

Lead climber fell and badly injured

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Tahquitz Rock
1979-031

By Hal Fulkman

It was 10 or 15 minutes to Loma Linda E.R., air time, and as I watched Lunch Rock get smaller and smaller below us it seemed incredible that in 15 minutes a mission would be over that everyone expected to last three to four hours longer.

Four and one half hours earlier I was sitting in the backyard with my wife enjoying a Saturday afternoon when the all too familiar screech came from my pager. After contacting the number that was called out on the pager, I was informed that a climber had fallen on Tahquitz Rock and was badly injured. I left within 10 minutes of the first pager call, and wasted no time in getting to Humber Park, our designated rendezvous.

When I arrived I met the sheriff's deputy, and the informant, and soon learned that the injured climber was about one pitch up on a route called 'Super Pooper.' From the description of his injuries we didn't have any time to lose. I had just finished throwing in some extra first aid equipment into my pack when John Dew, the second RMRU member arrived, grabbed his pack and within a few minutes we were on the trail which leads to the base of Tahquitz Rock. After about 35 minutes we were at the base of the rock, where the route begins. By this time more team members had arrived and were on the trail, so John stayed there to guide the rest of the team to our position, while I climbed up to where the climber had fallen.

When I reached the climber I saw he was being attended by his climbing partner and by another climber who had been soloing. All three men were glad to see me. While I was examining him, he told me his name was Matthew and with the help of his friend, he explained what had happened.



Jim Fairchild

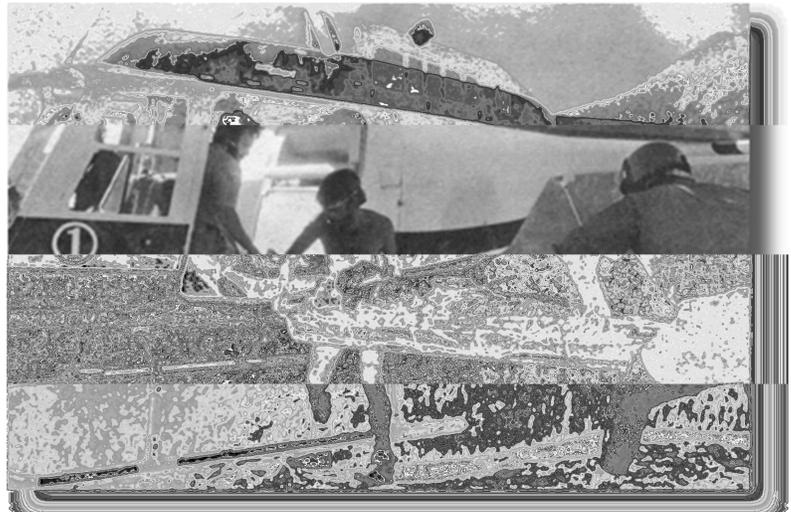
READY FOR AIRLIFT - RMRU member Hal Fulkman prepares to give the injured climber a small amount of water, as they wait to be flown out to the Loma Linda Hospital.

Matthew was leading the climb and was in a very difficult position trying to get an anchor in a large crack. Matthew said he made four attempts to insert the anchor and didn't remember much after that, except falling backwards and seeing his partner on the way down. When he hit the rocks below, he landed on his right side. His upper torso went into a crevice and saved his head from a direct impact.

After surveying Matthew, I determined that he had a broken jaw, fractured right wrist, a concussion, and numerous abrasions and contusions. Administering first aid was very difficult because of the small ledge that Matthew was laying on and in order to move around I had to tie into a safety line.

Within a short period of time additional team members were on the scene rigging lines to raise Matthew to a different ledge where it was possible to lower him all the way to the bottom. Because of numerous fires in Southern California that required the use of helicopters, we received the disappointing news that no helicopters were available to evacuate Matthew.

One half of the way down the rock we received a message by radio that Don Landells was about 10 minutes away with his jet Ranger, and would try a pickup on Lunch Rock. After getting Matthew to the bottom, we transported him to Lunch Rock. Don flew in and made a one runner landing nothing short of spectacular and within a few minutes Matthew and I were loaded and on our way to Loma Linda.



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ONE RUNNER PICKUP - Hal Fulkman waits in the back of Don Landells Ranger, as Bernie McIlvoy and Avery Powers prepare to slide the litter into the helicopter.

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.