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BASED AT NELLIS: Airman killed in crash

Helicopter goes down during rescue of injured Afghan election worker

By [KEITH ROGERS](#)
[REVIEW-JOURNAL](#)



Airman 1st Class Jesse M. Samek, 21, of Rogers, Ark., was a member of Nellis' 66th Rescue Squadron. COURTESY OF SAMEK FAMILY



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A Nellis Air Force Base airman on a rescue mission to save a wounded election worker in Afghanistan died Thursday after a helicopter crash injured him and two other crewmen, U.S. military officials said Friday.

Airman 1st Class Jesse M. Samek, a 21-year-old flight engineer from Rogers, Ark., became the first casualty from Nellis in the nation's war on terrorism that began after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

"He loved that his job was to do rescues and saving people in this war-torn world," his mother, Julia Samek, is quoted as saying in statement from Nellis officials.

She said her son enjoyed sports and was an avid St. Louis Cardinals baseball fan.

"He was a great outdoorsman. He loved camping, hiking, hunting, fishing and snow and water skiing. He played recreational hockey as a goalie," she said.

Samek, a member of Nellis' 66th Rescue Squadron, was aboard an HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter when it went down about 11 p.m. Wednesday, 105 miles east of Shindand in western Afghanistan. Samek was one of five crew members, and his duties included managing the aircraft load.

The crash is under investigation, but Air Force officials said it was not caused by hostile action.

The crew was on a medical mission to rescue an employee of Afghanistan's Joint Electoral Management Body, which was charged with overseeing the country's general elections, held Oct. 9.

The worker was wounded when a police officer guarding election officials accidentally fired his gun, said Maj. Mark McCann, a spokesman for the Combined Forces Command in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Samek, the other two injured airmen and the election worker were transported to a medical facility at Kandahar Air Field. The surviving airmen eventually were taken to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany.

Citing policy, the Air Force Special Operations Command declined to release their names.

Members of the 66th Rescue Squadron were unavailable for comment Friday. However, the squadron commander, Lt. Col. Steven Shepard, said in the Nellis statement that Samek will be missed.

"We lost a valuable member of our team and our Air Force family," Shepard stated. "Airman Samek will be missed, but his dedication and sacrifice will never be forgotten. Right now our efforts are focused on providing support to his family, friends and squadron members."

Nellis spokeswoman Capt. Maureen Schumann said more than 300 airmen from the base are deployed for overseas operations, including 20 from the 66th Rescue Squadron.

Samek was deployed for Operation Enduring Freedom late last month, and the tour in Afghanistan was his first deployment since coming to Nellis in June, she said.


Originally from O'Fallon, Mo., near St. Louis, Jesse Monroe Samek moved to Arkansas in 1997 and graduated from Rogers High School in 2001.

He joined the Air Force in February 2003 after attending the University of Arkansas for a year.

Melody Vaughn, who taught Samek high school English, remembered him as an "excellent student."

"He was a nice young man," said Vaughn, who was his teacher as a sophomore and junior.

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