



*Left: Visible behind the Jayhawk is the top of the Astoria Column. The structure stands atop Coxcomb Hill. The 125-ft (38-m) column was built in 1926, and has an internal spiral staircase that leads to an observation deck, providing a stunning view of the Columbia River entering the Pacific.*

the various missions, to which almost 60 percent of the annual flying-hour budget is allocated. The second heaviest workload relates to executing SAR missions, including pick-ups from vessels in distress as well as medical evacuations from fishing boats, cruise ships and merchant vessels. In addition, especially during the summer holiday season, many tourists, swimmers and sailors alike underestimate the ocean and get caught in the strong currents. Those that suffer hypothermia need urgent rescue.

To illustrate just how busy Astoria's Jayhawks are kept, in the 2005 to mid 2007 timeframe close to 500 SAR missions were flown resulting in 114 lives saved. The helicopters also assisted in rescuing another 69 people. In 2006, just over 341 hours were flown for 192 SAR missions, which equates to 16 percent of the year's total flight time. In normal situations when medical attention is required, the helicopter flies to a local airport to meet up with an ambulance,

thereby avoiding unnecessary flight time. The ambulance transports the patient from there. However, should the extent of trauma require that the patient be airlifted all the way to the Legacy Emanuel Hospital & Health Center in Portland, the Jayhawk does have access to a landing surface strong enough to support its weight. Such a decision is made by the doctor on board the ship (if present) or by the rescue swimmer on the helicopter, who is a trained paramedic. If necessary he can set up a radio conference in flight with the flight surgeon at the air station to decide on the appropriate action.

Due to the rugged geography across Northwest Oregon, Air Station Astoria is often called upon to assist with inland SAR cases as well. Inexperienced climbers, lost hunters or hikers, even escaped criminals, provide ample opportunities for helicopter crews to apply their skills 'on the other side of the beach'. Rescuing people from cliffs is one of the more challenging missions and as steep rocks dominate the coastline, a decision was made to establish the Coast Guard Advanced Rescue Swimmer School in Astoria. This is a unique establishment where aviation survival technicians (AST) receive training in heavy-weather and heavy-surf rescues.

An AST is something of 'a jack of trades',

performing a multitude of tasks that include ground handling and servicing of aircraft, conducting routine aircraft inspections, even handling aviation administrative duties. ASTs also inspect, services and maintains all aviation rescue devices and aircrew survival gear. Rescue devices include parachute aerial delivery systems, rescue baskets, litters, slings, droppable sea rescue kits and de-watering pumps. ASTs also provide aircrew survival training to aviators including swim tests, survival lectures and shallow water egress training. In flight, the AST has a double-function being the on-board emergency medical technician (EMT) as well as the helicopter rescue swimmer.

The five-day training course at the Advanced Rescue Swimmer School not only involves ASTs but entire aircrews from air stations all over the country, and is held twice each year during the early spring and late autumn. Such timing takes advantage of the heavy seas and inclement weather usual during those periods. Typically, a Dolphin and its crew is staged at Air Station Astoria for the training week and will work in conjunction with Astoria-based HH-60J Jayhawks and air crews from other Jayhawk units. Instructor staff from the Aviation Technical Training Center in Elizabeth City in North Carolina set up and run the classes in Astoria. At its conclusion, rescue swimmers and aircrews are better prepared to conduct the dangerous business of rescue in the surf of coastal shores, on the high seas of the open ocean, and along the rugged coast's cliffs and caves.

Vertical surface training (or cliff rescue) is essential and requires helicopters to hover close to rocky outcrops while lowering a tethered rescue swimmer to recover stranded or injured persons. In October 2006, the Canadian Armed Forces sent a nine-man crew and an EH-101 Cormorant from Canada to attend the course. It was the first time a Canadian team had participated. Not surprisingly, all Air Station

*Below: Cape Disappointment Lighthouse was the first to be erected in the Pacific Northwest and was lit for the first time in 1856. Serving vessels navigating what are probably the most dangerous waters on the West Coast, the Coast Guard station bearing the same name is located nearby at the mouth of the Columbia River.*

