



Parajumper Inspired by CAP

Chief Master Sgt. Jeremy S. Hardy Credits Cadet Experience for Sparking Search and Rescue Career

By Mitzi Palmer



Left to right: U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Brandon Daugherty, then-Master Sgt. Jeremy S. Hardy and Staff Sgt. Jason Blettenburg keep close watch during a combat rescue of an injured Afghan National Police soldier in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, in November 2007. Photo courtesy of U.S. Air Force

U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Jeremy S. Hardy still remembers his very first emergency locator transmitter search mission with Civil Air Patrol. “It was on Mother’s Day of 1986,” recalled Hardy, who is the superintendent for the commandant of cadets at the Air Force Academy. “Needless to say, an early morning call on Mother’s Day that had me scrambling out of the house to tromp through the woods in search of a possible aircraft didn’t sit well with my mother as a first impression of what CAP was all about.”

But it was that first mission for the then-cadet in CAP’s Florida Wing that sparked the beginning of a highly successful military career, one that includes more than two decades of wearing the parajumper — PJ for short — beret and participating in nearly 200 combat and civil search and rescue missions all over the world.

CAP Beginnings

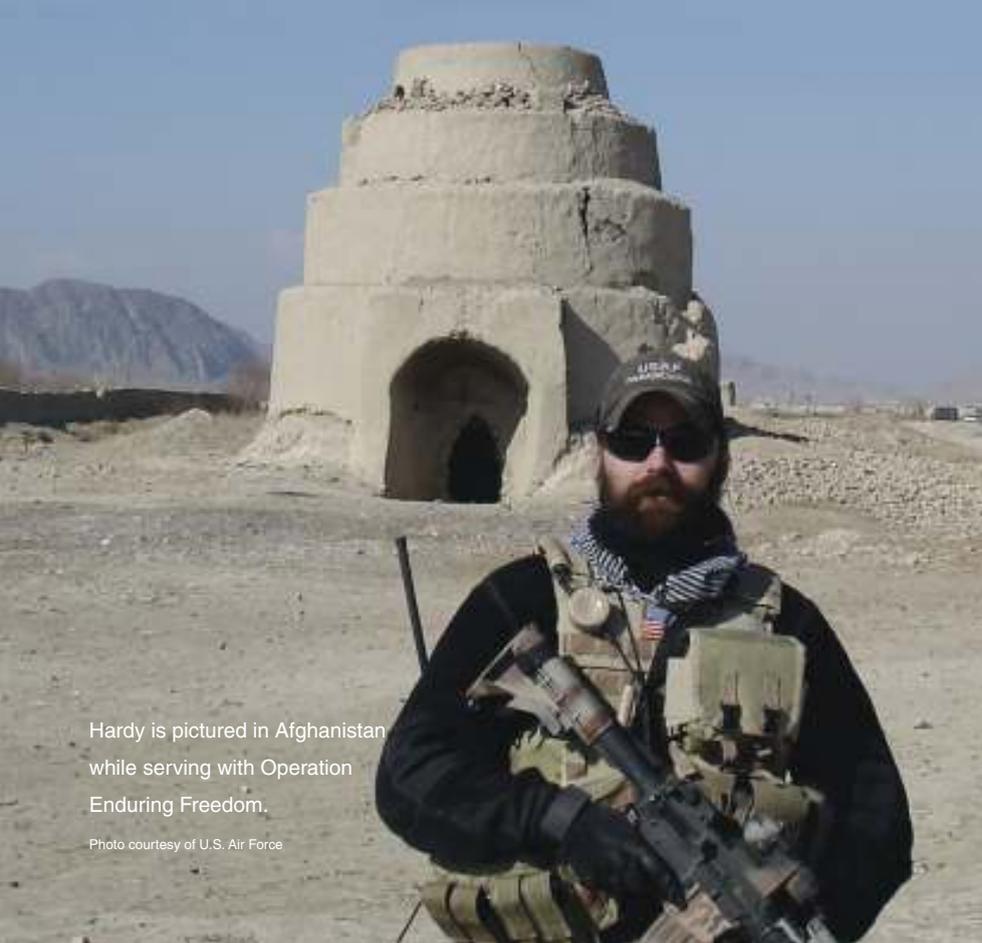
“I had always been enamored by aviation and search and rescue,” Hardy said about his decision to join the Osceola County Composite Squadron in the mid-’80s. “It seemed like a natural fit from the very beginning.”

