ladder and low & slow) to the remote austere and often isolated on-the-ground incident site. The by parachute or helicopter insertion/extraction nature of being there to be the final link most often requires making technical decisions of the feasibility of employing to the ground to assist survivors and injured once the mission commander or aircraft commander decides somebody is needed to penetrate into the incident site on the ground is needed.⁴ Being the final link making technical decisions of the feasibility of employing to the ground to assist survivors, evaders and the injured to save lives rather than recover bodies involves performing in-flight duties other crewmembers on aircraft lack the training, qualifications and experience to do.

The USAF Pararescue Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) originates with the Air Rescue Service officially requesting Specification Serial Number (SSN) for its newly developed survival-medical capability in its land rescue teams and parachute rescue teams in 1947.⁵ A new occupational specialty assignment of SSN 3383 was the outcome. The only training and qualification differing the Air Rescue Service land rescue SSN 3383 from the parachute rescue team SSN 3383 was the obtaining and sustaining military (airborne) parachutist qualifications. In 1950, the U.S. Army transformed SSN codes into Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) codes.

The newly established United States Air Force transformed the SSN 3383 code into the 921X1 Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) effective 15 May 1951. The P-prefix distinguished the Air Rescue Service's enlisted "parachute rescue team" members from its enlisted "ground rescue team" members. At this time both the land and parachute rescue teams are unique to the Air Rescue Service. In December 1952, the Air Rescue Service eliminated its land rescue teams citing improvements in helicopter performance and reliability had made land rescue teams unnecessary. This results in a revision of the 921X1 AFSC. Effective with AFR 35-492 dated 30 June 1953 the 921X1 AFSC separates into three new AFSCs of Rescue and Survival (P923X0), Survival Training and Personnel Equipment Specialist.⁶ The "land rescue team" members holding the 921X1 AFSC are reclassified into Survival Training Instructors and Personnel Equipment Specialists.

When the Aircrew Protection Career Field was authorized on 31 October 1953 by AFR 35-492 it included the P923X0 Pararescue career field (AFSC).⁷ Aircrew became a qualification requirement effective August 1956. SCUBA (combat diver) became a classification qualification requirement effective 1 March 1963. The AFSC became Pararescue/Recovery and concurrently career group moved from aircrew protection to Aircrew Operations as 115XO effective 31 May 1975. Military Free Fall/High Glide Ratio parachute became a classification qualification requirement effective 1985. The AFSC moved back into the Aircrew Protection Career Group as 1T2X0 effective 1 November 1993. The DOD occupation subgroup for Pararescue given in the Air Force Enlisted Classification Directory has remained 105000 (aircrew, ref DOD1312.-1) since 1956.

The 30 Jul 56 – 3 August 1956 ARS Commanders conference gives the first clear and concise documentation of the Pararescue AFSC being valued as an aircrew asset but concurrently warning being aircrew cannot be at the expense of diluting the surface mission need capability Pararescue exists to provide.

“Deletion of Aeromedics:

I would like to direct your attention to the new ARSM 50-1 with respect to use of Pararescue as crewmembers. Specifically this relates to participation in normal aircrew training. The new training manual lists the training requirements necessary to insure proficiency in performing aircrew member duties. It will be necessary for the pararescue man to participate in aircrew training to an extent that insures proficiency in hoist operation, delivery of MA-1 Sea Rescue Kits, and other prescribed duties. However, since he has a heavy alert schedule and extensive quarterly training for ground training, Pararescue training, and field training, it will be manifestly impossible for him to participate in all aircrew training. He should participate to the extent necessary to demonstrate proficiency in his aircrew duties, but should not be required to shoot twenty successive water landings or to fly extended night navigation check rides.

Basically there will be little or no change in his job. He has always been available and frequently used for all sorts of missions in any type of aircraft. This continues except that now he is the only one available and he will get paid for it. On every rescue effort it will be necessary to depend on him to establish that final link to the survivors, whether it be by hoist, landing, raft, overland, or by parachute. His training must be so controlled that it encompasses all these varied activities, and it must not concentrate on one aspect at the neglect of another. In short, the mission can be summarized as searching for survivors, delivering the Pararescue man to them by the most expeditious means, and then supporting and assisting him in their care and recovery.”

