LINEAGE
304<sup>th</sup> Air Rescue Squadron constituted, 24 Oct 1957
Activated in the Reserve, 16 Nov 1957
Redesignated 304<sup>th</sup> Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, 18 Jan 1966
Redesignated 304<sup>th</sup> Air Rescue Squadron, 1 Apr 1990
Redesignated 304<sup>th</sup> Rescue Squadron, 1 Feb 1992

STATIONS
Portland Intl Aprt (later, ANGB), OR, 16 Nov 1957

ASSIGNMENTS
2343<sup>rd</sup> Air Reserve Flying Center, 16 Nov 1957
2346<sup>th</sup> Air Reserve Flying Center, 1 Dec 1957
2345<sup>th</sup> Air Reserve Flying Center, 8 Apr 1958
Fourth Air Force, 8 Apr 1960
Sixth Air Force Reserve Region, 1 Sep 1960
Western Air Force Reserve Region, 31 Dec 1969
403rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery (later, 403rd Rescue and Weather Reconnaissance) Wing, Mar 1976
939th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group (later, 939th Air Rescue Wing; 939th Rescue Wing), Apr 1985
939th Operations Group, 1 Aug 1992

WEAPON SYSTEMS
SA(later, HU)-16, 1958-1971
HH-34, 1971-1976
UH-1, 1979-1987
HC-130, 1985-1997
HH-3, 1986-1992
CH-3, 1987-1992
MH-60, 1991-1992
UH-60, 1991-1993
HH-60, 1992

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT SERIAL NUMBERS

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT TAIL/BASE CODES

UNIT COLORS

COMMANDERS
LTC Vernon E. Acker, 16 Nov 1957
LTC John A. Forsythe, 19 Jan 1959
LTC Ross A. Meredith, 1 Feb 1967
LTC George W. Crandall, Mar 1967
Col James D. Beall, 26 Mar 1967
LTC George W. Crandall, 1 Nov 1967
LTC William R. Stack Jr., 21 Jan 1968
LTC Daniel R. Hitch, 31 May 1969
LTC Ross A. Meredith, 7 Jan 1971
LTC John A. Forsythe, 1 Feb 1971
LTC Ross A. Meredith, 18 Mar 1971
LTC James H. Barnard, Mar 1971
LTC William L. Siegel, 1 Dec 1972
LTC Rollin L. Ratchen, 11 Feb 1973
Col Donald A. Schwannenberg, 20 Oct 1974
Col Thomas M. Jones Jr., 13 May 1976
Col Deon E. Schroeder, 31 Jul 1981
LTC Michael J. Peters, 15 Apr 1983
LTC William R. Andresevic, 8 Mar 1985
LTC Pinar Crane, Jr., 12 Sep 1985
LTC Dean W. Mills, 6 Jan 1990
LTC Gene E. Garton, 13 Jul 1991
LTC Louis J. Budge, 3 Dec 1994
LTC James E. McKinney, Sr., 21 Nov 1997

HONORS
Service Streamers
None

Campaign Streamers
None

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers
None

Decorations
Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards
1 Jan 1975-31 Dec 1976
1 Jul 1977-31 Dec 1978
18 May-5 Jun 1980
1 Jul 1984-30 Jun 1986
1 Sep 1993-31 Aug 1995
1 Sep 1997-31 Aug 1999

EMBLEM
Approved on 7 Oct 1991

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS
Trained for combat search and rescue capability. Performed search, rescue, and medical evacuation missions primarily in the northwestern United States, including over 100 missions immediately following the Mt. St. Helens (Washington) volcanic eruption in May 1980. Maintained helicopter air refueling capability, 1985-1997. Deployed crews to provide SAR coverage worldwide, including to Kevlavik, Iceland, during and after the Gulf War and to the Gulf War area, 1993-. Occasionally provided support for space shuttle launches and to the USAF Fighter Weapons School.

The 452d Air Refueling Wing assumed tanker alert duties, providing one alert crew and aircraft to the active force at March AFB on October 1, 1977, one year after its conversion. The wing's
second unit, the 940th Air Refueling Second only to airlift, air rescue was the oldest of the Air Force Reserve's missions. In July 1972, the 303d and 305th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadrons converted from HC-97s to HC-130Hs at March AFB, California, and Selfridge Air National Guard Base (ANGB), Michigan. In June and July 1971 the 301st and 304th converted to the HH-34J helicopter, and in July 1974 the 301st added HH-SEs.

