

# THE RESCUEGRAM



The Official Information Publication of the 129th Rescue Wing, California Air National Guard

August 2008

Lives Saved  
**560**

These Things We Do...  
That Others May Live...



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## 129th aircrews and handcrews join the CA fire fight

By Staff Sgt. Jill Jamgochian, 129th Rescue Wing Public Affairs

As fire officials anticipate the fire season to endure through early fall, the 129th Rescue Wing answered its call to emergency state duty and deployed Airmen to assist in California's hard-battled fire fight.

The recent mobilization of 129th RQW handcrews stems from Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger alert of 2,000 additional California National Guard members during the next few months to assist in containing the fires which have scorched nearly one million acres.

The 129th RQW activated 29 Airmen to begin fire-fighting training July 23 to provide direct ground support to help CAL FIRE dig fire containment lines.

"Airmen from the 129th are motivated and ready to assist their neighbors in fighting the fires here in California," said Col. Amos Bagdasarian, 129th Rescue Wing Commander.

Personnel reported to the Wildland Fire Training Center (WFTC) at McClellan Air Park July 23 to train on fire behavior, fire safety, and how to create fire containment lines using hand tools.

A public information officer with CAL FIRE stationed in Butte County, Calif., Melissa Smith said, "We are thrilled to



Photo by Master Sgt. Barbara Apkarian

An HH-60G Pave Hawk from the 129th Rescue Squadron flies with a water bucket attached near Sacramento, Calif. July 2. The aircrews were training with water buckets, becoming the only crews certified for firefighting suppression duty in the U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard.

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## THE RESCUEGRAM

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The mission of the 129th Rescue Wing is to provide highly trained and well-equipped rescue resources, able to respond to and sustain the state mission of furnishing trained personnel for state emergencies, such as natural disasters, and to assist civil authorities in the enforcement of the law.

When called to active duty with the Air Force, we provide manpower, material and equipment resources to conduct and complete combat and search rescue operations world-wide. We provide manpower, material and equipment to conduct and complete peacetime search operations.

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# Operation Lightning Strike: An epic start to an early fire season

By Col. Amos Bagdasarian, 129th Rescue Wing Commander



As you all know, in late June wildfires rapidly engulfed Northern California due to hundreds of lightning

strikes. In the face of this state emergency, aptly named Operation Lightning Strike, the men and women of the 129th were ready to assist.

We first started out the firefight by sending key personnel to help support the 24/7 operations at the Joint Forces Headquarters in Sacramento. Our wing also mobilized 29 personnel to provide direct ground support to help CAL FIRE with the wildfire threat. CAL FIRE trained the Airmen on firefighting techniques July 23-28 at the Wildland Fire Training Center at McClellan Air Park. After completing training, the Airmen remain qualified to fight fires for one year.

In addition to the headquarters and ground support personnel, we provided two HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters and numerous aircrews to perform water bucket drops on the fires, becoming the only rescue unit in the U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard qualified to fight fires.

The hard-charging water bucket maintenance team that included Chief Master Sgt. Uwanna Perras, Master Sgt. Joseph Harris, Tech. Sgt. Brian Taylor, Staff Sgt. David Ortiz and Senior Airman Lance Zhang, prevailed in having the HH-60s modified and certified to drop water in record time. Since we began water bucket operations July 3, the aircrews dropped more than 150,000 gallons of water over

the Butte and Mendocino Complex fires.

While we were on fire duty, our MC-130P and HH-60 aircrews, and PJs remained on search and rescue alert. Ready and responsive as always, we launched a rescue mission here June 16 to save a fisherman experiencing a medical emergency aboard a Canadian fishing boat 500 miles off the coast from Eureka, Calif. While an MC-130 departed with the PJ team hours after being notified by the Coast Guard, two Pave Hawks and aircrews were recalled from firefighting operations in Chico and Ukiah.

***“The hard-charging water bucket maintenance team...prevailed in having the HH-60s modified and certified to drop water in record time.”***

The next day we launched two Pave Hawks (pink-painted for fire duty) and two Combat Shadows to pick up the patient and pararescuemen from the fishing boat. Our Airmen transferred the patient to hospital personnel at the Regional Medical Center of San Jose later that evening. The rescue subsequently made local and Canadian news headlines.

I am extremely proud of all of you, from the firefighting-trained ground crews to the headquarters support personnel. You embody the characteristics of 129th Airmen – dedication, selflessness, and a firm commitment to helping others in need. Thank you and keep up the outstanding work!

