

The Beginnings of Pararescue

From: Robert Lapointe [mailto:rlapointe@gci.net]
Sent: Monday, February 22, 2010 6:01 PM
To: jcassidy@alaska.net
Subject: RE: The Beginning of Pararescue?

I have been going through documents I collected at the Air Force Historical Agency and the below document discusses the creation of Pararescue. It is also the first use of the word "Pararescue" that I have been able to document. If I am reading it correctly, the first official PJs were Henry Erben, Cecil Hubbard, J.B. Wadd, Ted Surpykowski, James Curry, W.S. Smith, Richard Enoch and someone with the last name of Holde. Also can anyone inform me if the person who wrote this document was a PJ? His name was Robert Weaver

Request comments from our older members of the PJ Association.

NOTE: Below are the comments concerning this subject.

From Kevin Jones:

Although you have not included his (Bob Weaver's) attachment #1, I believe him in what he writes as being true. ARS was formed officially on 13 Mar 46 at Andrews Field, Fl. (but traces its roots to the 62d AAF Base Unit (Continental Air Forces) founded December 5, 1945, see HQ ARS Historical Record Report for Period Activation to 1 July 1946, introduction). It makes sense that they would include a combat experienced survival specialist as a consultant in the formation of this unit. Colonel Richard T. Kight was the second commander of ARS, receiving the unit from Colonel Wallace S. Ford on 1 Dec 46. All this coincides with what Bob has said in his first two statements. (See ARRS 1946 – 1981, An Illustrated Chronology, pg. 1).

1. The medical section for ARS was established 20 Jul 46 with the appointment of Captain Charles D. Bodine as the Acting Surgeon for ARS. He was replaced by Major Frank A. Perri, Flight Surgeon, on 19 Aug 46. Major Perri requested more medical officers and was given four on 18 Sep 46. However, these officers were not aviation medical examiners and were transferred out to be replaced by three officers that had graduated from both the Aviation School of Medicine and the Airborne Training School, Ft. Benning.(pg.11). These three officers reported to ARS on 27 Sep 46. They were referred to as "para-doctors" and assigned to:

- 1st Lt. Albert G. Lewis, HQ ARS
- 1st Lt. Randolph W. Briggs, Squadron B, Hamilton Fld.
- 1st Lt. Truett V. Bennett, Squadron A, Andrews Fld.

2. Lt. Pope B. Holliday (the man I believe should be credited with being the "1st PJ") was assigned to HQ ARS on 27 Nov 46 and was assigned to the 5th ERS (pg.18)

3. Lt. Holliday wrote a letter to the Commanding General, Air Transport Command on 5 Feb 47 requesting authority for the formation of "para-rescue teams". He requested three teams composed of four men: one medical officer, one medical technician and two weathermen trained in first aid.

4. Lt. Holliday, as a para-doctor jumps from an OA-10 to a crashed B-17 in the jungles of Nicaragua on 23 May 47. He is finally pulled out with the one survivor he parachuted to on 2 Jun 47.

5. Lt. Holliday was sent to Washington to confer with personnel of the Headquarters Army Air Forces on 1 Jul 47. From this conference, Lt. Holliday was given (pg. 20):

- A. Verbal authority, pending written authorization, to form six para-rescue teams.
- B. The authority for the formation of 10 more teams after that.
- C. The weathermen would be replaced by survival specialist (a new creation) in the team composition.

D. ARS was authorized to negotiate directly with the US Forestry Service Jump School at Missoula, Montana

E. A demonstration of capability would be done on Air Force Day, 1 Aug 47 at Bolling Fld, Washington DC for the CSAF, national television and other VIP's.

6. Para-doctor Briggs from above, was replaced by Captain Robert Goulding making the total of qualified parachutists in ARS as of 18 July 47 at three officers and three enlisted men.