Two spectacular operations occurred in 1980. Situated in the wilderness of Washington State, but near recreation and logging interests, the Mount Saint Helens volcano had lain dormant for 125 years. When it erupted on May 18, 1980, the 304th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron at Portland, Oregon, was in the midst of a monthly training session. Unbidden, the unit responded to the emergency, and within minutes its helicopters were en route to the mountain. On that first day, the 304th rescued 51 persons on 32 sorties. In all, at the end of ten days, the 304th had flown 111 sorties and saved 61 lives. Also participating in the rescue operations were the 304th's sister rescue squadrons, the 303d from March AFB and the 305th from Selfridge; maintenance men from all over the Air Force Reserve; and the 129th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group of the California Air National Guard.

29 Dec 78 The 304th APR Squadron, AFRES, assisted in the recovery of 163 survivors of a DC-8 crash near Portland, Oregon.

Following the volcanic explosion at Mount St. Helens, Washington, on 18 May, UH-1N aircraft and aircrews from the 304th ARR Squadron initiated a large rescue operation. Later, other ARRS units participated. The AFRCC at Scott AFB coordinated rescue operations and recorded a total of 101 saves. Of this number, the 304th saved 61 persons. In all United States Air Force, Coast Guard, Army, and Civil Air Patrol (CAP) forces worked 17 days and flew 932 hours during 508 missions.

TEXT OF HANDOUT AT THE "GOODBYE TO RESCUE REUNION DINNER" HELD IN PORTLAND IN APRIL 2003 (COURTESY OF FELIX McLARNEY) HISTORY OF THE 304TH AUTHOR DOTTIE COLGATE-JOHNSON

The 304th Air Rescue Squadron (ARS) was activated in the Air Force Reserve on 16 Nov 57 at Portland Intl Airport, OR. Lt Col Vernon E. Acker was assigned as the first unit commander. In 1959 the unit was selected for the Air Reserve Technician Program (ART) and Major John A. Forsythe was assigned as the first ART commander. Unit strength increased to 24 officers and 66 airmen as it transitioned into an ART Reserve Squadron and Air Reserve Technicians began replacing the training cadre of regular Air Force personnel.

The unit’s first assigned aircraft were the SA-16A Albatross, replaced by SA-16B models during the first quarter of 1960 and later redesignated HU-16B’s in July 1963. The HU-16s were amphibian aircraft and could set down on water or land. There was one special tri-phibian HU-16 which could set down on water, land or snow.
Facilities were quite limited in the early 1960’s. Command and Operations shared an old wooden barracks and maintenance had one small wooden building but no hangar. Nearly all the maintenance was done on the ramp with only an old tarp (with a hole in it) for a cover. Later, two engine stand buildings were acquired which could cover the engines for maintenance.

It wasn’t until 1961 that Pararescuemen (PJs) were added to the unit. Because of Viet Nam conflict, there were no qualified PJs available to fill the positions at any of the five squadrons; 304th in Portland, OR, 302nd in Phoenix AZ, 301st at Homestead AFB FL, 305th at Selfridge ANGB MI, and 303rd at March AFB CA. The PJs had only an old Quonset Hut and little else. Equipment soon arrived and with strong leadership they became a top team involved in all missions.

Today the 304th alone has five fulltime Air Reserve Technicians and 55 PJs.

During the 1960s the 304th had many search and rescue missions in the Pacific Northwest including one spectacular nighttime parachute jump on Mt St Helens to rescue two survivors of a small plane crash. They also participated in a highly classified mission in the South Pacific for two months in 1968. In October of 1961, the reserve units were called to active duty for the Berlin Crisis. They supported a 60-day search and rescue coverage of the North Atlantic from Goose Bay Labrador as many AF Squadrons flew overseas. The unit also had several SARs covering the North Pacific from Alaskan Air Strips as Air Force Squadrons flew overseas to the Far East.

On 18 January, 1966, the 304th ARS was officially designated the 304th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron and in December 1968 became the sole Air Force Reserve flying unit in the state of Oregon. Host-based responsibility passed to the Oregon Air National Guard and the 304 ARRS became a tenant unit.

In 1972, the unit was again reorganized and the HU-16B aircraft were reassigned and replaced by HH-34 Seabat helicopters which were re-designated as Chocktaw by the Air Force. 1974 saw the HH-34 being replaced by the HH-1H Huey helicopters. The 304th was assigned to the 403rd Air Rescue and Recovery Wing at Selfridge ANG, MI on 15 March 197 6 and in July 1978 the unit was designated to participate in the Military Assistance to Safety and Traffic (MAST) program. They were the first AFRES unit so designated to provide emergency helicopter transportation services to the Northern Oregon-Southern Washington region.

