

THE PARARESCUEMEN

The Air Force's PJs are a tough breed and always ready to jump into action.

Photography by Rick Llinares





Pararescuemen of the 106th Rescue Wing, New York Air National Guard, are hoisted aboard an HH-60G during a September 2008 training exercise at Francis S. Gabreski Airport, Westhampton, N.Y. Ascending to the chopper are MSgt. Erik Blom and MSgt. Jules Roy.

The pararescueman belongs to a tough breed of airmen, an all-business blend of warrior and paramedic. The PJ—initials for an earlier name, “pararescue jumper”—often must fight his way to a combat save, provide medical care to a downed flight crew, and fight his way out. PJs in recent years have helped save civilians caught in hurricanes. These dual roles underline their status as USAF operators and Guardsmen. The 106th Rescue Wing operates HC-130 Hercules fixed-wing transports and HH-60G Pave Hawks from Gabreski Arpt., N.Y. [1] SrA. Tony Yusup, a 103rd Rescue Squadron PJ, heads out to locate a downed airman. PJs typically carry about 100 pounds of gear. [2] Covering the PJs are door gunners. This M134 minigun is being manned by SSgt. Ryan Helf of the 101st Rescue Squadron.



[3] An airman simulating injury is readied for extraction by Blom, Roy, and Yusup. [4] The Pave Hawk carries a crew of four: two pilots, a flight engineer, and a gunner. Shown here are SSgt. Michael Algozzino and SSgt. Raymond Mitchel, gunner and engineer, respectively. [5] Getting to a downed airman sometimes requires a steerable jump from an HC-130. PJs often jump at night. Upon landing, they conceal their 'chutes, link up, and use GPS gear to stealthily seek the downed flight personnel. [6] An airman with simulated injuries is tended by SrA. Phillip Dwyer.



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[1] A 106th RQW Pave Hawk hovers near the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. Fulfilling a state mission, the unit deployed to lower Manhattan to assist in recovery efforts after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks there. [2] The HC-130 is a long-range version of the venerable Hercules, configured to enable the CSAR mission. It can refuel Pave Hawks in flight and at night, and has night vision gear. [3] A Pave Hawk raises dust as it settles down at Gabreski Airport. [4] Maj. John McElroy coordinates a CSAR training mission. [5] Blom and Roy deploy communication gear in search of a convoy hit by a simulated mine.

[1] In an exercise, TSgt. Mark Busch plays the role of an airman needing treatment after his two-vehicle convoy struck a simulated IED. Dwyer and SSgt. Michael Talbot provide help after jumping from an HC-130. The "wounded" were airlifted out via Pave Hawk after the PJs provided first aid and secured the area. When picking up downed aircrew, PJs treat airmen as if they might be impostors until their identity is established. Aircrew know to "assume the position." **[2]** Blom secures the perimeter in an exercise at Gabreski. PJs from the 106th RQW played the enemy ground forces. **[3]** During an extraction, one Pave Hawk will fly cover as the other makes the pickup. Helf mans the minigun.



[4] The HC-130s in USAF service are evenly divided between active and Guard units. The type first flew in 1964. **[5]** SMSgt. John Krulder, a flight engineer, assists two PJs ready to be hoisted aboard an HH-60G. **[6]** SMSgt. Brian Mosher is about to touch down after a 10,000-foot descent from an HC-130.



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[1] Blom awaits extraction during a Gabreski exercise. [2] The M134 minigun offers a 7.62 mm punch for the Pave Hawk, at 3,000 rounds per minute if needed. This HH-60 is forming up on an HC-130 off Long Island. [3] Dwyer and Talbot secure their parachutes after hitting the

ground at Gabreski. [4] A pair of Pave Hawks lifts off after rescuing injured airmen in an exercise. Part ambulance, part gunship, they can fight into and out of a hot spot if necessary. [5] PJs must be physically as well as mentally strong. Here, Dwyer, Mosher, and Talbot haul their

considerable gear and parachutes to a waiting HC-130. [6] An HC-130 prepares to refuel a Pave Hawk of the 101st RQS. The Air Force hopes to give the PJs a new ride in the near future: A replacement for the Pave Hawk should be chosen this year. ■