

Reserve rescue team pulls 17 from floodwaters

by Tech. Sgt. Paul Flipse

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(AFP) -- Air Force reservists assigned to the 331st Air Expeditionary Group, a inter-agency search and rescue unit based at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, rescued 17 people from Hurricane Ike flood waters Sept. 13 in a small Texas town.

The reservists, deployed from the 920th Rescue Wing at Patrick Air Force Base, Fla., with two HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters and two HC-130P/N long-range refueling aircraft were en route to the Galveston area when they flew over the town of Nederland, population 2,000, and saw it was mostly underwater. They quickly circled the town and began pulling people from rooftops and off flooded roads.



Rescue team pulls seventeen from floodwaters

An HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter assigned to the 331st Air Expeditionary Group passes over three massive hydraulic excavators sitting in flood waters from Hurricane Ike. Deployed from the 920th Rescue Wing at Patrick Air Force Base, Fla., the pararescuemen, along with aircrews, two HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters and two HC-130P/N refueling aircraft, rescued 17 people from the small Texas town of Nederland Sept. 13. (U.S. Air Force photo/Tech. Sgt. Paul Flipse)



An Air Force Reserve pararescueman assigned to the 331st Air Expeditionary Group scans the ravaged Texas landscape for signs of life in the aftermath of Hurricane Ike. Deployed from the 920th Rescue Wing at Patrick Air Force Base, Fla., the pararescuemen, along with aircrews, two HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters and two HC-130P/N refueling aircraft, rescued 17 people from the small Texas town of Nederland Sept. 13. (U.S. Air Force photo/Tech. Sgt. Paul Flipse)

Col. Steve Kirkpatrick, the 920th RQW commander, was

made commander of the rescue group, which comprises more than 600 personnel and approximately 20 Air Force and Navy HH-60 helicopters and four HC-130s.

After Hurricane Ike made landfall, the group deployed its search and rescue assets to affected states, providing qualified and immediate medical care, while bringing the ability to conduct air refueling, airlift and air-drops of supplies to the operation, and the ability to hoist people in need out of danger.

"Our SAR crews endure specialized training to conduct humanitarian and combat search and rescues," Colonel Kirkpatrick said. "We always hope there won't be a need for it. But when there is, we'll do it, and we'll do it well."

In addition to rescuing the 17 people from the floodwaters, the teams also

rescued three Chihuahuas and two black cats.

In 2005, wing Airman were a key asset during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Within 34 hours of Katrina's landfall, crews from the 920th deployed to the Gulf region and were the first Air Force responders on scene. Once in place, the unit's rescue professionals sustained 21 days of around-the-clock operations involving 200 wing personnel.

When they were through, they were credited with saving 1,043 lives, including 475 people in one day alone -- Sept. 1. In all, the Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Coast Guardsmen of Joint Task Force Katrina saved more than 60,000 lives.



Airmen to the rescue

Master Sgt. Doug Kestranek, assigned to a 331st Air Expeditionary Group team who rescued people and pets from the flood waters of Hurricane Ike, brings a dog to safety Sept. 13 in Nederland, Texas. Sergeant Kestranek is an Air Force Reserve pararescueman assigned to the 920th Rescue Wing at Patrick Air Force Base, Fla. (U.S. Air Force photo/Tech. Sgt. Paul Flipse)



Rescue team pulls seventeen from floodwaters

Air Force Reserve pararescuemen assigned to the 331st Air Expeditionary Group prepare to rescue a family trapped on the roof of their home by flood waters from Hurricane Ike. Deployed from the 920th Rescue Wing at Patrick Air Force Base, Fla., the pararescuemen, along with aircrews, two HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters and two HC-130P/N refueling aircraft, rescued 17 people from the small Texas town of Nederland Sept. 13. (U.S. Air Force photo/Tech. Sgt. Paul Flipse)