1979 ushered in another change in aircraft when the unit received the UH-1N Huey helicopters and in 1985 received its first HC-130 Hercules. On 1 April 1985 the unit was officially activated as the 939th Air Rescue and Recovery Group eventually picking up the 301st ARRS at Homestead AFB, FL. December 1986 saw the arrival of H-3 Jolly Green Giant helicopters. During the 80’s the unit saw numerous search and rescue and medical evacuation missions mainly in the Northwest. Most notably among these were the 100 plus missions following the eruption of Mt St Helens in May 1980.
The unit was once again re-designated on 1 April 1990 as the 939th Rescue Wing and in 1992 the 304th and 301st were redesignated from Air Rescue Squadrons to Rescue Squadrons.

The unit also assumed command of the newly activated 305th Rescue Squadron at Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ in March 1994.

From 1985 to present the unit maintained helicopter refueling capability allowing for extended flights over the ocean. Crews have been deployed to provide SAR coverage worldwide. The unit has supported the Olympics, provided coverage for space shuttle launches, assisted during hurricanes and provided search and rescue for lost hikers and crashed aircraft. In the “real world” arena the unit supported numerous peacekeeping missions overseas. They also participated in the Gulf War and the battle against terrorism in the Middle East.

Most recently our PJs proved their merit by supporting Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

The 939th Rescue Wing, with its two geographically separated unit, is the last bastion in the Continental United States. On 1 April 2003, this unique unit was once again converted only this time, along with a change in aircraft there was a change in mission. The 939th converted from HH-60G helicopters and HC-130 aircraft to the KC-135 aircraft and from the Rescue Mission to the Air Refueling Mission.

Even though we bid farewell to the rescue mission here in Portland, this unit will not soon be forgotten. Its contribution to the community and the Air Force is immeasurable. The history of this unit will remain steadfast in the hearts and minds of all those who have been touched by its compassion.

Most especially the 583 souls saved over the last 54 years, truly epitomizing the rescue motto, “These things we do…that other may live.”

Pararescuemen from the 304th Rescue Squadron, Portland, Ore., deploy from HH-60 Pavehawk helicopters assigned to the 305th Rescue Squadron, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., June 8-13, 2007, to practice mountain and water rescue skills. Although geographically separated, both squadrons are subordinate units of the 943rd Rescue Group located at D-M.

The PJs were able to deploy from the helicopters and practice a variety of tactics. Pararescuemen are among the most highly trained emergency trauma specialists in the U.S. military. With their medical and rescue expertise along with their deployment capabilities air-land-sea, PJs are able to perform life-saving missions in the world’s most remote and dangerous combat or
humanitarian environments to rescue injured or stranded people. The PJs commitment to training and self-sacrifice to save lives reaffirms their motto “These things we do that others may live”. Without the PJs and support Airmen from the rescue squadrons, thousands of service members and civilians would have been unnecessarily lost in past conflicts and natural disasters.

304th ARS
The 304th had a unique but humorous patch. The patch evolved from various summer activities of the unit. Fellow Rotorhead Associate member Felix "Mac" McLarney provide this humorous story of the evolution of the 304th "Duck" patch.

Each summer camp a half day break with softball game or volleyball was scheduled to break the monotony. Usually the age old separation of officers and enlisted prevailed, and provided some bragging rights for the next year.

After a few years of this winner looser joshing one of the commanders purchased one of those little inexpensive (I should say cheap) trophies that could be found all over the place. This one featured a mule (jackass if you will) and was presented by the winning side to the losers during commander's call at the next training weekend after the summer camp. It usually was placed near the coffee bar in the Hq/Ops building.

A new commander came on board and he decided that instead of presenting the little trophy he would (and did) replace it with a very real and cantankerous jackass. The losers had to care and feed it which wasn't very funny after a short time. No one had any acreage or working farm to house it, or didn't offer such anyway, so it was placed in the fenced area that housed our personal equipment/parachute shop, and vehicle parking shed. Being alone was not what this animal wanted so each and every time someone had to go in or out of the fenced compound they had to deal with an agitated beast. Fortunately at this time there were no active duty folks residing on the base at night as they would have been up in arms with the constant braying throughout the night. It was a joke our CO felt was amusing, but we never really understood his personality. Shortly after he left the animal was given away and all was quiet.

