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New capability improves search, rescue response

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347th Rescue Wing Public Affairs

MOODY AIR FORCE BASE, Ga. Pararescuemen in the 347th Rescue Group here are preparing to add a new capability to their life-saving arsenal.

Kangaroo Duck, a process which involves strapping an inflatable rubber raft to the underbelly of an HH-60 Pave Hawk, will be used to better assist with water-rescue scenarios, like those experienced during Hurricane Katrina.

The process got its name because the attached raft appears similar to a kangaroo's pouch when the helicopter is stationary, and boats can be referred to as ducks in the rescue community.

This method of operations is unique to Air Force combat search and rescue, said Lt. Col. Lee Pera, 347th Rescue Group deputy commander.

"After Katrina, we looked back at our operations to see if we could do anything better," he said. "One of the capabilities we didn't have was to deliver a boat to an area which was flooded or damaged by the hurricane. We felt this would be a great option to have for those rescues."

Currently, rafts for water rescues are stored inside the cabin, which takes up space that could be more effectively used for equipment or additional crewmembers. The K-Duck concept alleviates this dilemma, while adding an extra "pouch" to store equipment, said Lt. Col. Terry Johnson, 38th Rescue Squadron commander.

"K-Duck allows us to basically free up the whole cabin," he said. "It gives an additional area to store our rucksacks, weapons, water and food. Because it's already inflated, all the pararescuemen need to do is just cut it and jump in."

The implementation of this capability into the Air Force CSAR community will enable quicker, more effective responses to a myriad of scenarios, Colonel Johnson said.



“K-Duck will allow us to better support Joint Forces Command operations and combat insertions, deal with hurricanes and civilian search and rescue efforts, and possibly assist with space shuttle missions,” he said.

Even when loading up to 1,500 pounds into the raft, the flight performance of the HH-60 is minimally impacted by K-Duck, said Colonel Pera.

“There is an increased drag which limits maximum forward speed and slightly increases fuel burn rates, but overall, there is very little effect on the flying quality,” he said.

The K-Duck was successfully tested in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Apalachicola, Fla., recently and officials expect mission-ready operations by the spring.

“I used this capability under Air Force Special Operations Command about 10 years ago, but the rescue community never actually adopted it,” said Colonel Pera. “So, we recently began working with the system project office at Robins (Air Force Base, Ga.) to get it off the ground. We'll soon start the training pyramid, but initially we just want to establish the capability.”

Ensuring a successful transition to the new way of operating is important to readiness, especially after events following Hurricane Katrina showed a changing Air Force role in domestic disaster response, said Colonel Pera.

“You really never know when we'll face another event like Hurricane Katrina,” he said. “But like everything in rescue, we train, we have the capability, and we are ready to execute. Gaining this capability is just another example (of that mentality).”

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