

Hackney comes back to ARRS

By SSgt. Tim Cunningham

SCOTT AFB, IL (MNS) — He was once described as a lean, muscular six-footer with a crew-cut and dimpled grin, who blushes easily and cringes at the word hero. He is SSgt. Duane Hackney, Air Force Cross winner and pararescue specialist come home to the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS).

Sergeant Hackney reenlisted in the Air Force March 25 in a brief ceremony at Flint, MI, marking the end of a four-

Besides the Air Force Cross, the Air Force's second highest military award, Sergeant Hackney received the Silver Star for saving six men during a mid-July 1967 attack at Da Nang AB, Vietnam. He received the Airman's Medal for heroism after he rescued a sailor from high seas when the seaman's boat capsized.

Sergeant Hackney also has received the Bronze Star, Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal. Among many other honors, he was the 1967 winner of the Cheney Award and the 1967 Military Airlift Command Airman of the Year.

But all these things, says Sergeant Hackney, don't make him a hero. "I don't think there's any such thing as a hero," he says. "I'm down on the word hero because my counterparts, my buddies in ARRS, do as much as I did, probably more. I didn't do all that by myself," he notes.

"What is a hero? I don't know what a hero is. We just do our job. I think any pararescue specialist you come across is going to try his damndest to rescue a person in need of help. It's his job, it's what he gets paid for."

Sergeant Hackney added, "There were no other survivors on that February 1967 mission — just me. I was lucky, but why should I be a hero? I didn't bring anybody back."

Ten years ago Sergeant Hackney was happy to help the Air Force and to receive the praise of his countrymen. But he was always anxious to go back to work as a pararescue specialist. He's still as ready to work today as he was a decade ago. "I want to go back into an operational unit. I hope that's where I'll be," said Sergeant Hackney. "Saving lives is what it's all about."



'I missed it'

year separation from ARRS. Why did he come back? "I missed it; I really missed it," he says. "It" is pararescue work. He also said he's still kicking himself for getting out four years ago.

For Sergeant Hackney, Air Force life is a commitment. "I've asked myself all the second-thought types of questions and I've answered myself yes. I've no qualms about coming back in the Air Force and staying here as a career. It's a commitment," he says.

It was 10 years ago when Sergeant Hackney, then only 19, won the Air Force Cross. Even then he would speak of commitment. But that, he says, doesn't make him a hero. During the Feb. 6, 1967, rescue of a downed pilot in North Vietnam, Sergeant Hackney's helicopter was taking enemy fire.

Despite that, Sergeant Hackney was able to pull the downed pilot aboard the helicopter. He put his own parachute on the man and then found another parachute for himself. He had started to put the parachute on when the



Since his reenlistment, Sergeant Hackney has been at Kirtland AFB, NM, for eight weeks of requalification training as a pararescue specialist. Except for a one-week orientation visit to ARRS headquarters, here, he has been busy at the New Mexico base honing his life saving skills.

During his four years away from the Air Force, Sergeant Hackney was a deputy sheriff in the Detroit area. "I can't say anything bad about police work because it put food on my table. But I don't think I'll miss it, not like I missed pararescue, like I missed all my friends," he said.

"Policemen don't have many friends. Of course, they can't. You don't trust anybody. But, in pararescue I had a lot of friends and all of them are true professionals."

Many of Sergeant Hackney's pararescue friends are now technical sergeants and master sergeants. Many of those same friends will now be his supervisors. When he left ARRS in 1973 he was a technical sergeant with two years time in grade; he came back in the Air Force as a staff sergeant with no time in grade. He points out though that staff sergeant is where he belongs for time being. "I was out for four years. That fine, polished professional it took me



'It's a commitment'

eight years to be, well, in four years I've lost a little of that polish. So staff sergeant is about where I belong. The pay isn't as good, but then again, you've got to like your job if you want to live."

Sergeant Hackney remains muscular; his hair is somewhat longer; he still has a dimpled grin; he still blushes. However, he's only 5 feet 10. Ten years later he still cringes at the word hero. But like many of his pararescue friends, he wants to live, to be with friends and, he does like his job.