The operational policies and concepts of operations strongly encouraging employing Pararescue from the aircraft to perform duties of aiding survivors and evaders has become compromised by reluctance of rated crewmembers to make risky decisions as the pararescue personnel crewmembers on the aircraft is felt to be “their” safe operation of the aircraft asset and responsibility. Safe operation of the aircraft responsibilities certainly-so rests with the pilot, however the responsibility for the safe dropping of the parachutist rest with the Pararescue Team leader and his appointed jumpmaster” once the mission commander or aircraft commander

determines determine somebody is needed to penetrate into the incident site on the ground to aid and assist survivors and evaders. The demarcation of operational risk responsibilities and accountability since 1947 is the mission commander and/or aircraft commander makes the decision a course of action is needed and the PJ Team leader makes the technical decision if the course of action is feasible. Once employed out of the aircraft safe operations on the ground is owned by the Pararescue Team leader as these activities are no longer connected to safe operation of the aircraft and if the aircraft is a helicopter it may not be able to hold position to provide immediate extraction of the Pararescue personnel employed to accomplish surface activities.

As flight characteristics (range, airspeed, high elevations, weather capabilities) of helicopters improved; so did the reluctance to consider employing Pararescue personnel to the surface. The ground combat environment was considered a hazard avoided as a helicopter can always hover over the survivor or evader making Pararescue surface operations impractical even though there were frequent numbers of occasions when the mission would have gone better had the PJ been allowed to deploy to help the survivor get to and get on the hoist. The attempted June 13, 1968 combat rescue effort for First lieutenant Lance P. Sijan (Prisoner of War, posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor) is the most prominent example. Although the rescue helicopter had been shot-off on its first approach to Sijan's position, it returned and hovers over Sijan's position and receiving no fire for 30 minutes with Sijan on the radio saying he could get on the penetrator unassisted. After twenty-minutes in the hover trying to hoist up a survivor known to be injured and obviously having difficulty getting on the penetrator the PJ began requesting to be lowered. Thirty-three minutes into the hover enemy troops appeared nearby. The hovering rescue helicopter came under heavy fire and was forced to withdraw.⁸

The minutes of the 19-25 February 1974 Pararescue Combat Readiness conference also officially documents pilots having a reluctance to employ and support Pararescue as the final link to survivor or to recover materiel regardless of the situation. While some of the reluctance is attributable to pilots/aircraft commanders having unwillingness to accept risks of failure should something go wrong, the reluctance is also assignable to rated officer leadership not being adequately qualified and given experience preparation to make such surface operational environment mission command decisions. The making the technical feasibility decisions is a critical in-flight crew coordination task. Some of the justification for the 31 May 1975 Pararescue AFSC career group designation change was hopes to give stronger stature of being the professional crewmember having the aircrew duties of actively participating in making the technical feasibility decision of employing the Pararescue crewmember out of the aircraft to the surface to aid and assist survivors, evaders, and the injured. This hope eventually proved to be a false hope as effort to put the enlisted Pararescue AFSC back into the Aircrew Protection career group began in May 1989⁹ and the change happened effective 1 November 1993.

The history of the approval of and subsequent development US Coast Guard Helicopter Swimmer program during the 1980s provides useful capability and utilization comparisons. The obtaining such crewmember capability certainly accumulated sufficient evidence as to why aircraft and specifically helicopters need capability of a proficiently trained and adeptly capable person (crewmember) to be the final link to aid and assist ambulatory and uninjured survivors in getting on lowered by hoist rescue devices such as the forest penetrator, rescue basket, or horse collar.

