

## Marine stranded on ridge

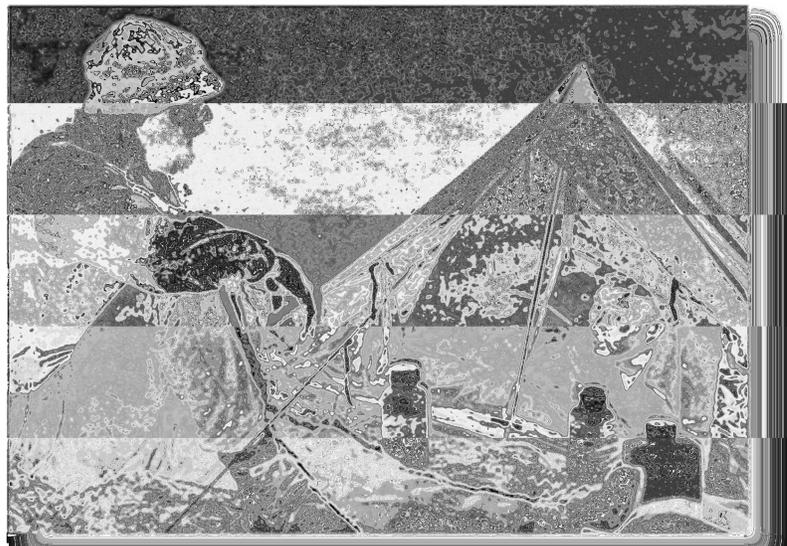
**July 09, 1978**  
**San Jacinto Mountains**  
**1978-034**

By Ed Hill

On Saturday, July 8th, Captains Michael Evinrude and Michael Johnson from the Marine base at Twenty-nine Palms started to climb the long ridge between Chino and Falls Canyon. The ridge starts at the desert floor and culminates in Sunday School Peak west of the mountain station of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. They planned to spend the night on the ridge and take the tram down Sunday. They carried sleeping bags, a tent, some food, and two quarts of water each.

By Saturday night, they were at the 7000' level and were low on water. It was decided that Mike Johnson would drink the remaining water and finish the climb. He would bring help to Mike Evinrude who would stay on the ridge until Monday. It took Mike Johnson from 8 am to 5 pm to reach Long Valley Ranger Station where he reported the plight of his hiking companion.

The call came at six in the evening, a Marine stranded in Chino Canyon. I envisioned a quick rescue from one of the tram towers. I packed my technical gear along with my search gear and left. We met at the Desert Station and learned that the stranded Marine was on the ridge. Tom Aldrich, J. R. Muratet, Steve Zappe and I were to hike down to him carrying water. Jim Fairchild would hold down base camp. Larry Roland would fly in a fixed wing aircraft over Mike and airdrop him some water. They made several passes and actually dropped three gallons of water. The water missed completely, and Mike was unaware that a water



Steve Zappe

Veteran RMRU member and unit president, Ed Hill, talked to Mike Evinrude as he slowly drank the water his body needed.

drop had taken place.

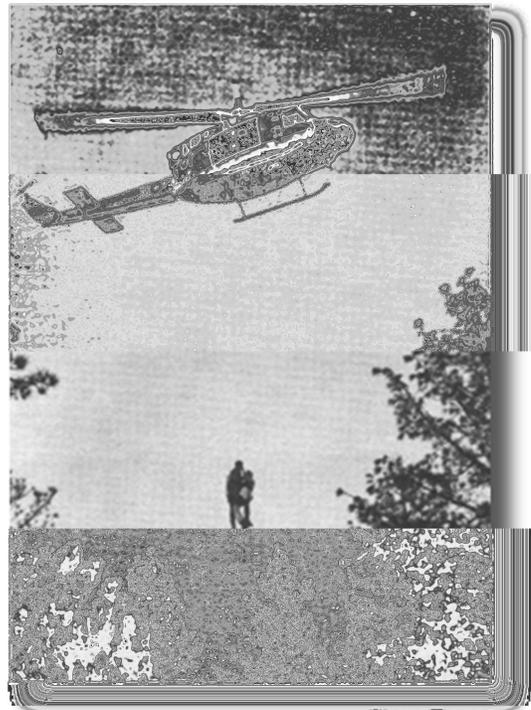
The hiking team rode up the tram and met two State Park Rangers who would go with us to Sunday School Peak. After some initial horsing around, we found the right ridge and started down. The moon had set, and we had trouble following the right ridge in the dark. We kept starting down small finger ridges and then would traverse back to the main ridge. At 1:30 am, Tom and J.R., who had been on an all night search the night before stopped, while Steve Zappe and I who had not, continued. Forty minutes later, we saw Mike's flashlight and found him inside his tent.

Mike was in good shape except for a lack of water. We gave him a water bottle to drink slowly and split a can of pears. The juice was the best part. We bedded down and fought mosquitoes for the rest of the night.

At first light, we got the welcome news that an Air Force Helicopter was coming to pick us up. We looked around for a helispot but decided that he would have to be hoisted out from right where we were camped. J. R. and Tom came down covering in fifteen minutes what had taken Steve and I forty minutes to do in the dark '

The helicopter arrived and lowered two paramedics down to us. They showed us how to use the jungle penetrator. The jungle penetrator is sort of a seat on the end of a long cable that can be used to raise and lower people and equipment from a hovering helicopter. We were hoisted up two at a time. Steve Zappe and I were raised up through a small pine tree, which was exciting. We were flown down to the Desert Station and a good meal provided by the Sheriff's Department.

In retrospect, Mike did exactly the right thing by staying on the ridge. It would have been a long hard trip down into either canyon before reaching the stream. It also would have been much harder to locate him.



Steve Zappe

**As the powerful twin turbaned Air Force helicopter hovered above the Pine trees, RMRU members John Muratet and Tom Aldrich were winched upward towards the big bird.**

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.