## Intrepid life savers: One day fighting fires, the next a rescue at sea

**By Capt. Alyson Teeter, 129th Rescue Wing Public Affairs**

Air National Guardsmen from the 129th Rescue Wing launched a search and rescue mission here June 16 to save a fisherman experiencing a medical emergency aboard a Canadian fishing boat off the coast of California.

Responding to a call from the Coast Guard District 11 Alameda, an MC-130P Combat Shadow tanker met the 85-foot Ocean Ma-rauder fishing boat approximately 500 miles from Eureka, Calif.

During this initial phase of the rescue operation, four specially trained pararescuemen parachuted from the MC-130P to provide emergency medical treatment to stabilize the patient. The four pararescuemen remained with the patient overnight while the MC-130P returned to Moffett.

The next day at 10 a.m., the 129th launched the second phase of the rescue operation. Two HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters and two MC-130P tankers departed

here to pick up the patient and pararescuemen from the Ocean Ma-rauder. After locating the fishing boat, the HH-60Gs hovered over the vessel to allow the pararescuemen and patient to be hoisted safely in to the helicopters.

The two HH-60G helicopters and crews were recalled June 16 from firefighting operations in Chico and Ukiah. 129th maintainers worked diligently to convert the aircraft from firefighting to rescue-ready. While also being on search and rescue alert, helicopter crews performed water bucket suppression operations in Northern California.

“The 129th is the ‘go to’ unit due to its specialized capabilities in a wide range of environments,



Photo courtesy of the San Jose Mercury News Maria J. Avila  
*130th Rescue Squadron loadmaster, Master Sgt. Miguel Toro, sends a hand signal from his C-130 to a fueling helicopter during a rescue mission over the Pacific Ocean July 17, 2008.*

such as fires, floods, earthquakes, combat, and civilian search and rescue,” said Lt. Col. Steve Butow, 129th Operations Group Deputy Commander. “Seamlessly transitioning from firefighting duty yesterday to the search and mission today demonstrates our keen ability to adapt, respond, and save lives.”

The rescue helicopter landed at the Regional Medical Center of San Jose’s heliport at approximately 5:20 p.m. June 17. 129th personnel then transferred the patient to awaiting hospital staff.

This rescue brings the total number of people saved by the 129th RQW to 560.

“The crews of the 129th Rescue Wing have done an outstanding job,” said Rear Admiral Craig Bone, Commander of the 11th Coast Guard District in Alameda.

“When our rescue coordination center asked them to fly this mission the response was immediate and, as usual, effective. Amid an already busy operational tempo supporting wildfire fighting and other operations the 129th mounted a complex rescue operation extending hundreds of miles offshore.”



Photo courtesy of the San Jose Mercury News Maria J. Avila

*A pararescuman from the 131st Rescue Squadron is hoisted into a Pave Hawk hovering over the Ocean Maurader, a Canadian fishing boat 500 miles off the coast of California.*

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have the military come in here. We don't have enough people, and are spread so thin. We need the California National Guard, we need them to come in here and help us build this line."

Capt. Walt Williams, a CAL FIRE trainer for the National Guard ground crews, Task Forces Axe and Pick, said, "I was hired back from retirement to bulk up the forces and apply some of my experiences. I've always been impressed with the Guard's abilities and was about to find out how well we could turn them into firefighters."

129th RQW handcrews aren't the only ones to get a crash course in fire suppression efforts.

In addition to ground support personnel, the 129th also provided two HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopters for water bucket missions, a new task for the highly-skilled combat, search and rescue unit. Since July 3, the aircraft and crews have dropped more than 150,000 gallons of water.

"Joint firefighting operations are analogous to the joint combat search and rescue operating environment our crews will experience in combat environments," said Lt. Col. Daniel Lapostole, 129th Rescue Squadron