But just after a year in the Florida Wing, Hardy’s family moved to Columbus, Ind., where there was no CAP squadron nearby. With the help of his parents, he established the Columbus Composite Squadron — now Bakalar Composite Squadron.

Hardy served on the Indiana Wing Cadet Advisory Committee and remained in CAP until he attended basic military training for the Air Force. He worked his way up to cadet lieutenant colonel and served as his unit’s cadet commander.

“My experiences in CAP were many, and all were extremely rewarding,” Hardy said.

One of his favorite and most notable experiences in CAP



Hardy is pictured in Afghanistan while serving with Operation Enduring Freedom.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Air Force

was Hawk Mountain Search and Rescue School, which Hardy describes as “phenomenal.”

“It ultimately led me to attending the Pararescue Orientation Course — a course that would forever change my life and put me in the path to where I am now.”

A Passion for Pararescue

While attending the CAP Pararescue Orientation Course at Fort Knox, Ky., in the mid-’80s, Hardy met Air Force Tech. Sgt. Scott Gearen, the lead instructor.

“Tech. Sgt. Gearen had survived a 3,000-foot parachute fall and was alive to tell the story,” he said. “Not only did he survive the ordeal, he was back to pararescue duty within 18 months.”

He was inspired by Gearen’s grit, determination and many stories of life as a PJ, he said.

“At 14 years old, I decided then and there that I would be a chief master sergeant and a PJ in the U.S. Air Force; and 28 years later I finally fulfilled that dream.”

Throughout the two decades of wearing his maroon beret, Hardy has been instrumental in numerous

pararescues.

“Although I cannot recall the exact number, it is well over 200,” he said.

His first mission came in 1998 when a training mission over the Gulf of Mexico led to a real-world rescue after two F-15 Eagles collided over the ocean near Eglin Air Force Base, Fla.

But his most high-profile rescue took place May 2, 1999, when an F-16 Falcon — call sign Hammer 34 — was shot down near Belgrade, Serbia, during Operation Allied Force. Hardy was the leader of a three-man rescue team that went behind enemy lines to rescue the pilot.

“Despite dodging several surface-to-air missiles and anti-aircraft fire that damaged our helicopter, we were able to rescue the downed pilot as Serbian forces swarmed the landing zone,” he said. “The pilot is now a three-star general and integral leader in the Joint Chiefs of Staff.”

Hardy was also part of the Air Force rescue force that saved 4,305 American lives during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and he has participated in multiple rescues supporting Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, the Philippines and other countries.

Preparing for Missions

Preparing for rescue missions — whether a combat rescue or humanitarian action — doesn’t occur right before the mission launches, he said. It’s a product of years of training and conditioning.

“For me that preparation can be traced back to my formative years as a CAP cadet,” he said. “As a cadet, I learned self-discipline, physical fitness, mental acuity and the ability to remain focused under stressful situations. These attributes formed a solid foundation that saw me



Hardy pauses outside the Air Force Academy Cadet Chapel in Colorado. A former Civil Air Patrol cadet who joined the Air Force and became a parajumper, Hardy is now superintendent for the commandant of cadets at the Air Force Academy. Photo courtesy of Master Sgt. Kenneth Bellard, U.S. Air Force Academy

through 22 months of arduous pararescue training that further instilled these values.

“I truly owe all of my meager successes to the Civil Air Patrol, its senior members and its activities. As such, I am eternally grateful!” ▲

Chief Master Sgt. Jeremy S. Hardy is the superintendent for the commandant of cadets at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He is the adviser to the commandant on training and personnel matters affecting 4,000 cadets and 248 active-duty military and civilian personnel. Additionally, as the Academy Military Trainer (AFSC 8B200) career field manager, he is responsible for the selection and training of 117 noncommissioned officers who provide mentoring in all facets of military training to cadets within the Air Force Academy's 40 cadet squadrons and four groups.



While serving in Afghanistan, Hardy poses with local children during an operation to deliver supplies and medical aid to a village threatened by Haqqani terrorists in 2009. Photos courtesy of U.S.

Air Force



Stateside, Hardy was part of the Air Force rescue force that saved 4,305 American lives during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Photo courtesy of U.S. Air Force