

Fairchild aircrew saves woman

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92nd Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

6/6/2008 - **FAIRCHILD AIR FORCE BASE, Wash. (AFPN)** -- A five-man UH-1N Huey crew from the 36th Rescue Flight here responded to an emergency call June 3 and rescued a 44-year-old woman reported lost by her husband in Ellensburg, Wash.

The Kittitas County Sheriff's Department requested assistance from the Air Force the morning of June 3 after ground teams, K-9 units and aircraft were unable to locate a missing woman who had left her home at 3 a.m. June 2.

The Air Force rescue crew was dispatched from Fairchild Air Force Base at around 8 a.m. June 3 after getting the call from the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center at Tyndall AFB, Fla. The crew was led by Maj. Daniel Nielsen, the 36th RQF director of operations and aircraft commander for the mission. The major was accompanied by 1st Lt. James Outland, a pilot; Master Sgt. Patrick Hunt, an independent-duty medical technician paramedic; Tech. Sgt. Matt Ryplewski, a flight engineer; and Chaz Burton, a crew chief.

Upon arriving at Bowers Field in Ellensburg, the crew refueled the helicopter and quickly returned to the sky. At around 10:15 a.m. they were in the area of concern and searching for the lost woman.

"When we arrived into the area, we were surrounded by clouds. The ceiling was as low as 500 feet, and visibility was limited to about two miles," Lieutenant Outland said. "With conditions like that, we weren't sure that we would be able to find her."

But the crew did find her. About two hours after beginning their search, just as the clouds began to lift, the Airmen discovered the woman walking along a high ridgeline, three miles from her home.

"We weren't expecting that she would be in an area so high up," Sergeant Hunt said. "We had a hunch, we went with it and we found her."

The crew landed the helicopter on a rural road near the woman's location. Sergeant Hunt was first to assist.

"The woman was underdressed. She wasn't wearing pants or shoes," he said. "She was suffering from mild hypothermia. Her feet were noticeably injured, and several toes appeared to be fractured."

Sergeant Hunt removed his flight jacket, placed it over the woman, and brought her back to the helicopter where she was given a snack and bottled water. The crew left the scene shortly thereafter, and headed back to Bowers Field, where an ambulance met the crew and transferred the woman to a local hospital for care.

The woman's husband reported he was very grateful to all those who participated in the search efforts.

"We owe a thanks that can never be repaid to the professionals involved in the search from Kittitas County and throughout the state," he said.

"We train tirelessly, so to experience our training translate into a successful mission like this is very rewarding," Major Nielsen said.

This was the 624th rescue for the 36th RQF.