Coast Guard helicopter crews responding to rescue the score or so survivors of the sunk S.S. Marine Electric on February 12, 1983 watched hypothermic and exhausted survivors being unable to get into the rescue basket lowered by hoist from hovering helicopters to retrieve them. Only 3 of 34 survivors were rescued. This resulted in the US Congress directing the US Coast Guard to have a helicopter rescue swimmer capability on its helicopters. More telling of the significance of this tragedy is the official U.S. Coast Guard, Seventeenth District, M/V Prinsendam A fire Gulf of Alaska; SAR Case Study, 3 February 1981 recommended the US Coast Guard develop and implement a helicopter rescue swimmer capability for its helicopters as a result of the lives saved by two USAF Pararescuemen employed into the water to assist survivors being instrumental in the no-loss-of life during this rescue. It wasn't until March 5, 1985, almost five years after the greatest sea rescue of all time (4-5 October 1980) that the U.S. Coast Guard had its first operational helicopter unit with helicopter rescue swimmers assigned.

The mission need for pararescueman to be the final link to survivors on Army CH-47 helicopters doing high altitude rescue during the 1970s and 1980s is another can't be ignored example. The lesson learned is no matter how all-weather or impressive the flight design characteristics and performance is advertised to be chance often puts the aircraft out of reach and beyond the ability of the survivor to get into it. Furthermore, the operation environment is in such chaos of change and situation uncertainty produces inescapable mission need for the final link depart from the aircraft capability to enter into the surface (land/water) operational environment to rescue and recover survivors or to recover sensitive materiel or devices.

The December 4, 2011 gone missing Iranian airspace or perhaps deliberate captured of a RQ-170 drone by Iran further demonstrates the long range air recovery of sensitive reconnaissance devices/materiel and special weapons mission need of the cold war era didn't disappear with the ending of the cold war.

As much as the multi-purposes scanner, gunner, medical in-flight duties all-members of the Pararescue specialty perform that are critical to aircraft sortie survivability, all members of the Pararescue specialty the primary operational suitability (utility, lethality, operability, interoperability, dependability, survivability, and habitability) is being the final link necessary for the purpose of the mission sortie being generated. The purpose is directly connected to the Air Force's core functions, specifically Personnel Recovery and Special Operations (AFDD -1, 14 Oct 2011).

The surface capability service the pararescueman performs (a human weapon system) provides unique combinations of skill sets, knowledge bases, and abilities. The Pararescue Specialty's critical skills operator purpose from the time the Pararescue specialty was established and trained and mission ready teams existed in 1947 is to have operability and interoperability overlap proficiencies and mission readiness to perform missions as a Special Forces operator, Combat Rescue Operator and as a National level SAR asset. The only significant Pararescue operational utilization change since 1947 is complexity of military operations has shifted from downed aircrew to joint operations and personnel recovery.

Pararescue's in-flight duties interoperability as an assigned aircraft crewmember has always contributed to confusions emerging from organizational reengineering and force structure reduction. The few in numbers available to support rated crewmember upgrade and proficiency

flying training stereotypically becomes the point of conflict. No consideration is given that not a single unit manning position authorization is earned and justified to support pilot upgrade and proficiency training. More substantial however is the lack of admitting or denying the impact that the Pararescue specialty has no authorized duty positions to put old, tired, and medically unqualified persons into (no overhead or excess manning positions) or a fast and inexpensive means to get lesser qualified mission capable persons to be NVG scanner and door gunner pilot training support.

The Air Force being service oriented to air warfare rather than surface warfare and small tactical unit warfare on the forward and behind enemy lines battlefield is cause for strong whim influences in the organizational culture. A organizational believing or wanting to believe the ground combat environments is always avoidable as a helicopter can always hover over the survivor or evader making Pararescue surface operations impractical and unnecessary.

Surface survivability of being the final air ground link performing personnel recovery requires team leadership and team leading requires skill and task qualifications and proficiencies paralleling the training, tactics, and procedures of US Army, and US Marine infantry Squads, Fire Teams, combat patrols and other small unit tactical teams. Preservation of critical skills operator with in-flight crew duties has always been the conflict in deciding the balance of being a combat crewmember performing in-flight duties and concurrently being the final link combat critical core skills operator put outside of and away from the aircraft to do personnel and sensitive materiel recovery.

