

People in the News

After 24 years

'First' PJ still jumpin'

By Sgt. Ken Hollis

DA NANG Afd — Twenty-four years and still going strong MSgt. Harold W. Harvey in length of service is to the U.S. Air Force Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service what J. Edgar Hoover is to the F.B.I. and what Stachel Paige was to baseball.

The 44-year-old sergeant is the only member of the first Air Force pararescue class of March 1948 still wearing the coveted maroon beret of this strenuous and most harrowing specialty.

A member of the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron here, the tireless veteran does most of his work these days "in and out" of HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopters over the dense jungles of Southeast Asia. Like every one of the some 300 pararescuemen (PJs) stationed worldwide, he lives to "shoot" a rescue mission.

"Rescues are really what we're paid for. It may be dangerous, but it's also very exciting and very satisfying. I can't describe how good it feels to save a man's life," Sergeant Harvey stated.

A dangerous mission on New Year's Eve is especially fresh in the sergeant's mind.

"An OH-6 Loach and an UH-1 Huey (helicopters) were downed near the Cambodian border in Vietnam. We went in after their crews, but had to pull out because of heavy enemy ground fire. The backup Jolly finally made the pickup (eight men). Back at Da Nang, I discovered that the pilot of the Huey was my cousin who I had never met," Sergeant Harvey explained.

As a pararescueman, Sergeant Harvey has served as a gunner, medic and sometimes scuba diver aboard nine fixed wing aircraft and six types of helicopters. The list includes C-46, C-47, C-82, L-5, L-19, B-29, PBY, SA-16 and B-17 conventional type craft and H-5, H-19, H-21, H-43, HH-3E and HH-53 choppers.

"Looking back, I really have enjoyed my career...my work," said Sergeant Harvey. "I guess you could say I love it," he added, smiling.

The PJ volunteered for pararescue service because, "I thought it would be challenging and I was looking for something different." Drafted into the Army in 1945, he was an infantryman, a tank driver and finally a paramedic with the Army Air Corps before trying pararescue.

"More than 100 guys volunteered for the pararescue school and only 36 finished," the sergeant explained. "It was four damn tough months."

The demanding schedule took Sergeant Harvey from the swamps of Florida for jungle survival training to the Black Hills of South Dakota for Arctic survival. He also boned up on desert survival near Biggs Field, Tex., and learned to parachute from aircraft at Ft. Benning, Ga.

The spread out pararescue course also served to prepare the sergeant for a career of globetrotting. He has served in California, Greenland, Labrador, Africa and, finally, Vietnam. In all, he has seen duty in 19 countries on six continents.

Many subtle and dramatic changes have taken place in the pararescue service over the years.

"Of course, the biggest changes have been in the aircraft used for search and rescue," the sergeant noted. He expressed a particular fondness for the HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giants.

"We also wear much more equipment now than in the early days," said Sergeant Harvey. "Safety and protection are stressed."

Until 1960, the PJ wore only a pair of fatigues when making a rescue from a helicopter. Today in Vietnam, he wears camouflage fatigues, a ballistic helmet, H-harness containing a .38 caliber pistol and an extra radio or two, a survival vest with two more radios, a medical kit, compass, knife and a bottle of water. He also carries an AR-15 rifle.

Serving as noncommissioned officer in charge of the 37th ARRS pararescue section, he is seven months into his second Vietnam tour. The sergeant was here from July 1969 to July 1970. Sandwiched between was an assignment at Eglin AFB, Fla. He arrived for his present tour last July.

Sergeant Harvey has received many decorations for his accomplishments over the years. Among them are the Silver Star, two distinguished Flying Crosses and seven Air Medals.

While he cherishes these awards, the reactions of downed aircrew members he has helped save and their compliments have been enough reward in their own right.

There was one Navy pilot in particular. Burned over 70 per cent of his body after crashing in his F-86 fighter in California, he called Sergeant Harvey, who parachuted from a C-47 to rescue him, an "angel from heaven."

The pilot wasn't too far off. Sergeant Harvey and others like him could be called angels in fatigues and the berets they wear with pride, their halos.

Affixed to the crest of the pararescuemen's beret is an emblem with the design of an angel of mercy watching over the rescue forces of the world. Inscribed on the metal emblem are the words, "These Things We Do That Others May Live."



U.S. Air Force Photo by A1C Ron Anderson

Sergeant Harvey checks the miniguns on an HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopter prior to a flight out of Da Nang.