



## USAF COMBAT SEARCH AND RESCUE RECOVERY FORCES

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Air Force personnel recovery (PR) efforts in a denied or contested environment are often combined into a tailored combat search and rescue task force (CSARTF)—a proven mechanism that has significantly enhanced combat search and rescue (CSAR) operations. The size and complexity of the CSARTF depends on the mission requirements and the threat. The CSARTF typically has two elements: PR assets and augmenting assets. Included among both are dedicated aircraft, specially trained personnel, and specific positions crucial to the PR mission.

A CSARTF is a mutually supporting package designed to protect the survivor on the ground before and during recovery, and the recovery force package from small arms, surface to air, air to air, and air to ground threats. The assets will be tailored to meet specific CSAR requirements. The exact composition of the CSARTF varies with threats enroute and in vicinity of the isolated personnel (IP). With proper planning, the CSARTF will be able to defeat or degrade the threat to an acceptable level of risk and enable the successful recovery of IP.

Due to changing threat conditions and IP status enroute to the objective, the CSARTF may require numerous adjustments and further augmentation during recovery operations. As such, all aircraft within control of the [air component commander](#) should be prepared to assist recovery operations. Additionally, the personnel recovery coordination cell (PRCC) should be prepared to request augmentation and support from the other functional or Service components through the joint personnel recovery center.

### DEDICATED PR FORCES

**Vertical-Lift Aircraft.** Rescue helicopters are utilized for long range, low level, day or night marginal weather operations into hostile environments to recover distressed or IP. Missions are usually flown as multi-ship formations to provide mutual support, but may be executed with a single ship based on threat and other supporting asset availability. Similarly, they may be employed as part of a larger composite force (e.g., embedded in a large air strike package) or launched in response to a PR event. Note, however, that vertical-lift assets would include both helicopters and tilt-rotor aircraft. Air Force special operations forces (AFSOF) are occasionally tasked to employ tilt-rotor aircraft in support

of US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) PR, under the requirements of their component PRCC.

**Fixed-Wing Rescue Aircraft.** Fixed-wing rescue assets are another key element of PR. Their primary role is to extend the PR umbrella coverage and to employ or extract Guardian Angel recovery teams. The depth of the battlespace and IP location may require that helicopter refueling be conducted in a non-permissive environment. Besides aerial refueling, these assets are capable of airdropping or air landing recovery teams and equipment to assist and recover IP. Additionally, fixed-wing rescue aircraft have an expanded communications capability, making them a natural communication relay platform, and their extended range allows movement of recovered IP over longer distances. AFSOF fixed-wing aircraft maintain comparable PR capabilities.

**Guardian Angel (GA).** GA is a non-aircraft, human- and equipment-based weapon system that is organized, equipped, and trained to conduct all five PR execution tasks (report, locate, support, recover, and reintegrate). GA provides recovery teams (RT) and operational support capabilities for [joint force commanders](#) (JFCs). Air Force recovery teams (RT) provide the ground element of the PR forces and as such RTs may have to deploy into uncertain or hostile environments and denied areas prior to, during, and after combat operations in support of the JFC's comprehensive PR plan. GA is organized into two functional areas: tactical recovery teams (TRTs) and operational support.

TRT capabilities are employed by specially trained personnel to recover IP and sensitive equipment. TRT operators directly assist, control, enable, and execute “operational air and space power functions in the forward battle space” in accordance with DAF Program Directive 10-35, [Air Force Special Warfare](#). TRT operators include combat rescue officers (CRO) and pararescue jumpers (PJs), but may also include other specialists as required (e.g. explosive ordnance disposal). These operators employ by multiple means as either a stand-alone capability or as part of a task force to penetrate hostile or uncertain environments and denied areas. CRO and PJ operators function across the full spectrum of conflict.

**Rescue Mission Commander (RMC).** The RMCs are vested with [tactical control](#) authority and responsibilities include planning, locating, supporting, recovering, and reintegrating of IP; to include direct control and maneuver of supporting and maritime assets in the operational area. The RMC reports to the air component commander, or delegated authority, and communicates and coordinates the recovery effort.

**Rescue Escort (RESCORT).** Based on threats to the IP and the recovery force, RESCORT is an integral part of CSARTF. RESCORT aircraft provide navigation assistance, route sanitization, and armed escort for the recovery vehicle(s). In increased threat environments, this assistance significantly improves the chances of a successful recovery. Ideally, RESCORT aircraft should be tactical aircraft capable of operating in the same environment as recovery vehicles. RESCORT formations should be proficient

in rendezvous procedures, escort tactics at medium and low altitudes, and defense of the rescue vehicles during mission execution.

