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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Aviator trapped in trees rescued

TYNDALL AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – The Air Force Rescue Coordination Center here worked with local authorities to rescue an individual who crashed his glider near Altoona, Pa., Sunday afternoon.

“After the Search and Rescue Satellite Aided Tracking system picked up the pilot’s 406 personal locator beacon signal, we tried to contact him based on the information we had attached to his PLB registration,” said Staff Sgt. Jose Grimes, AFRCC Search and Rescue duty officer. “He called us and stated that he crashed his glider into trees, sustained some minor injuries but stated he was in good condition.”

The AFRCC immediately contacted the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency who sent authorities from Blair County Fire and Rescue to the crash location, also transmitted to AFRCC from the pilot’s PLB.

The individual was picked up and taken to a local medical facility.

“This save is a prime example of the importance of 406 MHz frequency emergency locator transmitters and personal locator beacons in all aircraft,” said Maj. Bill Kennedy, AFRCC flight commander. “Effective February 2009, the SARSAT system no longer monitors the 121.5 MHz frequency. Although the 406 is a little more costly, it is more accurate when it comes to locating a PLB or ELT signal, especially when it is GPS encoded as was the case of this individual’s PLB.”

The 406 MHz beacons provide search and rescue agencies greatly increased accuracy and information reliability over the 121.5 MHz beacons.

“When we have the accurate data this beacon provides, we can send the appropriate assets directly to the distressed individual or situation, which is critical when seconds count in saving lives,” said Sergeant Grimes.

More than 95,000 possible distress positions within the 48 contiguous United States have been reported on the SARSAT system since 1986. Of those, the AFRCC took responsive action more than 13,000 times. Ninety-four percent of these situations turned out to be false alarms coming from ELTs located at airports.

“The bottom line is in the event of a crash or incident while out in the elements, a 406 PLB or ELT will greatly increase your chances of survival,” said Major Kennedy. “The more accurate the information we have attached to a PLB or ELT registration, the quicker we can make attempts to contact an owner.”

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GLIDER**

As the United States' inland search and rescue mission coordinator, the AFRCC serves as the single agency responsible for coordinating federal search and rescue activities in the 48 contiguous United States.

The rescue coordination center directly ties into the FAA's alerting system and the U.S. Mission Control Center. In addition to Search and Rescue Satellite Aided Tracking information, the AFRCC computer system contains resource files that list federal and state organizations which can conduct or assist in search and rescue efforts throughout North America.

Since January 2010, the AFRCC has saved 397 lives.