

Climber fell, injured hip and ribs

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Tahquitz Rock
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By Kevin Walker

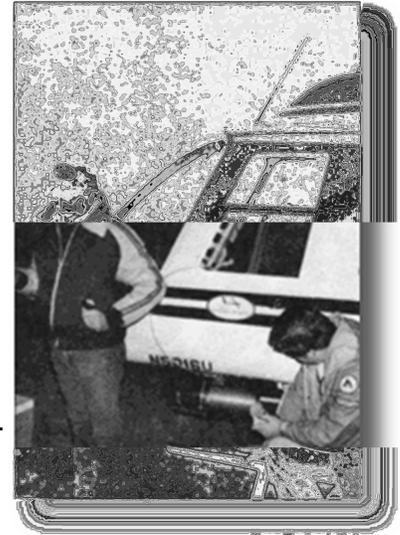
The holiday prediction came true. A four-day holiday starting on New Years, with clear, mild weather. It just had to happen. It was around 4:00 p.m., I clearly remember the half-time festivities were under way at the Rose Bowl. The call was for an injured climber on Tahquitz Rock. By voice contact with the subject, injuries were confirmed, so a helicopter was requested. The call out was initiated, and members were soon enroute to Camp Maranatha in Idyllwild.

Upon Arrival at Camp Maranatha we learned that Michael Kleinschmidt was at the base of the third pitch of the "Long Climb" on Tahquitz Rock, and that three climbers were enroute to Michael climbing up from the base of the rock. They were Bob Czarnowski, Dave Albritton, and Bob Harvey. While we were getting gear ready, Steve DeJesus from Landells Aviation arrived in helicopter 16U. With only minutes of daylight left, Walt Walker and Mike Daugherty climbed aboard and Steve Flew them up to the rock to get a look at things from the air. Indeed, Michael was on the long climb and three rock climbers had reached him and were lowering him down the face of the rock in his sit harness. The helicopter returned to base, and as Steve attached a directional light to the underside of the helicopter, Mike, Walt, and I discussed the rescue plan. We decided that it would be best to have the men and gear needed to effect the rescue flown to Lunch Rock. It was now dark, and with the light hooked up, Steve started the turbine-powered helicopter up, and, with Walt and I in the back seat, Steve lifted off, and we were en route to Tahquitz Rock. The wind was not bad in close but, but there was an occasional gust, so Steve flew around for about five minutes getting the feel of the wind currents. Then, when all felt right Steve maneuvered the machine closer, until we were just a few feet above Lunch Rock. Skillfully, he placed the skid down on the 100-foot tall boulder, and with the pilot's nod to exit, Walt and I carefully climber out. Once out, I countersigned the nod with a thumbs up. Steve then pulled the powerful Jet Ranger away and returned to base.

Past team member Woody Stark had earlier hiked in to the rock with a radio and was monitoring the progress of the climbers with Michael. As they got lower communications became easier. Woody learned and then relayed to base that Michael had injured his pelvic area on his left side, and had also injured his ribs to some extent. The pain was increasing, and the group felt it would be better to stop on the ledge approximately 130 feet above the ground.

Meanwhile, the second load, consisting of Mike Daugherty and Glenn Henderson, was flown in by Steve who skillfully brought the ship in, but this time we were able to help a little. Using our aircraft flashlights with red tips, Walt created an artificial horizon for Steve and I took hold of a skid and helped to guide the ship into position and then hold it there while Glenn and Mike exited. Walt and Mike headed across the base of the rock to where the Long Climb route begins. Glenn took over with the red lights and we helped Steve bring in the rest of the team in groups of two. Ray Hussey and Rick Pohlers were flown in with the litter. Jim Fairchild and Bud White came in with the litter wheel. Rob Gardner and Steve Bryant brought the remainder of the technical gear. Praise also needs to go to fellow member Henry Negrete who was loadmaster. Henry did a top-notch job assigning members and gear for the flights in. By the way, Henry sacrificed his chances to go in and help by staying and completing his task as base.

As the rest of us hiked over to the site, Steve flew back to base and shut down to wait and see if he would be needed to fly the subject out. Mike Daugherty climbed up the 130 plus feet to where Michael and the rock climbers were waiting. Because of the small size of the ledge, the first thing to do was to get the three climbers down. As they descended, Mike Daugherty set up anchors for the lower. Once the climbers were down, Ray jumared up, followed by Glenn. Ray quickly ascertained that Michael's injuries did not require the helicopter, therefore, Steve was released to head for Desert Hot Springs. Michael did appear to have some sort of fracture to the hip area and his ribs were quite tender. As the men toiled above, the rest of us waited below. Steve wished up well as he flew past the rock on the way home, and we thanked him for a job well done. After a while we heard moans from above as they lowered Michael, as carefully as possible, into the litter. Once all was ready, the lower was started. And Mike and Glenn did the lowering. Ray and Michael were lowered down the face slowly but smoothly and soon were at the base. Steve Bryant was the cook for the evening and had hot soup waiting for Michael.



Jim Fairchild

OUTFITTED - Mountain Pilot Steve DeJesus stands ready after installing the night surveillance light to illuminate the underside of helicopter 16 uniform. This light allowed Steve to fly RMRU members into the base of Tahquitz Rock to effect the rescue of Michael Kleinshmidt.

Michael was in very good spirits considering the ordeal he had been through. Once the gear was packed up and the wheel attached to the litter, we started down the large talus slope towards Humber Park. This part, as has in the past, went very slowly as we made our way down through the loose rock. It is hard to describe the work that it takes to do this but I can tell you that it is treacherous enough that a belay rope is needed to control the litter even though there are six team members with the litter at all times. Never the less, we did our job and at a little after 2:00 a.m. we were at Humber Park loading Michael into the Idyllwild Ambulance for a ride down to Hemet Valley Hospital.



Jim Fairchild

WHEEL OUT - Like so many times before, by utilizing the RMRU wheel, members were able to move injured climber Michael Kleinschmidt down the steep boulder field below Tahquitz Rock after he had been lowered off the climbing face back to Humber Park.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Riverside County Sheriff's Department for assisting as always with helicopter operations at Camp Maranatha. Dick Beggs, manager of the Camp for allowing us to use his facility for base camp. The three rock climbers, one of which is an Idyllwild resident, for their great help in getting Michael down to the ledge where we took over. My fellow team members for just being who they are. And, of course Steve DeJesus of Landells Aviation, for doing an excellent job getting us into the rock safely with his skills as a mountain pilot. To everyone, job well done!

Editors Note: Michael Kleinschmidt indeed was admitted to the hospital with a fractured hip and fractured ribs. He was released several days later, and stopped by Walt Walker's business to say thanks to RMRU and to let everyone know that he would stay in touch.

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.