But not to be outdone, the summer games continued and someone decided that a duck would be an appropriate trophy as well as a reminder to the losers who had to care for it. What happened next was not expected. Instead of the duck being a losers badge it became the mark of Zoro, or rather I should say its feet became the mark. As our crews visited other units and bases folks would wake up the next day to find duck feet images walking across their floors, at one base clinic they went up one wall, across the ceiling and down the other. At another they were placed next to the water coolers in a hangar. And to top it off, when AFRes built us a new ops admin building there were duck feet walking up to the building cast permanently in the new concrete sidewalk.

The duck lasted a good deal after I retired, and was eventually lost as a hawk was selected when the unit was placed under a Rescue Wing. No idea what did happen to the duck, but its loss as a logo is indicative of the lack of humor at Wing levels. So, while the University of Oregon has a duck for its team mascot, the 304th duck rose from a much more noble and distinguished
background. You'll note its collar says Huey, which isn't necessarily creative but certainly appropriate.

After losing an engine during open sea practice in Drake's Bay near San Francisco in 1967, number 51-7211 was towed ashore with a bulldozer. The HU-16B of the 304th ARRS had been in the water for more than two days.

Albatrosses served with five U.S. Air Force Reserve units which were dispersed throughout the country. Those Air Rescue Squadrons (redesignated Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadrons in the mid 1960s) operated SA-16As and HU-16Bs from their inception. They were the 301st at Homestead AFB Florida; 302nd at Long Beach Municipal Airport California (relocated to Luke AFB, Arizona); 303rd at March AFB, California; 304th at Portland International Airport Oregon; and the 305th at Selfridge ANG Base Michigan.

When the Dominican Republic crisis flared up in 1965, Albatrosses of the 301st ARRS flew nearly 130 hours evacuating Americans from the beleaguered island. The unit converted to a composite squadron in 1971 when it added HH-34 helicopters to its inventory. By 1973 all the 301st HU-16s had been replaced by the HH-34. In Fall 1966 the 302nd received the last three HU-16Bs to serve in the Pacific from the 33rd ARRS at Okinawa. The 302nd, 303rd, and 304th retired their Albatrosses in 1971. The 303rd and 305th replaced theirs with HC-97s in 1966 which, though incapable of water landings, were faster, able to carry more equipment, and stay on station longer. For its finale as an Air Force Reserve rescue aircraft, an HU-16B of the 304th ARRS was instrumental in saving the life of an injured seaman aboard a vessel 600 miles off the Oregon coast. Three PJs jumped from the Albatross into the ocean and were taken aboard the PECHENGA. This was the first paradrop ever made in Pacific Northwest waters. The last Air Force Albatross (S/N 51-5282), a Reserve aircraft, was retired to the Air Force Museum, but not before it completed a world record altitude flight on July 4, 1973, in the hands of a 301st ARRS crew.


The 301st Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron (ARRS) operated from Homestead AFB, Florida. In addition to SAR work, the 301st ARRS performed Presidential missions and provided security services for NASA at Cape Kennedy. The 302nd ARRS was based at Luke AFB, Arizona. The international airport at Portland, Oregon, was home for the 304th ARRS.

The AFRES HH-34Js were transitional aircraft, filling the gap left by the retirement of the Grumman HU-16 Albatross amphibian and the needs of the Vietnam War. The squadrons assigned them never carried complements of more than nine. The 301st ARRS didn't fly their
first mission with one until more than two months after its receipt. At times they were forced to place aircraft in storage because there were no trained air or ground crews available to use them. By the time parts procurement problems, training and personnel requirements had been sorted out, the HH-34Js were scheduled for replacement by HH-1Hs and HH-3Es, to begin in January 1974.

LT. Col. Barnard AFRES (Retired) (former 304th ARRS Commander) stated AFRES originally had targeted four of the five HU-16 units for conversion to the HH-34J. The 301st, 302nd, 304th and 305th ARRS were all to have 8 UE each, and the number 32 filled that requirement. It is believed that 26 of the aircraft were removed from storage and the remaining 6 came from the Navy straight to NARF Pensacola for modification.

The 305th ARRS was removed from that plan, going instead to HC-97's, but the timing of that change did not alter the H-34's from being transferred to AFRES. LT. Col. Barnard AFRES (Retired) confirmed that a pilot school program did not exist and that the crews got all of their HH-34J training at home station. The lesser known fact that the 305th ARRS dropped out of the picture so early on, never receiving any HH-34J's, helps to explain why looking back at only 3 units was creating so much difficulty in identifying what the fleet size was and how it came to be.