7. The Bolling Fld demonstration team, (the first official PJ team in the AF) consisted of:

Captain Pope B. Holliday

1st Lt. Truett V. Bennett

Sgt. Yrsha

Sgt. Holder

Captain Robert Goulding and a Corporal Thompson (both part of Squadron "B") also did a jump demonstration on that day.

8. Bob Weaver was there. However, as stated on pg. 22 of the official history:

"Sgt Robert Weaver has returned from his trip to Detachments #6, #9, #12 and Squadron "B" where he gathered information that indicated need, for bolstering the training, of ground rescue teams, rescue and survival equipment and medical training."

I believe it is because of this trip that Bob Weaver was unable to train with the rest of Captain Holliday's team and thus missed out on the demonstration and being a part of the "first team". I do not know if Bob Weaver was jump qualified at that time, but he is not listed as such. He is mentioned on pg. 24-25 as

"Lectures pertaining to the organization of the Air Rescue Service will be prepared by Major Perri and Sgt. Weaver (Survival Specialist) to be presented to the Aviation Medical Classes at Randolph Field, Texas."

9. The first PJ's to go to Missoula were four from the team out of MacDill AFB, Fl. during the month of September (bottom of pg. 25). This was followed in November, 1947 with 5 enlisted men, two medical officers and a representative from HQ ARS (Lt. Elliott). These men formed the nucleus of instructors for the Pararescue Survival School of the 5th ERS. I believe this class is the one that Bob Weaver speaks of. (ARS Historical Report 1 July to 31 December 1947, pg 14).

10. Finally, the entry on pg. 26:

"Ten parachutist, from different para-rescue teams, underwent training at the Forestry School. This class, the last to be trained at Missoula, completed its training on or about the 27th of November (1947).

So, depending on what you believe, who is the first? Sure, there were jump rescues in WWII and even before that. But, I believe Captain Holliday's team was the first under the newly formed ARS.

[From Udo C.J. Fisher February 22, 2010](#)

Just got off the hicky dingua, talking to Bob Weaver, the original Day 1 ARS man of the 1940s. I was made aware of him through reading LaPointe's email (see below). Weaver now is 91 and still in high spirit, he might show up at the 2010 PJ reunion in Tucson. Sure was very interesting taking to him.

Mentioning WWII combat jumps done by guys later on becoming PJs: My first NCOIC (32ARS) was TSgt. William 'Doc' Hyatt, who had been a USN pharmacist medic and made a combat at Guadacanal (spelling?) in conjunction with US Marines engagement. "Doc" was a fine man from A to Z, he died on an Orlando AFB hospital operating table in 1961, where he was assigned to HQARS.

From Charles Hoell Feb 23, 2010

I'm glad to hear that Bob Weaver is still with us. When Gene and Peggy Armstrong, and myself started working on the "PJ Book", we had contact with Bob. He provided the information that shows up on pages 14 and 15 of the book.

From Mack "Willi" Courtney Feb 24, 2010

I think the name that you were not sure of could have been a SFC named Houle. can not remember his first name but I was thinking that he went through the 2nd class with Me., and regarding Henry Herbin, His MOS was 3383 which was survival spec list if you were a qualified parachutist your MOS was 3388 P He did not become a PJ until after 1949 although He was one of the first cadre to be assigned to the Paraescue & Survival School. He now lives in Miami and I think he is ninety-one, I spoke to him late last year and He sounds strong. Cecil Hubbard passed away last year

From John D. Branch February 24, 2010

Here is a Certificate of Graduation from the 1st class, S/Sgt Weaver great instructor a great snake man also Sgt Henry Erben I think he was a Leg at that time; and Sgt Jerry Jacobs just came back from smoke jumpers school. We used old smoker gear for some time.

