

President Lyndon B. Johnson presented a Presidential Unit Citation to the 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron for extraordinary gallantry in military operations in Vietnam in ceremonies at the White House on January 19, 1966.

"Because the men of the 38th have risked their lives so that their comrades might live, they join that company of the valiant to whom we all owe our freedom and our national honor," the President said.

"With this citation we pay a grateful nation's tribute to that selfless gallantry. The 38th Air Rescue Squadron stands in the finest tradition of service to our great country."

Examples of Southeast Asia Missions

The varying roles of the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service are illustrated by these examples of 1965 combat rescue missions:

- Two ARRS HH-43 helicopter aircrews were credited by Army medics with having the lives of five critically wounded soldiers in Vietnam. Chopper crews flew nine trips into the jungle battle area while Army UH-1B armed helicopters and U. S. Air Force A-1E Skyraiders flew protective air cover. The landing zone, surrounded by 125-foot high bamboo, was so small that the HH-43 rotor blades literally cut their way into and out of the area.

- An HH-43 on alert at Bien Hoa was airborne within two minutes after an F-100 pilot parachuted into enemy controlled territory during a heavy rain. The HH-43 homed-in on the pilot's personal locator beacon. Despite erratic signals, poor visibility and sporadic ground fire, the chopper descended to 25 feet, turned on its landing lights, located and rescued the downed pilot.

- Within minutes after an F-105 pilot ejected over the Gulf of Tonkin, an ARRS HU-16 located his position. While three jets flew RESCAP the HU-16 landed, picked up the downed pilot and returned him to safety -- in less than 30 minutes.

- When an F-105 pilot ejected following an attack on mobile surface-to-air missile sites near Hanoi, a HH-3C and its fighter escort proceeded to the rescue area. The chopper's 60-foot cable jammed on its winch. Efforts to retrieve the pilot by rope also failed. With the F-105 pilot dangling from its cable, the chopper moved a quarter of a mile to a rice paddy, lowered the pilot to the ground, then landed and picked him up. During this time the chopper suffered three hits from enemy ground fire, one round missing the fuel tank by inches. The rescue took 22 minutes, 17 more than a "normal" combat pickup.

- Using extra fuel tanks, an ARRS HH-43 crew flew 200 miles into North Vietnam to rescue a downed F-105 pilot. The pilot had landed among enemy troops, who had pinned him down in a dense hillside bamboo forest. Thick undergrowth had kept the enemy from reaching him first. Despite heavy rain showers, the HH-43 crew spotted the pilot's parachute. While fighter aircraft suppressed enemy ground fire, the HH-43 hovered five feet above the 100-foot tall bamboo and dropped its sling to rescue the downed pilot.

- An ARRS helicopter crew teamed up with Australian ground forces for a different kind of recovery. After a rendezvous with a U. S. Air Force forward air controller over an unsecured area 12 miles from Bien Hoa, adverse weather forced the chopper to fly at tree-top level. Upon reaching the pickup area, it hovered over a small clearing and lowered its forest penetrator cable. Australian soldiers ran from the dense underbrush and attached several objects to the cable. The recovery proved to be a high-priority cargo for Intelligence.

SPACE PROGRAM SUPPORT

In June 1961 Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service received international attention for its successful recovery of a capsule ejected from the Discover XXV satellite.

During Commander Scott Carpenter's orbital Project Mercury flight in May 1962, ARRS again demonstrated its recovery capability. Two U. S. Air Force pararescuemen leaped into the Atlantic recovery site, east of Puerto Rico, and installed a flotation collar around Aurora 7, the NASA spacecraft.

These two recoveries, particularly the latter, emphasized the importance of aircraft in support of manned space flights.

ARRS responsibilities in support of Project Gemini space flights include:

- Conduct recovery and support operations in the North American area through NASA's Orlando Recovery Control Center;
- Develop a global air contingency recovery plan;
- Plan for future employment of specially-equipped ARRS aircraft for reentry tracking, post landing location of the spacecraft, and recovery of flight personnel; and
- Provide the primary recovery in the entire launch site recovery area.

The objective of any recovery mission is to locate and recover the spacecraft and its occupants as quickly as possible, then deliver them to points designated by NASA.

Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service is responsible for two types of recovery:

- Planned recovery -- Pick up of astronauts and equipment from pre-planned splash-down areas under controlled conditions;
- Contingency recovery -- Recovery under any other conditions anywhere along the spacecraft's global orbital path.

Following the three-orbital flight of U. S. Air Force (Lt. Col.) Virgil Grissom and U. S. Navy (Cmdr) John Young on March 23, 1965, two ARRS pararescuemen parachuted into the Atlantic from an HC-54 and attached a flotation collar to the GT-3 space capsule.

During the GT-4 and GT-5 flights, ARRS was responsible for the launch