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USAFSO Helicopter Helps Flood-Stricken Costa Ricans

Albrook AFB — Close cooperation between the Civil Guard of Costa Rica and personnel of the U.S. Air Forces Southern Command was instrumental in the movement of 216 Costa Rican civilians from flooded areas of Limon Province, Costa Rica, over last weekend.

After heavy rains started flooding the Caribbean coastal area of Costa Rica Friday morning, a request was made to the United States Embassy in San Jose by the Costa Rican Government for help in moving approximately 40 marooned people.

Bad weather greeted the CH-3 "Big Charlie" helicopter that was dispatched to Puerto Limon by the USAFSO Rescue Coordination Center at Albrook. The helicopter, piloted by Capt. John R. Squire and Capt. David E. Lyall, 24th Special Operations Squadron, encountered strong headwinds in the two and one-half hour flight from Albrook to Puerto Limon. Upon arrival at the Costa Rica coastal town, the runway was under water and there was a

100-foot visibility ceiling.

Landing on higher ground off the runway, the helicopter crew was greeted by Alfonso Sole, governor of Limon Province, and Capt. Thomas Flemings, commander of the Puerto Limon Civil Guard detachment.

Other USAFSO personnel who arrived on the helicopter were TSgt. Harvey R. Pickelsomer and TSgt. James A. Spears, pararescue personnel of the 605th Special Operations Squadron, and TSgt. Roy Prater and Sgt. Luis Garcia, helicopter mechanics with the 24th Organizational Maintenance Squadron.

At 6:30 Saturday morning the personnel from the Canal Zone started their operations and had picked up 41 marooned persons by 10 a.m. After dropping them off on higher ground, reports started arriving at the airport about other people who were in possible danger from flood waters.

The helicopter took off again and flew up the Sixaola River separating Costa Rica and Panama. Flying under a 100-foot ceiling, the helicopter followed the river and spotted people in the water, or on ground that appeared in imminent danger of flooding. Capt. Lyall said the water extended some three miles from the banks of the river.

The helicopter pilot described the area they were flying in as river valleys surrounded by mountains. All the lowlands were flooded and they had to follow the rivers inland from the coast.

The water was so high it covered a railroad that ran parallel to the river. According to Capt. Lyall, the water was high enough that there



EMERGENCY AIRLIFT — TSgt. Harvey R. Pickelsimer, (l) pararescue man from the 605th Special Operations Squadron, and TSgt. Roy Prater, helicopter mechanic with the 24th Organizational Maintenance Squadron, carry a 12-year-old Costa Rican girl suffering from an appendicitis attack from a U.S. Air Forces Southern Command CH-3 "Big Charlie" helicopter at Puerto Limon, Costa Rica. The helicopter was in Costa Rica to help move villagers from their homes because of flood waters.

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