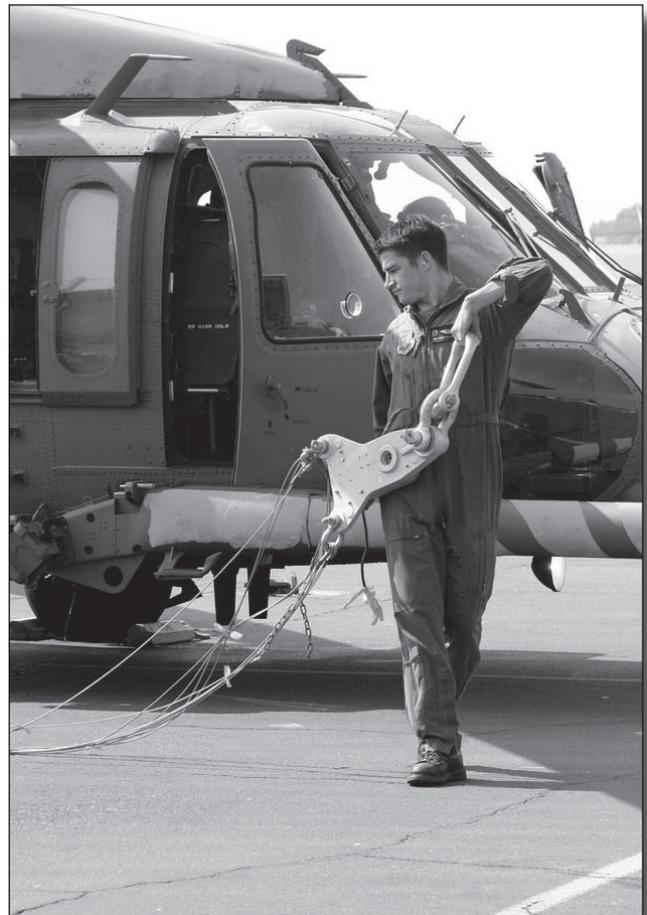


Photo by Master Sgt. Barbara Apkarian

Senior Airman Sean Pellaton, an HH-60 gunner from the 129th Rescue Squadron, pulls a water bucket hoist July 2 at Mather Field, Calif. The aircrews were training with water buckets over a pond near Sacramento, Calif.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Ray Aquino

Staff Sgt. Gabriel Wren, 129th Security Forces Squadron, embarks on a chartered bus at Moffett Federal Airfield July 23. The bus transported him and 28 other 129th personnel to the Wildland Fire Training Center at McClellan Air Park, Calif.

Commander. "The training value is unmatched."

The HH-60Gs also have an aerial refueling capability that allows Airmen to perform longer rescue and water bucket support missions. The aerial refueling is accomplished by the 129th RQW's MC-130P Combat Shadow tankers.

The 129th's Pave Hawks are the sole AF asset to be certified and capable of performing water bucket missions. The aircrews were trained by CAL FIRE to acquaint themselves with the water bucket mission in their Pave Hawks.

"It's very new to the [129th RQW] said Capt. Andrew (last name not given), pilot for the wing. "Just a couple of months ago we began modifications on the aircraft, as we anticipated this was going to be a rather unusual fire season."

The 129th RQW submitted requests to begin certification and necessary modifications to their Pave Hawks in order to provide another asset to the state.

"What we didn't anticipate was the fires breaking out while the modification forms were still in the approval process," Captain Andrew said.

The forms being in transition ended up be-

ing a blessing for the 129th RQW because more personnel were available to push the paperwork through the system due to the demand for more aircraft assistance.

129th maintainers worked diligently and quickly to get their aircraft prepared.

Once the crew receives their orders to perform fire duty, maintainers must remove the internal auxiliary tank, install a radio and release switches, and then paint the aircraft with required markings. The water bucket is attached once on scene. Simultaneously, the crews maintain airborne SAR alert.

The 129th RQW is working alongside and benefiting from the Army National Guard's previous knowledge of water bucket missions. There are currently 22 rotary-wing aircraft, including nine from other states, to assist in the firefighting support mission, Operation Lightning Strike.

"When it gets to the flying portion, everyone has received the same training. CAL FIRE does a really good job ensuring we all have the same basic knowledge," Captain Andrew said.

"The Army has been tremendous in giving us assistance and technical knowledge," he added. "Lucky for me, they're all guys I flew with when I was flying with the Army, so it's really easy to have a working relationship with these guys."

The training and work relationships between the National Guard



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jill Jamgochian

*Jolly 92, an HH-60G Pave Hawk from the 129th Rescue Squadron performs multiple water bucket missions over Butte County wildfires in California.*

and CAL FIRE have blossomed into an understanding of California's necessity of all its assets, military and civilian.

"We've gotten along absolutely fantastically," said Rob VanWormer, a CAL FIRE Battalion Chief operating out of the Chico Municipal Airport, assisting military aircrews from Nebraska, Utah, Wisconsin and California. "They're highly-motivated, really dedicated people. They've been integral coming up with thoughts and ideas, whenever an issue arises," VanWormer added.

The National Guard echoes the sentiment.

"I'm just very pleased how everybody's just pitched in, basically same team, same fight, and everybody's doing what they have

to do to get the job done," Captain Andrew said. "And now that we're on this, we're looking at pushing through some paperwork to get additional capabilities for [our aircraft] future fires."

