



Fairchild rescue flight saves 3 in busy week

by by 2nd Lt. Tristan Hinderliter
92nd Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

1/19/2007 - **FAIRCHILD AIR FORCE BASE, Wash. (AFNEWS)** -- Helicopter crews from the 36th Rescue Flight here rescued a man and his son Jan. 11 and a woman Jan. 14 in what turned out to be a busy, heroic week in North Idaho. The second save was number 613 for the flight, which is part of the U.S. Survival School, a tenant unit at Fairchild.

The action started the evening of Jan. 10, when Airmen in the 36th RQF were notified that a man and his teenage son were stranded in the wilderness north of Sandpoint, Idaho, after their snowmobiles had become disabled in deep snow.

The father was able to communicate by cell phone with local search and rescue crews, but the ground search stalled when the rescuers' snowmobiles also became stuck in deep snow. The 36th RQF crews launched two helicopters, but had to abort both missions due to severe weather and low visibility.

Shortly after 9 a.m. the following morning, rescue flight aircrews launched two UH-1N Huey helicopters for another attempt to rescue the man and boy, who had spent the night above 5,000 feet elevation in sub-freezing temperatures.

Around 10:45 a.m, the crews spotted the pair and descended for the rescue, said Capt. Micah West, one of the pilots. Also on board his aircraft was Capt. Zach Guza and flight engineers Tech. Sgt. Matt Rylewski and Staff Sgt. Jamie Aulbach.

The other helicopter, piloted by Capt. Mike Volkerding, with Capt. Chris Roness and flight engineer Senior Amn. Jake Bragg, lowered Tech. Sgt. John Parish, a survival school independent duty medical technician, or IDMT, 70 feet on the hoist so he could assess the medical condition of the two men.

"They had made a snow cave and fire the night before," said Sergeant Parish, "but by the time we arrived their gear was frozen. I don't know if they could have made it another night."

Captain Volkerding's aircraft hoisted the boy and flew him to a nearby airport where he was picked up by ambulance and transported to a local hospital. In the meantime Sergeant Parish looked after the father, whose condition was more serious, while the second helicopter circled back around to pick them both up. The father was taken directly to the hospital.

Both were treated and released that morning, the local newspaper reported Jan. 12.

"This sort of situation is something we train for on a regular basis at the survival school," said Captain Volkerding of the rescue. "It's very rewarding to be able to use our skills to help civilians in the community when they get into trouble."

Part of the rescue flight's mission, in addition to supporting survival school activities, is assisting local authorities by conducting search and rescue and medical evacuation missions such as this.

Airmen in the 36th RQF had the opportunity again just three days later.

Mid-afternoon on Jan. 14, rescue flight aircrews were tasked by Air Force Rescue Coordination Center officials to aid in a search and rescue operation in progress near Wallace, Idaho. Captain Volkerding, again the aircraft commander, gathered his crew of copilot 1st Lt. Duke Warner, flight engineer Master Sgt. Keith Fitzgerald, and IDMT Master Sgt. Cameron Aaron and headed to Idaho.

Ground search crews already had located the subject, a woman who had suffered a broken leg in a snowmobile crash in rough terrain. The Idaho emergency medical service was on scene administering first-aid, but they needed air support to extract her due to the rough terrain, Captain Volkerding said.

It was dark when the helicopter arrived shortly after 5 p.m., so the crew had to use night vision goggles. They did not have communication with the ground, the captain said, but were able to locate the injured woman and

ground rescue crews by spotting flares. About 5:45 p.m., they went to work in the steep terrain.

The helicopter circled the site several times while the crew determined the best approach. With temperatures dipping below zero, they lowered Sergeant Aaron on the hoist penetrator 80 feet into the dark. Sergeant Aaron worked with the injured woman for about 20 minutes to prepare her for recovery. He then requested a stokes litter, a stretcher with sides and a removable torso cover.

The aircrew hoisted the injured woman into the helicopter, then hoisted Sergeant Aaron and headed to a medical center in Coeur d'Alene.

"It was a challenging recovery," Captain Volkerding said. "The terrain was very steep with tall trees and the blowing snow, but it always feels good to be able to use our training to help people."

[Comment on this story](#) *(comments may be published on Air Force Link)*

[Click here to view the comments/letters page](#)