



## JOINT PERSONNEL RECOVERY AND COMBAT SEARCH AND RESCUE - A DOCTRINAL VIEW

Joint Personnel Recovery (JPR) includes support to civil search and rescue (SAR), combat search and rescue (CSAR), military SAR (MilSAR), combat recovery (CR), special recovery operations (SRO) and care after recovery (CAR). The concept of JPR is by itself not new, but like a number of other operational concepts the advent of air power impacted search and rescue missions by increasing the reach and flexibility with which they could be carried out. With its speed of response, the enhanced coverage of its sensors, sophistication of survival equipment and extended reach that surmounts geographical barriers, airborne platforms can rapidly search large areas, reach areas inaccessible by land or sea and effect timely recovery. Time is critical in JPR and the responsiveness of air power and its reach, information dissemination capabilities and provision of command and control infrastructure has placed airborne assets at the vanguard of search and rescue operations, in both benign and hostile environments.

This is not to suggest that JPR using land or maritime assets has become redundant. The choice of the asset to be employed would depend on a number of factors, primarily the environment, accessibility and the urgency of the situation. History and current operations include instances where JPR (although not designated as such) has been carried out by land and sea. For example, in February 1942, the submarine, *USS Searaven*, rescued members of 28 Squadron RAAF from Timor at night because they had been stranded after their exit plan to rendezvous with an RAAF flying boat failed.

Australia, as a signatory to the International Civil Aviation Convention 1944, the International Safety of Life at Sea Convention 1974, and the International Search and Rescue Convention 1979, is responsible for SAR over a vast area that includes the East India, South-West

Pacific and Southern oceans, covering 47 million square kilometres. Although the state and territory police are the SAR authorities, the Federal Government, through the Australian Defence Headquarters, is responsible for the provision of SAR for all military and visiting military forces. This responsibility is exercised through the Navy, Army and Air Force depending on the context of the distress situation.

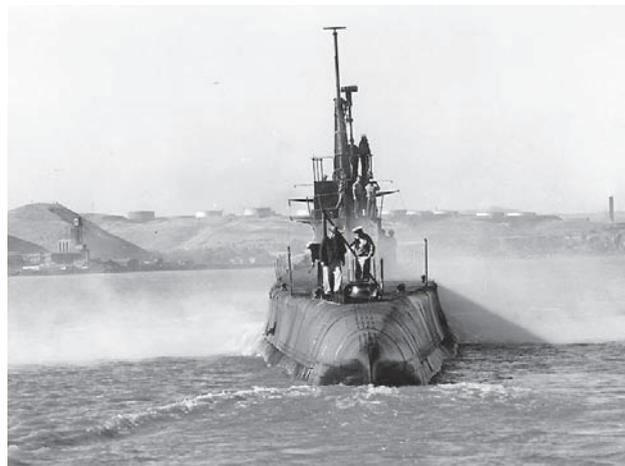
Combat search and rescue is the recovery of isolated personnel, usually behind enemy lines, from an environment in which a threat to their well-being is posed by hostile forces. By virtue of their mission profiles, combat aircrew and Special Forces groups are perhaps the ones at the highest risk of being behind enemy lines. Consequently a highly visible and important part

of CSAR operations is the recovery of aircrew who have been forced to abandon their aircraft and Special Force groups who operate in side adversary territory.

By their very nature, the majority of Combat Search and Rescue operations are conducted in a hostile environment and are primarily aimed at maintaining the morale of combat forces by ensuring that all possible efforts will be undertaken

to recover anyone in distress. It also has a by-product of denying the enemy information that could otherwise be obtained by the capture and interrogation of the individual or group in danger or their exploitation for political propaganda purposes.

Although the ADF does not have a dedicated CSAR capability, the inherent flexibility of air power can be leveraged to assist the CSAR efforts of partner forces. For example, a helicopter can be used in conjunction with Special Forces to create an ad-hoc, but capable, CSAR force on a case-by-case basis. All operational planning and execution must take into account the CSAR



*USS Searaven (8 May 1943)*

requirements and therefore it is necessary for the ADF, and especially the Air Force, to be aware of the issues involved in CSAR operations.



*P3C searching coastline*

It is to be expected that CSAR operations would be opposed by enemy activity and the assets being normally unarmed make these operations very high risk. In recent operations, CSAR missions have suffered as much as 10 per cent attrition. Operational security therefore, is of paramount importance in the planning and execution of these missions. It is also incumbent on the planners to ensure that CSAR operations are given priority in terms of protection, which may involve the use of combat assets to provide covering fire for the rescue aircraft, vehicle or ship. Proper planning before the mission is essential to ensure that the rescue operation is conducted with the appropriate coordination and concentration of necessary force. High level command of these operations will determine the necessary allocation of forces balanced against the need to avoid detriment to other operations. The basic air power tenet of centralised control and decentralised execution is very clearly applicable here. Unplanned rescue operations can rapidly spiral out of control and become extremely resource-intensive, limiting operational options in a smaller, resource-constrained force.

While the rescue of combat forces in distress or downed aircrew is of the ultimate importance, CSAR missions, especially in very hostile situations, should only be undertaken after the probability of success has been carefully assessed. The advantages of recovering one's own personnel can be very quickly overwritten by the loss of the rescue package with even greater number of personnel in danger. The decision to mount

a rescue operation would therefore have to be done at an appropriately high level, and must take into account the negative political, diplomatic and public opinion fall-outs that can accompany the capture of combatants and the possibility of their becoming hostages.

The culmination of CSAR is the eventual rescue of the survivors. Not all air power assets that can contribute to the SAR effort are capable of conducting the rescue part of the operation. This is particularly so in the case of maritime SAR, wherein the airborne search platform by itself may not be able to effect the rescue, but has powerful search capabilities and the endurance necessary to remain in the physical proximity and in contact with the survivor, airdrop necessary supplies and coordinate the eventual rescue.

CSAR is a necessary capability, particularly for an all-volunteer military force, wherein there is an implicit moral obligation to rescue personnel in distress. However, the resource requirements to have a standing capability could be unsustainable and resource-debilitating for smaller forces. In these circumstances, the inherent flexibility of air power and the capability of the force to operate jointly will have to compensate for the lack of dedicated and assigned assets. A clear understanding of JPR, especially CSAR, will form an intrinsic part of the professional mastery of military personnel.

- *Air power has enhanced Joint Personnel Recovery capabilities by its reach, speed of response and information dissemination capacity.*
- *Combat Search and Rescue is a highly visible and important part of JPR that has a moral dimension to it.*
- *CSAR operations by itself are dangerous missions and require elaborate planning and efficient execution to be successful.*

*"That others may live."*

Motto of the US Air rescue and recovery Service



**Air Power Development Centre**  
Level 3, 205 Anketell Street  
TUGGERANONG ACT 2900

Ph: 02 6266 1355 Fax: 02 6266 1041  
Email: [airpower@defence.gov.au](mailto:airpower@defence.gov.au)  
Web: [www.raaf.gov.au/airpower](http://www.raaf.gov.au/airpower)

