



Injured Man

1/1/2004

Humber Park, Idyllwild, CA

2004-001

by Henry Negrete

Unfortunately rescues do not take holidays off. Such was the case on New Years day 2004. At about 14:30 that afternoon I received a call from the Idyllwild Fire Dept. to give me a heads-up call about a male hiker who had slipped off the icy trail near Tahquitz Peak in the San Jacinto Mountains. I intern called Glenn Henderson, one of RMRU's call captains to pass on the information. Glenn contacted the Riverside Sheriff's dept., and, returned my call to tell me that the Sheriff's helicopter (Star 91) would be in route to U.S. Forest Service helipad at Keenwild station to pick up fellow team member and Idyllwild resident Lee Arnsen and me to fly in and start the rescue. Lee and I rendezvoused with Star 91, and were quickly in the air to search for our fallen hiker. Lee and I went prepared with gear to do a ground.

Fortunately for them Captain Tony Sandrini of the U.S. Forest Service was on Patrol in the area and was flagged down by a hiker who said he had heard someone yelling for help from Tahquitz Rock. After investigating the situation Capt. Sandrini contacted the Riverside Sheriffs office, who in turn activated RMRU.

RMRU was requested to respond to Humber Park for a probable technical rescue on Tahquitz Rock. Living and working in Idyllwild I was one of the first to arrive "on scene" at Humber Park. With binoculars in hand I scoured the rock face trying to spot where the climbers might be. The deputy on scene informed me that he had already requested the Sheriff's Department Helicopter to assist in the search. Soon after the arrival of the heliÂcopper the two climbers were spotted clinging to the side of the rock.

The helicopter crew requested that I rendezvous with them at the U.S. Forest Service Helipad at Keenwild StaÂtion as soon as possible. The urgency was because the winds were picking up and both the temperatures and sun were going down. After arriving at the helipad, I was advised by Tony, the pilot, that this was going to be one of the "hairiest" rescues we've done because of the existing conditions. His words were a little unsettling at first, but then I thought, "This is what we train for."

Lee and I went prepared with gear to do a ground rescue. Once we spotted the stranded hiker the helicopter crew advised us that the hiker was in a good spot for a hoist rescue. We quickly flew back to the helipad to lighten our load and prepare for

the hoist rescue. Lee and I drew straws to decide who would go out on the hoist. I drew the long straw, or, was it the short straw? (Just kidding). Anyway, I returned with the helicopter crew and was lowered to the hiker with a full body harness to secure him into. I found him about 50 ft. down from the trail clinging to a pine tree. It was about 2 to 3 ft. high and not more than 3 inches thick. This tree probably saved his life and certain injury. About 4 years ago RMRU had searched and recovered a hiker's body in the very same area from the same type of accident.

We quickly ascended to the site of their predicament and I tethered my pack to my side so I could be winched down to the climbers. The helicopter had to hover about 200 feet over them so as to be directly above them but not too close to the rock. When I reached the climbers I was pleased to find three things: (1) the climbers were uninjured, (2) they had stopped on a small ledge that would at least accommodate our feet, and (3) there was a nice, new, shiny bolt to clip into for safety.

After clipping into the bolt I was able to get off the hoist cable and hook it into the harness of the first climber to go up. When I tried to retrieve the cable for the second climber it was a little more difficult because the wind kept blowing it away from us. After finally "catching" the cable the second climber was soon on his way up to safety.

I needed some time to pack up the climber's gear left on the ledge so the helicopter flew the climbers back to the helipad to make room for me to return. When the helicopter returned for me, the wind had picked up and I had a little tougher time trying to grasp the cable. If it weren't for the superb skills of the Pilot and Crew this could have been a bigger ordeal for me.

I was soon back in the "bird" with renewed appreciation for the Pilot and Crew's expert abilities. After arriving back at Keenwild Station we exchanged expressions of gratitude and high 5's to each other and were soon on our way back to enjoying the remainder of our cool fall day in beautiful Idyllwild.

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.