The conception and development era (1940s-1950s) of Pararescue was at a time of the Air Force was having a peacetime not-in-combat gone missing aircraft attrition rate of about 500 plus aircraft a year worldwide. Many of these aircraft being multi engine bomber, reconnaissance and transport aircraft flying over remote arctic landmasses of Alaska, Canada, Greenland and logistics and deploying ferry flights across vast stretches of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Other long range reconnaissance operations utilizing satellites and extreme high altitude weather balloons also required the pararescueman to parachute to the incident objective and then rig devices or materiel to be retrieved by Fulton Recovery tactics and methods with the PJ performing SERE until recovered by helicopter, boat, submarine, or even walked out on foot.

Developments in new technology and improvements in old technology have changed unplanned occurrences frequency of such missions, but it has not eliminated the unexpected missions of this sort happening. New technology has also changed searching methodology and tactics utilized in the hostile operational environment. The same technology improvements have also complicated aircraft and aircrew methods and tactics to penetrate into an incident area and loiter there. The June 1976 Pararescue SAR Conference emphasized the emerging hand held surface-to-air threat to hovering helicopter was becoming such Pararescue personnel will need to E&E penetrate the designated area, contact the survivor or evader and shepherd him to a safe area for pickup.¹⁰ Consequently, the final surface link to survivors is remains a valid mission need. The Pararescue human performance system performing this service still requires surface critical core skills of SERE, Tactical Combat Casualty Care, and small unit tactical skills of squad and fire teams tactics, techniques and procedures.

Pararescue being the final link to the survivors to penetrate by parachute, hoist, or helicopter landing requires a delicate what is the mission need answer of the career field having or not having aircrew status. From one perspective, the Pararescueman is part of the flying package to accomplish a mission and from another perspective problem-solving, evaluation of hazards, and being the final link to survivors and isolated personnel is more than in-flight duties and operating aircraft systems.

Aircrew ownership utilization of Pararescue personnel to specific Mission Design Series (MDS) aircraft has become impractical, ineffective and inefficient. The fixed wing combat rescue MDS has become so specialized in supporting helicopters and doing command and control functions that the specialized configuration functionality to do these activities make it too valuable of a loss and replacement risk to utilize to insert the small tactical team by parachute. The rotary-wing (helicopter and tilt-rotor) combat rescue and special operations MDS provide high tech survivability flying through combat airspace where air superiority exists or low-tech surface to air threat exists. This high tech, however, gives no safety or useful survivability while holding a lengthy hover in an area the enemy is actively present or sitting rotors running for long duration in the hot helicopter-landing zone. There is also availability of more in numbers multi-purpose aircraft with crews sustaining adequate mission capable and mission ready status capable of inserting the Pararescue team when necessity force mission commander decision to put the Pararescue team on the ground for a lengthy extended period to accomplish search and rescue operations and activities.

Although the in-flight duties do justify Air Force member performing Pararescue duties being aircrew, the establishing an aircrew ratio/composition to sustain training sortie generation for pilot training and proficiency requirements and concurrently keeping sufficient numbers of mission ready Pararescue on-hand for operational requirements has typically proven ineffective and economically inefficient (an unaffordable force structure and mission ready sustainability problem). Being the flying package final link to the survivors to penetrate by parachute or helicopter insertion methods (landing, hoist, fast rope, rope repel, rope ladder and low & slow) requires problem solving, evaluation of hazards, mission planning (situational awareness) and high level of crew coordination with all the members of the crew to accomplish the tasks of the mission. This level of in-flight duty participation in execution operational missions contributes to necessity of Pararescue personnel being proficient in functioning as part of the aircrew during the sortie, but the crew duties are in such practical integration utility across the many multi-purpose MDS aircraft available Pararescue personnel are truly a general-purpose aircrew capability. This general-purpose aircrew position is however and unfortunately a limited in numbers specialized mission capability that should not be directly associated with a specific MDS or be utilized to be primary support for the upgrade and proficiency training of other crew positions at the expense of Pararescue upgrade and proficiency training.

