



CSAR in Afghanistan

Meet the “Guardian Angels” and “Pedros” of Operation Enduring Freedom.

By Department of Defense photographers

Since 2001, when USAF assets and special operations teams first carried the fight to al Qaeda and their Taliban hosts as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, Air Force combat search and rescue (CSAR) airmen have flown countless missions. Today, the small community of HH-60 Pave Hawk aircrews (“Pedros”) and “Guardian Angels”—pararescuemen, combat rescue officers, and survival, evasion, resistance, and escape specialists—are among the most battle-hardened and decorated military members across the services.



USAF pararescuemen (PJs) from the 83rd Expeditionary Rescue Squadron at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, provide security on a Nov. 7, 2012, mission, as an HH-60 Pave Hawk passes above the site. PJs are not identified here due to operational security concerns.

USAF photos by SSgt. Jonathan Snyder

111 PJs with the 83rd ERQS secure the area on a hilltop after being lowered from an HH-60 Pave Hawk on Nov. 7, 2012. PJs are highly trained battlefield airmen frequently tasked to both secure landing zones and help evacuate injured patients—often under fire. PJs are the only combat forces in the Department of Defense specifically organized, trained, equipped, and postured to conduct “full spectrum personnel recovery” or PR, according to the Air Force. 121 A PJ from the 83rd ERQS is lowered on a hoist from a Pave Hawk during the November mission.



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111 A PJ from the 83rd ERQS is hoisted up to a Pave Hawk helicopter during the mission. Hoist operations require great skill and patience, as they are often conducted to extract severely wounded patients in combat zones. 121 PJs with the 83rd prepare for a mission on the ramp at Bagram. 131 A PJ scans the ground for threats while the helicopter's gunner fires one of the Pave Hawk's two .50-caliber heavy machine guns.



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141 A Pave Hawk with the 83rd drops off PJs on top of a hill during a mission. 151 A Pave Hawk makes an approach during the same mission. The Pave Hawk is a specialized HH-60 with a refueling boom, medical gear, defensive systems, and guns. With full kit, it tips the scales at more than 20,000 pounds.



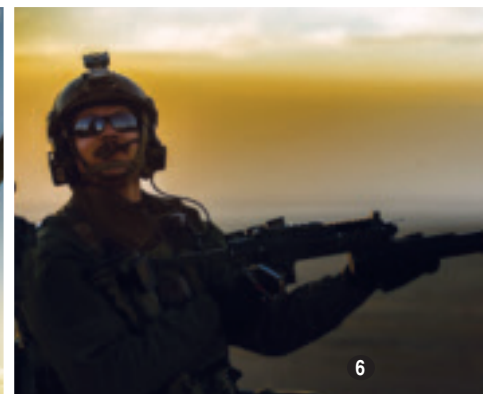
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161 (Four set, clockwise from bottom): A PJ secures a mission site with an M203 grenade launcher. Another PJ is lowered from a Pave Hawk via a hoist during the same mission. PJs at Bagram check their gear harness prior to a mission on Nov. 6, 2012. Another PJ from the 83rd scans for threats from the ground as his Pave Hawk flies to its mission objective. **171** At Bagram, a PJ from the 83rd ERQS prepares for a mission. PJs are assigned to special tactics squadrons and units in the Active Duty, Air Guard, and Reserve sector and often operate with other US and allied special operations forces.



USAF photos by SSgt. Eric Harris



111 PJs lower a stretcher for a medical evacuation in Nuristan province, Afghanistan, April 13, 2012. In the operation, Afghan National Army commandos and coalition special operations forces defeated insurgents who were overrunning a village. PJ and HH-60 crews routinely collaborate with other SOF and Afghan forces during joint operations. 121 PJs evacuate an Afghan commando injured during the operation.

DOD photo by PO1 Clayton Weis



DOD photo by PO1 Clayton Weis



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131 An airman from the 46th ERQS covers a simulated casualty to protect him from dirt and dust during a mass casualty exercise near Kandahar, Afghanistan, as a Pave Hawk takes off in the background on Dec. 24, 2010. USAF rescue airmen train vigorously to keep up their skills. 141 A combat rescue officer preps for a landing near Kandahar aboard a Pave Hawk as part of the casualty drill. 151 An airman kneels between two simulated casualties as an HH-60 lands in the background during the drill.



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161 Airmen move a simulated casualty onto a litter during the qualification scenario. 171 A Pave Hawk picks up PJs from the 46th ERQS and a wounded soldier near Kandahar on Dec. 24, 2010, in brown-out conditions.