The 129th RQW's anticipation of a longer fire fighting season is in accordance with many civilian fire authorities beliefs about the work that has yet to be completed. Even though more than 2,000 fires have been contained, it looks like the National Guard will remain an active and positive member in the fire fight.

"They have all the heart in the world, and we can work with that," said Captain Williams. "I have a feeling the Guard is going to be involved right in the firefighting until it rains."

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## Chaplain's Space: Introduction to "Strong Bonds" marriage seminar

*By Chaplain (Major) Ivan Williams, 129th Chaplains Office*

"Strong Bonds" is a Chaplain-led seminar training concept that helps to build ready families by preparing, strengthening, and equipping them with tools for the stressors of military service.

Military life places extreme hardship on relationships, especially in wartime, so unprecedented resources have been provided to help servicemembers build stronger relationships through the Strong Bonds Program.

Strong Bonds empowers servicemembers and their loved ones with relationship-building skills, and connects them to community health and support resources.

It is a holistic, preventative program committed to the restoration and preservation of military families, even those near crisis. Strong Bonds has specialized programs for single servicemembers, couples and families.

More than 90% of those who have attended the program rate it positively. Participants not only bond with their loved ones – they bond with other families, Chaplains and the military community as a whole. In turn, our servicemembers realize that they're not in this alone. For more information please contact the Chaplain's office at x9140.

## Portrait of a Professional -- Senior Airman Phong Tran, 129th SVF

### What is your favorite memory in the military?

Being deployed to Kuwait for 120 days earlier this year.

### What motivated you to enlist in the military?

Drawn by a sense of duty.

### What's the most important lesson you've learned in the military?

Taking pride in my country.

### How has being an Airman changed your outlook on life?

By helping me set and follow through on long term goals.

### Where did you grow up?

San Jose, Calif.

### What is your job in the civilian world?

Park Enforcement Officer West Valley College in Saratoga.



*Portrait of a Professional is a monthly profile of an outstanding Staff Sgt. and below. Nominations will be routed through the squadron and group commanders.*

## NGVAC recognizes 129th RQS Airman



*Senior Airman Sean S. Pellaton from the 129th Rescue Squadron is the Santa Clara County Air Guardsman of the Year! Airman Pellaton will be presented with an award on behalf of the Santa Clara County National Guard and Veterans Affairs Commission (NGVAC) at the Family Day Picnic Aug. 2, 2008.*

## Risks involved with laser eye surgery

*By Col. Lori Marion, 129th Medical Group Commander*

Eye laser surgery is a popular option for eliminating the need for glasses, but the current rules for all traditional Air National Guard members who want to have laser surgery are written to avoid impacting your unit's mission. Here are some tips to follow if you are interested in having laser surgery on your eyes:

1. Traditional Guard members, flying and non-flying, need to start by reading the information available at one of these Web sites:
  - [https://kx.afms.mil/kxweb/dotmil/kj.do?functionalArea=RS\\_USAF](https://kx.afms.mil/kxweb/dotmil/kj.do?functionalArea=RS_USAF) (.mil access only)
  - <http://airforcemedicine.afms.mil>
2. Before you make any surgical commitments, you must obtain your commander's consent for the timing (should be done when it will interfere least with your unit's mission.)
3. You will need the optometry clinic to document that it can meet the requirements for evaluating your vision and deployability status.
4. Your civilian eye doctor tests your eyes, approves you for laser surgery and completes the Air Force application form.
5. All documents must be reviewed by the AF Laser Eye Surgery Registry before surgery.
6. You then have just six months to have your surgery.

If you are interested in laser eye correction, please read the information at the web-sites, then go to the W:Medical: CRS folder on the shared drive. Find the folder for your AFSC category, and read the info labeled "Read This First." Read carefully, ask any questions before you have surgery, or commit to surgery. Take the time to do it right and avoid surgical career complications

## News & Notes

### **New 129th members - welcome!**

Staff Sgt. Jeanie Holland  
Senior Airman Sharon Hack  
Senior Airman John Hyuga  
Senior Airman Thavi Yang  
Airman 1st Class Natalie Marlais  
Airman 1st Class Joemar Sambito  
Airman 1st Class Ryan Ziegler

### **Promotions**

Chief Master Sgt. Kristina Keck  
Tech. Sgt. Christopher Gabor  
Tech. Sgt. David Gaudrea, III  
Tech. Sgt. Bernardo Diaz  
Staff Sgt. Peter Aung, Jr.  
Senior Airman Bryson Barnette

### **ARMS: How to access your important documents**

Your records are now located in the Automated Records Management System (ARMS). You will have the ability to access your records at any time from home or work as long as you have access to the Internet.

