FAQs

Q: What is Personnel Recovery (PR)?

A: PR is the sum of military, diplomatic, and civil efforts to affect the recovery and reintegration of isolated personnel. It consists of four functions: preparation, planning, execution, and adaptation. Within the execution phase there are 5 tasks: report, locate, support, recover, and reintegrate. The Air Force’s primary method of conducting the recovery task is Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR). Ref JP 3-50 for more information.

Q: Does PR include MEDEVAC?

Q: Because the Air Force trains to conduct CSAR it is inherently capable of performing several collateral missions to include noncombat search and rescue, casualty evacuation, humanitarian relief, noncombatant evacuation operations, counterdrug activities, support for National Aeronautics and Space Administration flight operations, support to SOF, and other missions as directed by Combatant Commanders.

Q: What is Guardian Angel (GA)?

A: GA is a non-aircraft, equipment-based weapon system employed by Combat Rescue Officers (CROs), Pararescuemen (PJs), and Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) Specialists. GA trains and is equipped in most MAJCOMs (primarily AETC, ACC, AFSOC, and AFRC) to provide PR capabilities to the Combatant Commanders. It works closely with other weapons systems, such as the HC-130 and HH-60, to perform its mission.

Q: How long has GA existed?

A: The CRO and the GA weapon system were established in 2001.

Q: What are some typical missions that GA is tasked to execute?

A: Extricating soldiers from vehicle wreckage resulting from IED blasts, SCUBA dive search for personnel swept away or blown into canals and rivers, augmenting SEAL teams or ODAs to provide embedded medical and technical rescue capabilities, inserting into active firefights to recover injured Marines, providing casualty evacuation for injured local nationals, reintegrating American citizens taken hostage by enemy forces, military freefall (MFF) jump from an HC-130 to injured sailors, confined space searches through earthquake rubble, and training high risk of isolation personnel to name a few examples.

Q: Is GA considered Special Ops?

A: GA Rescue Squadrons (RQSs) report to ACC as their lead MAJCOM and conduct conventional rescue operations. That said, a large portion of GA manning is in AFSOC and they conduct special operations.

Q: What is a CRO?

A: A CRO is an officer who commands GA forces conducting PR operations.

Q: What training does a CRO receive?

A: A CRO initially attends AF Combat Dive, Airborne, MFF, SERE and Apprenticeship Courses. A CRO does not receive EMT-Paramedic. After graduating from the pipeline he will be qualified as a Recovery Team Commander and maintain currencies in his various skillsets.

Q: What can a CRO expect during his career?

A: A CRO will start at an RQS and be expected to learn the trade of the recovery task. He will most likely be an Assistant Flight Commander and primarily focus on training. He will then move up to Flight Commander and be responsible for the team as a whole. His perspective will widen to full spectrum PR, and not just focus on the recovery task. Opportunities will open up to work within AFSOC, SOCOM, AETC, or other MAJCOMs. These opportunities may include staff time or advanced operations. The CRO can return to become a DO at the RQS or spend time in other agencies or detachments. A CRO then has the opportunity to advance to RQS/CC and eventually find himself contributing to the AF Rescue mission as a whole.

Q: What role does a CRO execute operationally?

A: A CRO commands personnel recovery operations and is involved with every aspect of mission planning and execution. A CRO will go as far forward in the battlespace as required to effectively execute PR operations. In the preparation function he oversees SERE training and operations. During the planning function a CRO will build the PR portion of OPLANs and OPORDs. The most obvious function is that of execution, where a CRO commands a team of PJs to recover the IP and then reintegrates that IP with SERE Specialists. During the actual recovery mission, a CRO’s job is “up and out” – coordinating security, working additional ground/overhead assets, exfiltration plans, etc. The PJ’s job is “down and in” – cutting open the vehicle, stabilizing the patient, etc.

Q: How often is a CRO deployed or TDY?

A: A CRO typically deploys for 120 days every 18 months and is TDY 30% of the time while not deployed.

Q: Can I apply to be a CRO if I am a civilian?

A: No. You have to be in the military in some capacity so that you can attend Phase II on military orders. This includes ROTC, Academy, Guardsmen, Reservist, Active Duty, Enlisted, Officer personnel. If you are a civilian we recommend you pursue a Guard/Reserve position, enlist as a SERE Specialist/Pararescueman and submit an application after completing your initial enlistment, or attend OTS and submit an application upon commissioning.

Q: Where are the primary Guardian Angel units located?

A: Active Duty Rescue Squadrons (RQSs) are located at Kadena AB in Japan, Nellis AFB in Las Vegas, NV, Davis-Monthan AFB in Tuscon, AZ, Moody AFB in Valdosta, GA, and Lakenheath AB in England. Reserve RQSs are located in Portland, OR, Tuscon, AZ, and Cocoa Beach, FL. Guard RQSs are located in Anchorage, AK, Sunnyvale, CA, and Long Island, NY.

Q: Does asthma, eye surgery, concussions, color blindness, or other medical conditions preclude me from applying to become a CRO?

A: Contact a flight surgeon to discuss the specifics of your case. Ultimately you need to complete a Flying Class III physical that will clear you for flying, jumping, and diving operations.