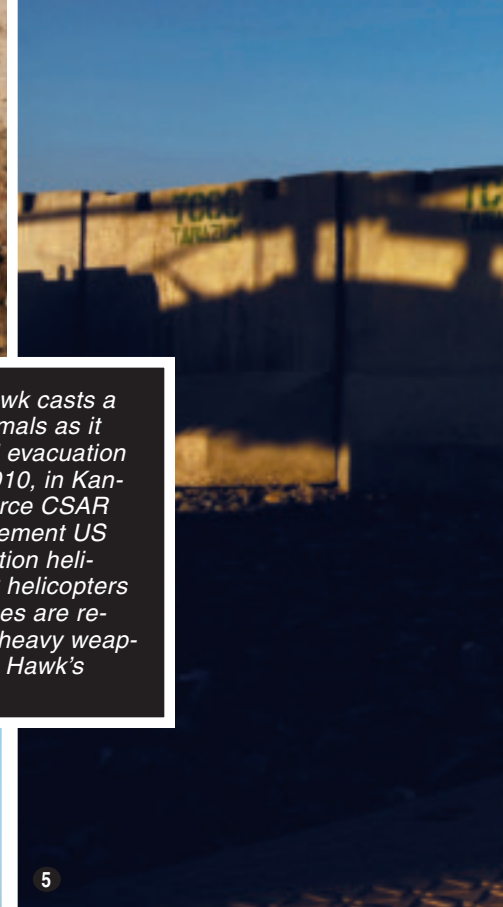


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USAF photos by SSgt. Manuel J. Martinez



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11 An HH-60 Pave Hawk casts a shadow near farm animals as it responds to a medical evacuation request on Jan. 10, 2010, in Kandahar province. Air Force CSAR assets routinely supplement US Army casualty evacuation helicopters, as CASEVAC helicopters marked with red crosses are restricted from carrying heavy weapons, such as the Pave Hawk's .50-caliber guns.



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12 Pave Hawks rest on the tarmac at sunset Jan. 8, 2010, at Kandahar. *13* An HH-60G with the 83rd at Bagram prepares for a night-time training sortie on Nov. 13, 2013.

USAF photo by SrA. Kayla Newman

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141 USAF PJs land in Faizabad district in Badakshan province on March 29, 2013. The PJs inspected the area to ensure a sufficient landing zone for operations. *151* An HH-60G casts a shadow on concrete walls surrounding the ramp at Kandahar on Jan. 9, 2010. The logo on the wall is a stylized version of the flashes pararescuemen have on their maroon berets: an angel wrapping its arms around a globe. Missing from the stencil is the PJ motto, "That Others May Live." *161* An HH-60 pilot with the 83rd rushes to his helicopter at the start of a June 12, 2011, mission, as PJs and aircrew prepare to launch the aircraft. It takes an average of less than 10 minutes from the time of alert to have a flight of HH-60s in the air and on the way to pick up wounded.

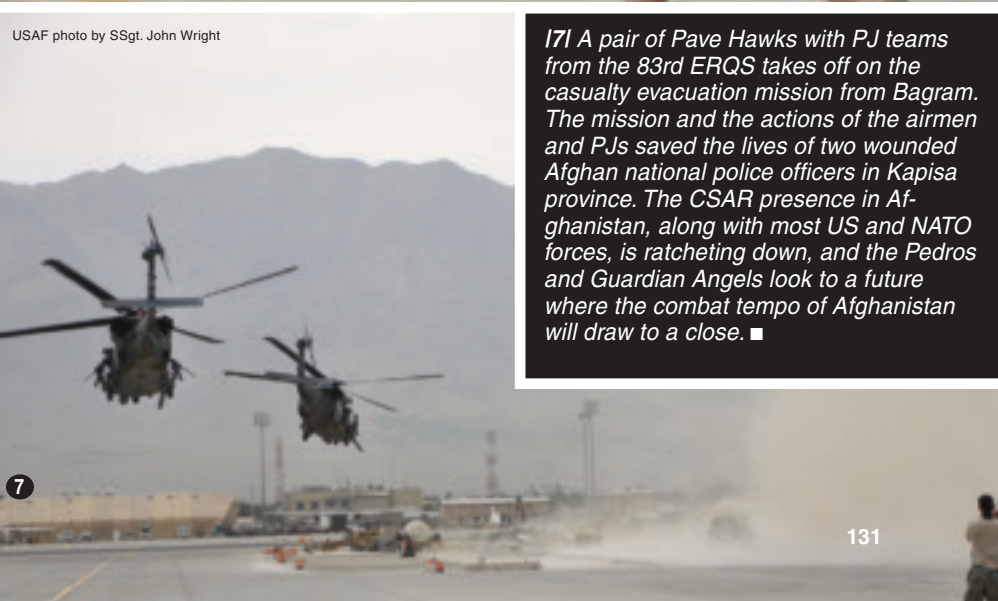
USAF photo by SSgt. John Wright



USAF photo by SSgt. John Wright



US Army photo by Spc. Mitchell Makowicz



171 A pair of *Pave Hawks* with PJ teams from the 83rd ERQS takes off on the casualty evacuation mission from Bagram. The mission and the actions of the airmen and PJs saved the lives of two wounded Afghan national police officers in Kapisa province. The CSAR presence in Afghanistan, along with most US and NATO forces, is ratcheting down, and the *Pedros* and *Guardian Angels* look to a future where the combat tempo of Afghanistan will draw to a close. ■