After logging on to the AF Portal, personnel must click on the

### **Air Force Training Course scheduled**

Purpose: For supervisors and trainers to successfully plan, conduct, and document members training within the CFETP according to AF regulation for members upgrade and promotions.

Attendees: Open to 129th assigned section supervisors, trainer and certifiers.

Date: Saturday, Nov. 1, 2008

Sign up: Please send names of individuals that would be attending these classes October UTA to Senior Master Sgt. Jacqueline Harris at [jacqueline.harrissmith@camoff.ang.af.mil](mailto:jacqueline.harrissmith@camoff.ang.af.mil).

### **A job with impact - apply today!**

The wing is currently seeking applicants for the 129th Rescue Wing Human Resources Advisor.

The application will consist of a Records Review RIP, a ready to submit School Application with primary and alternate HRA course dates, a cur-

cally appear.

Your new email address will be [firstname.lastname@ang.af.mil](mailto:firstname.lastname@ang.af.mil). To capture these older email messages the user will have to take certain actions.

Your local CSA and Communications Flight Help Desk will be able to assist you, and these actions will be well publicized through the various outlets prior to the upgrade.

As a whole the Air National Guard expects to be complete moved into the Exchange 2007 environment by the spring of 2009.

### **Travel card services provider to change**

Citibank will succeed Bank of America Nov. 30 as provider of Air Force government travel card services.

Air Force members and civilian employees don't need to take any action other than ensuring their mailing address with Bank

## 129th News and Photos: [www.129rqw.ang.af.mil](http://www.129rqw.ang.af.mil)

Automated Records Management System (ARMS) Member button to view their records.

For CAC access you may also go directly to the AFPC Secure site at <https://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/afpcsecure/MainMenu.asp>.

If any member has difficulties accessing ARMS please consult your appropriate organization CSS POC.

\*\* Please note that all hard copies of the Unit Personnel Records will be shredded on Aug. 8, 2008!

### **Home Community Care**

**No cost child care is now available during UTA weekends.**

**To see if you are eligible, please contact the Services Flight at x9291.**

rent Fitness Score, and a cover letter addressed to the wing commander highlighting the essence of what the individual brings to the HRA position.

If you have any questions, please call Chief Master Sgt. Kristina Keck at x9202. Position closing date is August 22.

### **ANG set to upgrade to Microsoft Office 2007**

Every computer user in the Air National Guard will be experiencing changes in the day-to-day computer use in the coming months as the ANG network is upgraded to Microsoft Office 2007.

The first time a user opens his or her email in the Office 2007 environment the account will be empty. While the old email address will still receive mail, all of their previously saved messages will not automati-

of America is correct. Citibank will use that information for its card distribution, which starts in August.

### **VA reaching out to vets with mortgage problems**

The Department of Veterans Affairs is reaching out to veterans, both those who use the VA home loan guaranty program and those who don't, to keep people in their homes. Depending on a veteran's circumstances, VA counselors can intercede with the borrower on the veteran's behalf to pursue options that would allow a veteran to keep his or her home.

To obtain help from a VA financial counselor, veterans can call 877-827-3702. Information about VA's home loan guaranty program can be obtained at [www.homeloans.va.gov](http://www.homeloans.va.gov).

AIR NATIONAL GUARD

# Recruiting Assistance Program



Earn up to \$2,000 for each new recruit who enlists and reports to Basic Training. For eligibility information please visit <http://www.guardrecruitingassistant.com/>.

## 129th Alumni and Heritage Association

Do you belong to the 129th Alumni and Heritage Association? You don't need to be an alumni to be a member, currently we have about 300 members, total! Our goal is to continue the ongoing heritage of the 129th through current and past members. We support the wing during deployments and homecoming and have an annual scholarship for wing personnel or their families attending college. Please see your Chief for details. Continue your legacy....please support the AHA.

## 2008 - 2009 UTAs

<b>2008</b>	7-8 March
2-3 August	4-5 April
6-7 September	2-3 May
4-5 October	6-7 June
1-2 November	11-12 July
6-7 December	1-2 August
	12-13 September
<b>2009</b>	3-4 October
3-4 January	7-8 November
7-8 February	5-6 December

*\* Dates in June Rescuegram were incorrect, these are the correct UTA dates.*

129th RQW/PA  
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UNITED STATES AIR FORCE  
OFFICIAL BUSINESS

These Things We Do, That Others May Live...