The never ending question is the Pararescue career field being aircrew or not aircrew is best determined by the human factors (capability needed) in the operational environment in terms of survivability, adaptability, operability (in-flight/surface), dependability, reliability, and interoperability (aircrew, squad/fire team, joint operations, special operations). All members of the enlisted Pararescue career field exist to have capability providing service purpose to be the final link employed to the surface to assist with isolated personnel and materiel recovery. Any

changes of concepts of operations diverging to lesser mission need capability will have manning implications and bring with it mission availability impairment.

Pararescuemen are NOT MEDICS. PJ's are air and ground combatants, medics are not. Pararescue plays an offensive role during combat operations. The primary pararescue operational usability is to rescue anyone, anytime, anywhere, under any conditions. The operational capability is Personnel Recovery anywhere, anytime and under any conditions across the globe. Air Force Pararescuemen, also known as PJs, are the only Department of Defense (DoD) elite combat forces specifically organized, trained, equipped, and postured to conduct full spectrum Personnel Recovery (PR) to include both conventional and unconventional combat rescue operations.

Mission reliability in the operational environment reality to be the final link capability available to leave the aircraft to penetrate onto the surface (land/water) operational environment to aid and assist survivors, evaders and the injured persists in being an operational requirement for all sorts of combat air forces core function roles and missions and Joint Operations. Aircraft design change, aircraft performance and flight characteristic improvement or other device acquisition and procurement cannot satisfy the mission capability requirement of human performance being the final link employed from the aircraft to aid and assist survivors, evaders and the injured to and onto the recovery or extracting aircraft. A sustained human performance is required to fulfill this mission need pertinent to physical ability and stamina and psychological resiliency ability to adapt to performing adequately in the surface operational environment. Training and qualifications must support what the human performance capability is being required to do in executing combat rescue and recovery and isolated personnel recovery missions.

Here is a list of some key terms to consider in any capability analysis done answering the to-be or not-to-be aircrew question. Some of the terms have overlap and redundancy but are provided to build varying perspectives to explore the analysis needed to arrive at mission need justifiable solution.

Command authority – refers to members of the military (NCO, Warrant, Commissioned) are assigned to or assumes a position requiring the direction and control of other military members. It relates to any leader who directs and controls other military members as an official part of his or her duties. The inherent authority to issue orders necessary to accomplish the tasked unit or team mission unless contrary to law or regulation (lawful orders). NCO members of the military can have command authority. The NCO tank commander, squad leader, fire team leader, patrol leader are all small tactical unit example of duties NCOs perform using command authority to direct and control. This level of authority exercised in the operational environment differs from general military authority. This operational tactical chain-of-command also differs from functional and support channels chain-of-command.

Dependability - Ability to fulfill the required performance under given conditions, taking operational risk management and willingness to risk aircrew, aircraft and surface team to execute any given mission into account.

Duty echelons of the chain of command – refers to dual competencies and proficiency of specialty as prescribed by CFETP and NCO mission role (platoon leader, squad leader, team leader, fire team leader, combat patrol leader) having responsibility of following orders and giving orders. The leader level has legitimate NCO power of a leader to direct those subordinate to the NCO to take action within scope of position and tasked mission objectives, goals, and orders.

Fatigue - Refers to the consequences (both physical and mental) of sustained task performance over time in performing duties in the operational environment.

Full Operational Capability (FOC) - In general is attained when all pararescue members of the operational unit or team have the training proficiency defined in a UTC or Unit capability design document. Also known as mission ready and mission capable.

Human Performance Standards – in general refers to the ability to adapt to and perform in the operational environment. These standards also in including characteristics also directly impact personnel recruitment, retention and motivation directly contributing to personnel effectiveness and overall team performance. Generally given in the CFETP, Tactics-Techniques-Procedures (TTPs), and AFIs.

Mission Reliability - The probability the Pararescue human system will perform its required mission-critical functions for the duration of a specified mission under conditions stated in concepts of operations and other training, techniques, procedure documents.

Operational Availability - A measure of the degree of personal and unit mission/combat readiness when the mission calls for it.