**Airborne Mission Coordinator (AMC).** An AMC coordinates the flying mission for forces designated to support a specific CSAR operation. The AMC may be designated by component PRCCs or higher authority to coordinate the efforts of several assets. The AMC serves as an airborne communications and data relay between rescue forces and command elements. The E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System, though heavily tasked, is the most capable AMC platform due to its extensive communications capability and ability to oversee the air picture. Other multi-crewed assets such as the HC-130 (rescue aircraft), Navy E-2 Hawkeye, and the E-8 Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System are also very capable AMC platforms. The AMC coordinates refueling of air recovery assets. The AMC also keeps the recovery force elements and personnel recovery task force (PRTF) commander and RMC informed of all pertinent information, such as threats, aborts, and electronic warfare information. The AMC advises the PRTF commander, RMC, and air component commander of mission support requirements, and coordinates the designation and use of appropriate fire support coordinating measures.

**On-scene Commander (OSC).** The OSC is the individual who initiates rescue efforts in the objective area until rescue forces arrive. Initially, the OSC may be the pilot of any aircraft in the vicinity, including the wingman of a downed aircraft. The OSC's initial actions are to attempt to establish communication, locate and authenticate the IP, and pass essential elements of information to the AMC. The OSC role will be transferred to the RMC or as directed by the RMC or AMC as required. After transferring OSC duties to the RMC, the original OSC may remain on station in a supporting role.

## **AUGMENTING PR FORCES**

**Forward Air Controller (Airborne) (FAC[A]).** The FAC(A) controls air strikes in close proximity to the IP. A FAC(A) may be able to locate and authenticate the IP before the arrival of other elements of the CSARTF and may be able to function as the OSC until the rescue forces arrive. The FAC(A) may perform OSC duties until the RMC arrives on station. The FAC(A) may also provide a current and accurate assessment of enemy activity in and around the objective area.

**Air Refueling (AR) Aircraft.** Multiple ARs may be required during prolonged CSAR operations. Sequencing of assets between refueling and marshalling points should be carefully managed in order to have all rescue elements available at mission execution time. For real-time CSAR execution, refueling support requirements are relayed through the AMC to the PRCC. The PRCC will orchestrate AR support with the tanker coordination cell.

**Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Platforms.** ISR platforms, whether air- or space-based, possess a tremendous capability for supporting CSAR efforts, especially for detecting and locating IP, as well as monitoring threat systems in

the objective area. These assets are also suited to maintaining a listening overwatch on IP and monitoring IP frequencies when an immediate recovery is not possible. Ultimately, these platforms provide commanders and CSAR forces with the situational awareness to make necessary decisions for the successful recovery of IP.

**Space Systems.** In addition to space ISR assets briefly mentioned above, other space systems provide support during search and recovery operations, such as providing: vital communications between the CSARTF, PR forces, and IP. Additionally, space systems enable precise timing and navigation signals and environmental monitoring (weather) during search and recovery operations. Finally, search and recovery operations may benefit from offensive counterspace operations. The denial or disruption of adversary space capabilities may serve to hinder the adversary's ability to effectively organize, coordinate and orchestrate operations intended to interfere with personnel recovery.

**Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD).** SEAD forces minimize the surface-to-air threat to friendly forces executing PR missions. Integrated and interoperable communications between SEAD forces, rescue forces, and ISR platforms are critical. When assigning SEAD platforms, the threat environment should be defined for all rescue forces.

**Electronic Warfare (EW).** EW forces help mitigate the surface-to-air and air-to-air threat to friendly forces executing PR missions. Integrated and coordinated EW capabilities between rescue forces, SEAD forces, EW platforms and forces, and ISR platforms are critical to successful PR missions. The ability to provide synergistic denial, degradation or defeat of enemy radar and communication capabilities should be part of planning considerations.

**Joint and Coalition PR Forces.** Other components and coalition partners may assist in the PR of isolated Airmen just as Air Force PR forces assist in the recovery of the joint or coalition personnel. Joint, Service, allied, and foreign publications govern how these forces are integrated within the PR architecture. Nonetheless, it is important, to keep in mind that AF PR construct assets are part of a greater PR system and that Airmen need to work closely with joint and coalition partners to recover any IP from hostile or uncertain environments and denied areas.

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