John Branch

PJ First class #1

WASH DEPARTMENT
CERTIFICATE OF TRAINING
This is to certify that
NAME: CPL JOHN D BRANCH 4P1423118
HAS SATISFACTORILY COMPLETED TRAINING IN
TITLE OF TRAINING: PARACHUTE AND LATER INFANTRY
Given at
GIVEN AT: 18 MARCH 1948
DATE: 18 MARCH 1948
SIGNATURE: John D. Branch
TITLE: CAPTAIN USARV
POSITION: 690 0-45-00700

SUBJECT: BRIEF SUMMARY REGARDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PARARESCUE TEAMS
AND THE PART I PLAYED IN ASSISTING IN THIS EFFORT.

1. At the time the Air Transport Command (later called MATS) was interested in forming the Air Rescue Service I was still overseas. I received PCS orders to report to ATC Hqtrs. as a consultant in the formulation of the ARS. This was during the period of Feb. 1946 to Oct. 1946. (See attachment #1 for confirmation of this period of time and assignment).

2. In October 1946 I left the service. In early 1947 Col. Dick Kight, then C.O. of ARS, contacted me and invited me to reinlist in the ARS and assist in establishing Pararescue teams and training facilities for such teams, as well as Land Rescue Teams. This I did in June 1947. (See attachment #2). *HENRY ERBEN, CECIL HUBBARD, J. B. WADD, TED SURPYKOWSKI, JAMES CURRY.*

3. The first pararescue personnel were sent to the US Forest Service Smokejumpers School at Missoula, Montana for instruction in advanced parachuting, use of protective equipment and clothing, tree landings and let-down techniques. *W.S. SMITH, RICHARD ENOCH, HOLDET*
① ② ③

4. The first pararescue teams were established and ready for field assignment in the last half of 1947 or early in 1948.

5. In 1948 I was placed on TDY to the Pentagon to design a career program for survival specialists. MOS 3383. I don't remember whether or not the pararescue personnel were then given this MOS or not. At that time we established career progression in this MOS to Chief Warrant Officer.

6. In July 1948 I received a direct commission and assigned as Chief, Pararescue Section, Operations, Hqtrs. ARS.

Bob Weaver

SUBJECT: SUMMARY OF SURVIVAL TRAINING IN THE USAF

In 1943 Richard Howard (now Prof. Howard of Harvard Univ.) and myself were assigned to an Aero Medical research and training staff under the USAAF School of Applied Tactics in Orlando, Florida. At that time we were Army Air Corps personnel and at that time survival training was not only non-existent in the USAAF but had received no consideration by any command. Information regarding ill-fated aircraft missions in the south pacific was channeled to the School of Applied Tactics for analysis. Such information often included data regarding the failure of aircrew members to survive a bailout in an isolated tropical environment though suffering no physical injury in the bailout or crash landing. From this information Dick and I decided there was a high priority for some type of survival training school which would develop curricula and instructors for unit level training schools throughout the south pacific command as well as CONUS units. Our first attempts to justify such a school to the powers that be were met with failure through the disapproval of the commanding officer of the School of Applied Tactics who continually referred to the USAAF as "that god-damned air arm". However in late 1943 the Pentagon dispatched a team of General officers and their staffs to visit all Army Air Force schools to determine those schools requiring expansion, those which were obsolete and should be closed and to identify requirements for new training programs resulting from on-going WW II air combat experiences. Dick and I were permitted to make a very short presentation as to the need and design of a survival school to meet not only the requirements of south pacific operations but air operations in other potential areas. Shortly after this inspection team returned to Washington, D.C. the Pentagon issued a directive to the C.O. of the School of Applied Tactics (same fellow who referred to the USAAF as "that god-damned air arm") to provide the necessary administrative facilities for Dick and I to conduct research, design curricula and establish the first survival school in the USAAF. (Shortly after the school was in full operation Dick assisted Frank and John Craighead in establishing the Navy's survival school at Pensacola, Fla.) The official designation of the AAF school was either in late 1943 or early 1944. I don't remember the exact month. The school was placed directly under the command of Donald Flickinger (now retired AF Gen.)