It is believed that all 32 helicopters were modified to the HH-34J configuration and were accepted by the three AFRES Rescue Squadrons. This may explain why some of the helicopters were placed in storage due to the lack of trained air and/or ground crews to adequately utilize the additional assigned aircraft. Due to various reasons aircraft were transferred between units, therefore making it difficult to ID a tail number to a specific unit.

During the era of the HH-34J's, Mr. Felix J. McLarney was the squadron First Sergeant for the 304th ARRS. Felix was kind enough to provide the following historical information and pictures for use on our website. This serves two purposes, (1) Helps to ensure the 304th ARRS is recognized for posterity for its use of the HH-34J helicopters, (2) Provides USAF ROTORHEADS with a little known, but important part of our rich history.

The 304th ARRS Commander and other senior members of the unit realized the transition from the HU-16 to the HH-34J was going to be a monumental task requiring a maximum effort on the part of each and every member of the unit. All the hard work came to fruition four months after the receipt of the last aircraft when the unit attained a C-3 combat readiness status. The conversion from fixed to rotatory wing resulted in many problems at all level of command. Of special interest is the fact that the 304th ARRS was the first Air Force unit, active or reserve, to have flown this ex Navy ASW aircraft as an Air Force Air Rescue aircraft. With considerable pride they came to realize that while they were the second unit to take delivery of its initial knocked down depot modified HH-34J's they were the first to reassemble, test fly, report all 10 aircraft as operational, and achieve mission ready status of its 12 assigned aircrews.

Probably the major problem was the lack of specific information on the reliability of the HH-34J and requirements for its logistic support. To clarify some of the problem areas and acquire first hand information of the reliability and capability of the system an exercise plan was developed.
(Read a MAC Flyer article on this one of a kind, unique exercise and the numerous obstacles the 304th ARRS had to overcome in order to successfully accomplish the exercise).

Commanded by Lt. Col. James H. Barnard, this was to be a real cross country deployment mission as opposed to the months of dogged transition training. It was selected to both reward the unit personnel for their high intensity transition efforts and to visually present to Western Air Force Reserve Region Headquarters at Hamilton AFB the units return to full operational status.

Upon contacting Hamilton Approach Control Lt. Col. Barnard who was the flight commander reported in as a flight of 8. The HH-34J was new to the Air Force and eight HH-34J's in formation was an uncommon sight at Hamilton, which gave rise to the photograph in the MAC Flyer. Arriving in trail formation, demonstration team style, all aircraft landed at the same time, taxied in trail formation and completed a team type shutdown by stopping all of their rotors in unison using the rotor brake system. The transient ramp at Hamilton was not wide enough to line up all 8 aircraft in a single line. Aircraft #8 is not visible in the photo below as it had to park in a second row.

This entire effort was a product of unit pride, unofficial competition between sister units, inter-service cooperation, and the can-do effort to get the best out of what was available as achieved by many in the military reserves.

By way of example, in this particular flight all of the aircraft were Navy Fleet Reserve, all of the Air Force Reserve HU-16 pilots were re-trained to rotary wing by the Army at Ft. Rucker. Lt Col Barnard had been a Navy Reserve P-2V Pilot when he first entered the AF Reserve and flew C-119's. Major Bruce Wood had been a Marine Reserve H-34 instructor pilot. When learning that the AF was converting to the HH-34J he transferred to the unit, was hired as the full time Air Reserve Technician maintenance officer, flew all of the initial test flights following receipt from the depot, and became the units first HH-34J instructor pilot.

It isn't unusual to find disparity in aircraft records such as the above references to "never exceeding compliments of 9" and the MAC Flyer article which reflects the unit had "10 UE with 2 extra support". The important number for the 304th ARRS at the time was "UE" (unit equipped) aircraft and that was 8. Mr. McLarney believes the unit may have taken delivery of the "extra's" because the other units were not ready to receive them. If that had come from any official command instruction he has no recollection.

The 304th ARRS was fortunate the aircraft conversion did not result in a large loss of non-flying positions. The majority of its experienced aircraft maintenance staff was retained, and following retraining on the H-34 at Sheppard AFB all continued to serve in Portland. Their skill, together with Bruce Wood's experience and flight qualifications, combined to rapidly bring the depot modified birds into operational status.

