



Air National Guard members save lives by land, sea

by Capt. Alyson Teeter
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7/18/2008 - **MOFFETT FEDERAL AIRFIELD, Calif.**, -- Air National Guardsmen from the 129th Rescue Wing launched a search and rescue mission from here July 16 to save a fisherman experiencing a medical emergency aboard a Canadian fishing boat off the coast of California.

Responding to a pararescuemen headed to the 85-foot Ocean Marauder fishing boat about 500 miles from Eureka, Calif.

During this initial phase of the rescue operation, four specially trained pararescuemen parachuted from an MC-130P Combat Shadow aircraft to provide emergency medical treatment to stabilize the patient. The four pararescuemen remained with the patient overnight, while the MC-130P returned to Moffett Airfield.

At 10 a.m. July 17, the 129th launched the second phase of the rescue operation. Two HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters and two MC-130P tankers departed to pick up the patient and pararescuemen from the ship. After locating the fishing boat, the HH-60Gs hovered over the vessel to allow the pararescuemen and patient to be hoisted safely into the helicopters.

The two HH-60G helicopters and crews were recalled yesterday from firefighting operations in Chico and Ukiah, California. The 129th maintainers worked diligently to convert the aircraft from firefighting to rescue-ready.

While also being on search and rescue alert, helicopter crews performed water-bucket suppression operations in Northern California, dropping more than 150,000 gallons of water since July 3.

The 129th Rescue Wing is the only rescue unit in the U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard qualified to fight fires.

"The 129th is the 'go-to' unit due to its specialized capabilities in a wide range of environments, such as fires, floods, earthquakes, combat and civilian search and rescue," said Lt. Col. Steve Butow, the 129th Operations Group deputy commander. "Seamlessly transitioning from firefighting duty yesterday to the search-and-rescue mission today demonstrates our keen ability to adapt, respond and save lives."

The rescue helicopter landed at the Regional Medical Center of San Jose's heliport at about 5:20 p.m. July 17, where Airmen transferred the patient to awaiting hospital staff. This rescue brings the total number of people saved by 129th Rescue Wing to 560.

The unit's primary mission is to train and be prepared to perform its federal mission of combat search and rescue anywhere in the world. In addition, the unit also works closely with the Coast Guard and various civil agencies on state missions.

"The crews of the 129th Rescue Wing have done an outstanding job," said Rear Adm. Craig Bone, the Coast Guard District 11 commander.

"When our rescue coordination center asked them to fly this mission, the response was immediate and, as usual, effective. Amid an already busy operational tempo supporting wildfire fighting and other operations the 129th (RW) mounted a complex rescue operation extending hundreds of miles offshore."

(Air Force Capt. Alyson Teeter serves with the California National Guard.)

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