

Hiker slid down ice slope

January 7, 1978
Near Tahquitz Peak
1978-002

By Walt Walker

It was late afternoon when RMRU was contacted by the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, Banning Station, that a young man had fallen near Tahquitz Peak.

My son Kevin and I loaded our gear into the Wagoneer and headed for Idyllwild, arriving at the substation at 1700. We were quickly followed by John Dew and Hal Fulkman. While we were interviewing the informant, Peter Cooper, Bernie McIlvoy, Rick Pohlers, John Muratet and Jim Hansen drove up only minutes apart. In about another 15 minutes, Pete Carlson, Steve Jensen and Don Chambers also arrived.

Peter Cooper told us that he and a friend George Foster, both of Idyllwild, had hiked to Tahquitz Peak and were returning towards Saddle junction. George slipped on the snow covered trail and slid out of sight. Peter called down to his friend. he responded by saying he could hardly see and that he was stuck on a steep ice covered slope. Peter told George to stay put and that he would go for help.

While on the way for help, Peter met Joe and Shirley Keoughan, he told them about the problem. They said they would see what they could do to help. They in turn met Jim Vavrina and Ann Marie Brennan of the San Diego Mountain Rescue Team. These four could only shout encouragement, as they did not have any ropes, crampons or ice axes.

After interviewing the informant and considering the late hour, we requested the sheriff's department to order a helicopter. They contacted Don Landells and he said he would arrive in Idyllwild in about 30 minutes. While waiting for the helicopter we all went through our packs and got ready for a snow and ice type of mission.

When Don arrived in his Bell Jet Ranger, we installed a RMRU radio, and discussed the problem with him. He wanted to take only one man on the first flight. So I loaded my pack and ice axe into the back seat of the bird and climbed aboard. Don put power to the bird and we lifted up and were on our way towards Tahquitz.

We spotted George sitting on a rock, deep in an ice covered chute about 350 feet below the trail. We discussed the problem and decided Don would get as close to the slope as possible and I would jump with my ice axe in the arrest position. As Don

maneuvered the bird in close, I hand signaled George to stay put. With a nod from Don I slipped out onto the step and jumped towards the slope four feet below. Luckily I punched through the snow with my heavy double boots.

Carefully I got myself up out of the holes and chopped steps in the ice with my ice axe. Slowly I worked my way over to George. After getting to him, I asked him about his injuries. He only complained about his arm and shoulder. I quickly examined his arm and shoulder and decided it was not fractured.

Getting George up, I turned around and started chopping steps uphill. When we got to a flat spot a little higher up, I radioed to Don to come pick us up. (He had been circling the area while we moved up the slope.) Don inched his bird in towards the steep slope and began to let it come down towards us. As he was doing this a very loud cracking noise occurred and Don instantly lifted the Bird up. The powerful machine's main rotor blades had cut the top off of a frozen Pine tree. Don motioned for me to move to another area across the slope away from the trees.

Once again I chopped steps into the steep slope and George and I moved across. I then had to chop a small flat area for us to stand on. When this was completed I radioed Don again. He brought the bird straight in towards us. With the bird blowing snow up from the slope and into our faces, I helped George climb up onto the step and into the cabin. Don lifted up and moved away as he had the young man move to the other side.

It was now my turn to be picked up as Don worked his way into position above me. With the runner at chest level, I grabbed a hold and soon realized my arms were very tired from all the chopping. With an extra effort I worked my way up onto the stop as Don moved away from the slope. We were on our way back to base by the time I was completely inside the bird and had my seat belt buckled.

Arriving at base, Camp Maranatha baseball field, the rest of the team members helped George out of the bird. While we took the radio out of the bird and unloaded my gear, George was on his way to the Hemet Valley Hospital. We all adjourned to dinner in Hemet at the new Denny's. After dinner, Kevin and I went by the hospital to check on George. We spoke to emergency room nurse, Nina Fisk, and she told us that George did not have any fractures. Considering the fall, he was a most lucky young man.

RMRU is a volunteer search and rescue team that covers Riverside County and assists other teams with search and rescue efforts in other counties. Each member purchases their own equipment and takes time off work, without compensation, to participate in search and rescue missions. Team equipment is purchased from contributions from the community. We are a non-profit organization and are funded by [donations](#) from people like you.