

# STARS AND STRIPES

Friday, February 23, 2001

## Air Force copter crew answers call to evacuate woman from Korean island

By [Jim Lea](#)

*Osan bureau chief*

OSAN AIR BASE, South Korea — A U.S. Air Force helicopter crew from Osan flew through thick fog Monday to a tiny island near North Korea to save a South Korean woman and her unborn child.

Officials on Bek Ryung Island originally had called for a police emergency helicopter to evacuate the woman identified as Yu Shin-ja, 33, about 8 p.m. Sunday.



*Jeromy Cross / Stars and Stripes*

**The Yu Family and members of the 33rd Rescue Squadron catch a glimpse of Yu Shin-ja's new daughter at a hospital in Inchon, South Korea. A helicopter crew from the 33rd saved Yu, Shin-ja from Bek Ryung a small island in the Yellow Sea after she developed complications during childbirth.**

Yu needed an emergency caesarian section that could not be performed on the island, a police spokesman said.

Bek Ryung is one of five tiny South Korean islands near the Northern Limit Line that separates South and North Korean territorial waters in the upper reaches of the Yellow Sea. It is only a few miles from the North Korean mainland.

Police helicopters were grounded because of the fog, so the South Korean air force was asked to fly the mission, the police spokesman said.

A helicopter was launched from Chongju Air Base, south of Seoul, but had to return because of the weather.

South Korean officials asked the U.S. Air Force's help at 11:30 p.m.

Master Sgt. John Norgren, an Osan spokesman, said an HH-60G Pave Hawk from the 33rd Rescue Squadron left for the two-hour flight carrying a South Korean air force interpreter and Dr. (Capt.) James J. Thomas, a family practice physician assigned to the 51st Medical Group at Osan.

Norgren said visibility was less than one mile. But the Pave Hawk is equipped with sophisticated night vision and navigational equipment that

allows it to fly in all weather conditions.

Air crews from the 33rd also train regularly in bad weather and low visibility conditions to be prepared for such emergencies, Norgren said.

The helicopter landed on Bek Ryung at 3:55 a.m. and took about 15 minutes to take Yu aboard, he said.

The helicopter landed at Inchon, about 10 miles west of Seoul, about two hours later.

Yu was rushed to Inchon's Central Gil Hospital. She gave birth to a baby girl shortly after her arrival, a hospital spokesman said.

Both mother and daughter are doing well.

***Bae Gi-chul contributed to this report.***

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