Note: Mr. Felix J. McLarney stated that aircraft 148493 was transferred to the 302nd ARRS and later Hill AFB Museum. Aircraft 145710 was transferred to the 301st ARRS and later transferred to the LA Sheriff. Aircraft 145710 was seen in several of the "Cops" TV episodes all painted up in LA's green and gold livery. Later the 304th ARRS was tasked to transfer Aircraft
148013 to the LA Sheriff but it experienced an in flight emergency – involuntary hard over. The crew side slipped the aircraft, righting it before they turned completely over, and remained airborne. However, before they could trouble shoot the problem a second involuntary hard over occurred and they proceeded to auto rotate and side slip down to a successful emergency landing. Fortunately the 3 crewmen sustained no injuries.

The above pictures were taken at the emergency landing site in Northern California. It is in the boonies, among small trees, some of which were cut off by the main rotor blades. The involuntary flight control input and blade strikes exceeded the normal en route unscheduled maintenance the flight mechanic could perform. As the aircraft was being transferred from the military a decision was made not to make repairs and it was turned over to Beale AFB, CA. for disposal action. The unit had maintenance people go down to assist the Beale personnel put 148013 on a truck and transport it to the base. DRMO at Beale AFB, CA. took possession.

This summary reflects that the 304th ARRS received fifteen (15) aircraft directly from depot overhaul, reassembling, test flying and maintaining all in operational status. Five (5) of these were later transferred to sister units as they progressed through their transition training - two (2) to the 301st ARRS and three (3) to the 302nd ARRS. The 301st ARRS operated a total of eleven (11) aircraft and the 304th ARRS had a permanent fleet of ten (10) aircraft (note: fleet numbers for the 301st ARRS and 304th ARRS are confirmed by official assignment and/or utilization records. This places 143865 and 148025 at the 302nd ARRS bringing their fleet total to eleven (11) which matches it with CONAC assigning that same number to the 301st ARRS. Continuing to research for these two official service transfer records). The fleet total of thirty two (32) aircraft agrees with initial AF official news release information about the equipment change for the reserve rescue squadons.

143885 (304th ARRS)
143936 (304th ARRS)
145710 (304th)
148008 (304th ARRS)
148013 (304th ARRS)
148014 (304th)
148027 (304th ARRS) crashed into Columbia River during night PJ water recovery training. PJ's refloated it and unit returned it to base for investigation. IP did not catch student descent rate in time. Night over water contributed due to impaired depth perception.

148934 (304th ARRS)
148936 (304th ARRS)
148942 (304th)
148943 (304th)
148948 (304th ARRS)
148954 (304th ARRS)
148958 (304th ARRS)
148963 (304th)
The first AF reserve rescue unit - and the only unit in Oregon - to be designated a Military Assistance to Safety and Traffic (MAST) unit. In the late 70's the closest military unit with that designation was the Army Aviation Battalion at Ft Lewis' Hunter Field in WA.

The 304th ARRS was in the early stages of informing the Sheriff's of their new capabilities which immensely increased their requesting the 304th ARRS's help with civilian rescues. With all of the outdoor recreation possibilities in the Pacific Northwest folks were getting into trouble at all times of the year. The sheriffs began to call the 304th ARRS directly as opposed to the existing military/civilian rescue guidelines which required civil authority to contact the Western Rescue Center at Hamilton AFB first. The Hamilton folks would then assign the mission to the unit who could best respond. There was no better way for the 304th ARRS to become expert in its mission than having real rescues coming at frequent intervals.