Operational Capability -The ability to achieve a desired effect under specified standards and conditions through combinations of ways and means to perform a set of tasks. It is defined by an operational user and expressed in broad operational terms in the format of a Joint Doctrine, Air Force Doctrine, Career Field Education and Training Plan, Major/Combat Command Mission Essential Task Lists, and OPlans.

Operational Effectiveness - Measure of the overall ability of representative personnel (typical PJ Team) to accomplish a mission when used in the operational environment or expected (training/exercise) operational environment to determine operational suitability. Generally useful for determining necessary changes or improvements to concepts of operations, training, tactics, procedures and career field education and training plan.

Operational Environment - The natural occurring and man-made perils, hazards, physical hardships, and dangers present or potentially encountered when executing an operational tasking or a mission.

Operational Suitability The degree to which a human performance system such as Guardian Angel weapon system can be placed and sustained satisfactorily in field use with consideration given to availability, compatibility, transportability, interoperability, reliability, wartime usage rates, maintainability, environmental, safety and occupational

health, human factors, habitability, manpower, logistics, supportability, natural environment effects and impacts, documentation, and training requirements.

Operational Usability- Refers to the extent to which the human performance service or capability can be used to achieve goals and objectives with effectiveness, efficiency, reliability and satisfaction in context of successful mission accomplishment. It include performing autonomous or jointly with aircrew and other small unit tactical teams.

Survivability - Addresses characteristics of human performance requirements and standards that reduce performance susceptibility in the operational environment to mission degradation or failure as result of injury, loss of life, lack of equipment, lack of command and control, lack of resupply in context of the full spectrum of anticipated operations and operational environments. Air Force mission commanders depend on being confident all Pararescue personnel have the minimum or better human performance capability and ability to enter into a variety of hazardous and dangerous operational environments to provide a surface rescue or recovery capability. PAST, PULHES, ASVAB and other screen and select requirements are entry into training classification qualifications standards having purpose to minimalize operational risks and ensure adequate human performance survivability is obtained and sustained by all USAF Pararescue personnel.

The query to me was to provide background of the aircrew or not aircrew discussions and decisions happening during the period of about 1989 to 1996. The issue has nothing to do with to be or not to be aircrew, but with having availability of USAF Pararescue personnel who are adequately equipped, sufficiently trained and have sound understanding of the tactics, techniques and procedures critical for surface survivability of being the final air-ground link in the operational personnel recovery environment.

¹ Air Force has 9 career groups: 1-Operations, 2-Logistics, 3-Support, 4-Medical or Dental, 5 - Legal or Chaplain, 6 - Acquisition or Finance, 7 – Special Investigation, 8 - Special Duty, and 9 - Reporting Identifier. Reference AFI 36-2101.

² **Career Field**—A group of closely related AFSs (or a single AFSC when there are not related specialties) requiring basically the same knowledge and skills. A career field includes subdivisions and ladders. Reference AFI 36-2101.

³ Historical Data Air Rescue Service 1 July - 21 December 1951 (90-91)
Historical Data Air Rescue Service 1 January - 30 June 1952 (70)
ARSM 50-1, April 1951, para 34-7 Physical Training

⁴ ARS Manual 55-2 ca. 1952 states the safe operation of the aircraft rests with the pilot; the responsibility for the safe dropping of the parachutist rest with the Pararescue Team Commander and his appointed jumpmaster.

⁵ Historical Data Air Rescue Service 1 July - 11 December 1947 (25)

⁶ Historical Data Air Rescue Service 1 July - 31 December 1952 (51-52)

⁷ ARS Commanders Conference Notes, 30 November 1953 - 4 December 1953 (5)

⁸ SMSgt Robert I. LaPointe, RETIRED AIR FORCE. PJs in Vietnam, The story of air rescue in Vietnam as seen through the eyes of Pararescuemen. Northern PJ Press. 2001 (372-375).

⁹ Proposed Change to Pararescue Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC). HQ MAC/XOT, ? May 1989

¹⁰ Minutes of June 1976 Pararescue Combat Readiness Conference, HQ Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service, 30 July 1976. (1, 3, 5, 7, A5-1, A7-1)