The first students trained by the school staff were personnel equipment officers, who in turn were responsible for establishing unit level survival training programs throughout the AAF. The academic phase of this training was at Orlando with the field training on Hypoluxo Island, adjacent to Lantana Florida. About a year after the school was initiated I was assigned to the China, Burma, India theater to lead a jungle rescue team in Upper Burma in the Kachin tribal area. The progress and events related to the school from that time until after WW II are unknown to me.

Immediately following WWII there were drastic cuts in military personnel, programs, and units. The School of Applied Tactics was amongst those units deactivated. However a few new organizations were formed for future air operations. One such organization was the Air Rescue Service. The Air Rescue Service assumed the responsibility of continuing survival training facilities for the now separated United States Air Force. At this time, in order to meet world wide Air Force requirements, the field training sites were expanded to include Florida, Texas and Labrador.

In 1947 or early 1948 I was temporarily assigned to the Personnel branch at the Pentagon to assist in designing and writing a career progression program and examinations for a survival technician field (MOS 3383). Up until then survival instructors were carried under a real hodgepodge of career designations, none of which remotely related to their duty assignment.

The Air Rescue Service assisted in establishing a survival training program at Chunute AFB and also assisted in the establishment of the survival school for the ARC Wing at McCall, Idaho. (The ARC Wing organization was first formed within the Air Rescue Headquarters) When SAC first held curricula conferences for the school at Camp Carson I attended such conference at the Broadmoor Hotel near Camp Carson so am quite familiar with the events leading up to and following the initiation of the SAC school.

Sometime after the SAC school was implemented discussions were held in Washington regarding the practicality of merging the survival phase of training of the Air Rescue Service, the Arctic Survival School in Alaska as well as the SAC school into a single school under the Air Training Command. This later resulted in the Stead AFB location which SAC personnel were instrumental in selecting.

A word in passing as to why the SAC school was established even though approved survival training facilities already existed in the Air Force which could have been expanded to incorporate the SAC requirement should SAC have desired such. (Though this is my personal opinion and probably should not appear in the history you are writing, I believe my explanation will make the reasoning obvious.) General LeMay desired SAC to be self-sufficient (rightly or wrongly doesn't really matter at this point) regarding several support facilities. At that time the Air Force had a large transport capability known as the Air Transport Command, later changed to MATS. SAC attempted to establish their own in-house air transport facilities. Although the Air Rescue Service had rescue responsibilities for the entire Air Force, SAC attempted to establish their own rescue service by persuading the 10th Rescue Organization in Alaska to form the nucleus of such an organization. Bernt Balkin, the C.O. of the Alaska organization deferred to the Air Rescue Service. SAC endeavors at establishing these duplicate facilities all failed except for the the survival school. Under this self-sufficiency approach it should be obvious why the SAC school was established and also obvious why at a later date the Air Force directed the merger of the schools for practical and economic reasons, rather than a desire by SAC to expand into a larger field training area.

With the establishment of the school at Stead AFB, SAC instructors and staff were transferred to Stead. Shortly after this move several ARS instructors were assigned to Stead AFB. ARS retained some of their survival instructors in order to train pararescue and land rescue team members. Between 1952 and 1956 I again lost contact with survival training activities as I was on loan to the American Museum of Natural History to do exploration work for them in Thailand. Following this assignment I joined the staff at Stead AFB.

As you can see some of my date recollections are hazy, however the following individuals may be able to provide more specific dates regarding the events I've related above.

Donald Flickinger (Retired USAF General. First survival school was under his command).

Richard T. Kight (Retired USAF General. Was C.O. of the ARS when survival training responsibilities were vested in the Air Rescue Service after WWII).

Ennis Taylor (ARC Wing survival training program in Idaho).

Burton Miller (SAC school staff member).

Richard Howard (Presently Professor in Harvard Univ. Botany department).

Bob Weaver

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