On 30 May 2002, at 1351 local time (2051 Zulu), an HH-60G helicopter, 89-2601 crashed near the summit of Mount Hood in Oregon at a level of 10,700 feet MSL. The helicopter, assigned to the 304th Rescue Squadron (RQS), 939th Rescue Wing RQW, Portland Air National Guard Base, Portland Oregon, was assisting civilian authorities to rescue three critically injured climbers who had fallen into a crevasse on Mount Hood. The pilot, co-pilot, flight engineer, and 4 pararescuemen egressed safely with non-life threatening injuries. The helicopter sustained $4,750,385.00 in damages. There was no injury to civilians or damage to other property as a result of this accident. Shortly before impact, the helicopter was in a thirty-foot hover at 10,700 feet MSL, over the rescue site, which is located on the southwestern flank of Mt Hood. The flight engineer was preparing to commence lifting one of the victims of the climbing accident who was on a litter hooked to the hoist cable when main rotor RPM slowed and the helicopter began to descend. The aircraft then went into an uncontrolled right yaw, which put the pilot’s intended escape route behind him. The flight engineer cut the hoist cable. While attempting to maneuver to land the helicopter on the 45-degree slope of the mountain, the main rotor blades imparted the steeply sloping terrain. The helicopter began to roll side over side down the mountain slope. The helicopter rolled seven and one half times before coming to rest inverted, approximately 200 feet below site of impact. By clear and convincing evidence I have determined that the crew used inaccurate performance planning data, and therefore lacked the power required to accomplish the mission. The pilot immediately recognized the slowing of his main rotor RPM, which was most likely caused by the loss of favorable headwinds. These headwinds had very probably initially compensated for the crew’s inaccurate performance data. However, the pilot chose to delay the execution of his pre-briefed go around procedure. The pilot’s hesitation prior to executing his go around and utilizing his escape route resulted in the helicopter’s main rotors drooping to the point where the helicopter lost altitude, and was difficult to control. Due to the helicopter’s 30 degree uncommanded yaw to the right, the mishap pilot’s intended escape route. By substantial evidence I have determined that changing winds on Mount Hood, a common occurrence at the Bergschurnd, where the rescue operations took place, contributed to the accident. Additionally, I have determined that the mishap crew either lacked an understanding of or did not adequately consider the effects of unpredictable mountain winds on flying performance when selecting a method for executing the survivor recovery.
For the last 50 years, the Air Force has maintained a rescue presence in Portland, Ore. That streak was in serious jeopardy for members of the 304th Rescue Squadron during the most recent Base Realignment and Closure actions. The BRAC commission targeted the squadron’s host unit, the 939th Air Refueling Wing, for closure. The 304th managed to survive. Over the next year or so, the Reserve’s presence at Portland will dwindle from nearly 1,100 Airmen to about 100, all members of the rescue squadron. It appears that the 304th is destined to remain in Portland. The BRAC closure marked the second time in three years that the rescue Airmen had managed to survive a drastic change. In 2003, the 939th, then a rescue wing, converted to KC-135 tanker aircraft and became an air refueling wing. Though the wing changed missions, the 304th RQS remained in place, becoming a part of the 920th Rescue Wing at Patrick Air Force Base, Fla. “It’s very much like a family, especially since rescue folks have been here since 1957,” said Chief Master Sgt. Richard Konopka, 304th RQS chief enlisted manager. “So, the closure is very hard on everyone. All the people in finance, the military personnel flight and the clinic are the same friends we’ve always had, so it’s very difficult losing them.” Even positive events for the 304th RQS, like moving into a new building, come with negative consequences. “Coming here to our new building (a facility previously used for maintenance) was difficult. It’s like we’re vultures,” said Master Sgt. Patrick Tillmann, NCO in charge of aircrew life support. “I told my guys to be very polite. They’ve been very supportive of us. “These people are our friends. They’re going away, moving their families, and we’re staying. We still have a mission and are busy while they’re here without aircraft.” Although the 939th ARW is going away, some members were able to secure positions within the 304th. “We’ve been able to pick up a few people from the support side of the house, and that’s a good thing,” Chief Konopka said. “It was like rescuing our own family from what was going on across the street.” While the BRAC commission decided Portland could do without a refueling mission, the rescue mission was deemed more essential. The decision to keep this mission in Portland was based, in large part, on the unit’s level of experienced pararescuemen, also known as PJs. The unit has approximately 50 pararescuemen, 11 combat rescue officers and 48 support people. “For the Air Force (as a whole) we provide the largest pool of seven-level trained PJs — period,” Chief Konopka said. “This is a very good recruiting area for the type of people who are motivated to be in rescue. Currently, we have the highest percentage of new recruits in pararescue in Air Force Reserve Command.” By the time a PJ gets through all the training to attain his three-level, Chief Konopka said, it takes an average of 30 months. In addition to being highly trained members of the 304th RQS have a lot of very important deployment experience, having spent time in Kosovo, the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, they deployed in support of relief efforts after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. “We have a tremendous amount of wartime, deployment, and civilian search and rescue experience,” said Capt. Chris Bernard, 304th RQS combat rescue officer. In addition to a valuable pool of trained resources and a good recruiting base, another advantage of maintaining a rescue presence in Portland is the availability of various training environments within a few hours of the base. “The area here is conducive to training,” Captain Bernard said.
“All major environments are represented here in Oregon. Within two hours you can be at the ocean, major rivers, forests, mountains, glaciers or the desert. You have any environment you want in which to train.” With the upcoming departure of the 939th ARW, finding a way to continue supporting the 304th is a priority. “As the 939th goes away, our concern is that the Reservists who stay get the adequate support they need,” said Lt. Col. Paul Dechirico, performance manager with the 920th RQW at Patrick AFB. “The good news is that we have some breathing room because the 939th is not leaving right away.” Colonel Dechirico was part of a site activation task force that studied the future manpower needs required for the 304th RQS. He said AFRC is working closely with the host Air National Guard unit at Portland to provide many of the support requirements. “As things begin to go away, such as support functions, it just gets a little bit more difficult, but it’s not insurmountable by any stretch of the imagination. It’s just the new reality,” Chief Konopka said. “We have good relationships with other assets, both locally and regionally.” “We have no problem getting Air Force Reserve or Guard aircraft in here,” Captain Bernard said. “They like to come up and train here. We also train with the Army and Coast Guard. By doing so, they get to sign off on some of their training. This (the BRAC closure) has actually forced us to become more focused on joint operations. “One of the advantages working with our sister agencies is taking some of the good things they have to offer and implementing them to what we do,” the captain said. “I know working with the Coast Guard, those guys are the experts at water rescue. So we’ve definitely learned some good things from them and adapted them to our training.” While current members of the squadron are going to have to adapt to being the Reserve’s lone presence at Portland, this situation is really nothing new in the big scheme of things. “We were a geographically separated unit from 1957 until 1985,” Chief Konopka said. “So, in a sense, we are going back to our roots.” 2007

In August 2006, the 939th ARW’s final four KC-135 aircraft left Portland International Airport for their new home at March Air Reserve Base, Calif. The wing’s four other KC-135s left Portland in July and settled in at Tinker AFB, Okla. “The departure of these aircraft signifies a major milestone in the transformation of our wing,” said Col. William N Flanigan, 939th commander. “Since becoming an air refueling wing three years ago, members of the 939th have been steadfast in the face of tremendous adversity.” Before the 939th received KC-135s and converted to an air refueling wing, it performed a search and rescue mission. Although there won’t be any aircraft left, the Reserve will maintain a presence in Portland once the 939th is deactivated as the 304th Rescue Squadron will continue to employ approximately 100 people at the Portland International Airport. The 304th RS performs both civil and combat rescue operations by air, land and sea. Meanwhile, the 440th AW sent 13 people to Pope AFB, N.C., in August to begin setting up operations in preparation for the rest of the wing moving. The BRAC recommendations call for Pope AFB to convert to Pope Army Airfield. The main body of the wing, which includes about 200 fulltime flying operations and aircraft maintenance specialists, is scheduled to be at Pope by May 1, 2007, with the command element making the transition between May and July 2007. All eight of the unit’s C-130 Hercules aircraft will move to Pope in August 2007. General Mitchell is scheduled to close by February 2008. At Luke AFB, the first of the 944th FW’s 17 F-16s left for Hill AFB, Utah, in mid-August, where it will undergo Falcon Star, a life-extending set of upgrades. After the program is completed, the aircraft will make its new home at Nellis AFB, Nev. The wing’s remaining 16 aircraft will begin leaving Luke in
March 2007 bound for various locations including the Tucson Air National Guard headquarters; Edwards AFB, Calif.; and the California ANG in Fresno. Luke’s historic 302nd Fighter Squadron, which traces its lineage back to the Tuskegee Airmen, will find a new home at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska. The 302nd will join two active-duty squadrons as a Reserve associate unit flying the Air Force’s next-generation fighter aircraft, the F-22 Raptor. “It’s a little sad taking the first jet off the ramp,” said Maj. Scott Crogg, 302nd FS pilot. “Since the 1950s, the Air Force has been right-sizing. We do what we can and look to the future.”

Airmen, Civilians Conduct Disaster Response Drill Active Duty airmen and members of the Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard joined civilians and other service members at Camp Rilea, Ore., Aug. 5 for an exercise simulating the humanitarian aid response to a large earthquake occurring in the Pacific Northwest, triggering a tsunami. Lt. Col. John Graver, commander of 304th Rescue Squadron, oversaw rescue efforts for the "Pathfinder-Minuteman" exercise from the event's joint operations center. "When a disaster strikes, no one group or agency can do it all. So why wait until game day?" he said, according to an ANG news release. About 250 people worked in 12-person teams to find injured people and provide medical care. The exercise involved a water rescue and drowning victim recovery, house-to-house searches for injured victims, and search and rescue for victims trapped in vehicles and collapsed buildings. Scientists say the Pacific Northwest is overdue for a massive earthquake—magnitude 7 or greater—that could wreak widespread devastation. Dr. Jon Jui, who leads the Oregon Disaster Medical Team, said local officials have focused on training for a worst-case scenario for several years, but having military members and civilian agencies work together will improve communication and response if disaster strikes. 2015
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