

RMRU

RIVERSIDE MOUNTAIN RESCUE UNIT

NEWSLETTER

12 ISSUES PER YEAR DISTRIBUTED BY THE RIVERSIDE MOUNTAIN RESCUE UNIT, INC. — POST OFFICE BOX 5444, RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA 92517
A VOLUNTEER NON-PROFIT TAX DEDUCTIBLE CORPORATION — MEMBER OF THE MOUNTAIN RESCUE ASSOCIATION

Volume XIII, Issue 12, December 1977 — John Dew, Editor — Walt Walker, Publisher — Dona Towell, Artist

Because of you,



*the Sustaining members, and us, the Regular members,
this lad, now 12 years old, will have a joyous Christmas.*

On the cover-

While reviewing past issues of the *RMRU Newsletter*, in preparation for writing the December *Olden Days* column, I came across the December 1972 issue that had, on its cover, the photograph you see on the cover of this issue.

As editor, in 1972 I decided to re-print the photograph, taken by RMRU member Bill Speck, of five year old Jeffrey. I thought then, as I do now, about how he and I would both be having a joyous Christmas. He, if for nothing else, that he was alive. And I, just for having had some small part in saving his life.

For those of you who are *Sustaining Members* of RMRU, I say to you with truthfulness and humility that Jeffrey might not be alive today, if it were not for **you**. — Walt Walker, Publisher



PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

When the newsletter staff received the above photo, we immediately had thoughts of an excellent candidate for 'Dingbat of the month'. After the initial remarks and laughter we decided that was not the correct course of action. Tom Aldrich had actually volunteered for a very serious job, that of inspecting RMRU's 1000's of feet of climbing rope, inch by inch to see that they did not have cuts or frayed areas that might be unsafe for continued use

\$USTAINING MEMBERS—

BY MIKE DAUGHERTY

During the past month we have received contributions from the following new and renewing members:

New—

- *Gary Crow
- Tom Aldrich
- Ed Hill
- Jerry Bassart
- *Art and Cappy Bridge
- JoAnna Quackenbush
- Gary and Marcel Weissbrot
- Robert Fainberg

Renewing—

- David Westheimer
- M/M George Sweet
- Robert and Edna Kowell
- John and Margaret Hauschild
- Allan and Hulda Rau
- *Dr. and Mrs. Norman Mellor
- David Harrah
- *Theodore L. Young

**Century Club*, donation of \$100 or more.

TRAINING

**Technical & Van Workday
10 Dec., Sat.**

By Rick Pohlers

Normally this training was our annual Helitac training. However, since there were no whirlybirds available, we had to make do.

So out to Big Rock on the shores of Lake Perris we went to brush up on technical rock techniques. Two sorry "victims" were already dangling from the rock when we arrived. So we split into two groups, one of which had the new guys. The big reason for this training was to familiarize the new guys with our techniques. Meanwhile, the other group worked on a more difficult "victim".

All hapless victims were eventually rescued, more or less. Then team members practiced individual skills such as Jumarring and rappelling. Thus, a profitable morning was spent improving our skills. It was a good thing what with the rash of missions we have had on Tahquitz Rock. Then off we went for lunch at the local "greasy burger" place.

Next on the schedule was the annual van cleaning. This year we had two trucks to wax, so it was nice that most of the troops managed to get back from the "greasy burger" to Al's house.

All gear was emptied, cleaned, checked, and some retired after having been used that morning. During the cleaning, the new strobe light was installed on Van No. 2. It has since been put to good use.

After the trucks were gleaming, and we had quenched our thirst, President Pete demonstrated his skill on a skate board and Jim demonstrated his first aid skill on the results. These very nice demonstrations made for a fun way to end the day.

• RMRU

Coming Events-

MARCH

- 8 — Regular Meeting
- 10-12 — Training
- 22 — Board Meeting

Search and Rescue

RESCUE

Mission No. 7734M

**26 Dec., Mon.
Near Desert Hot Springs**

By Kevin Walker

At 5:00 A.M. the day after Christmas, I was awakened by my dad (Walt Walker) after he had received a call from Deputy Carl Sabo of the Riverside County Sheriffs Office in Indio. The deputy informed him that a light aircraft carrying three passengers from Las Vegas to Bermuda Dunes, was down in the foothills about three miles north of Desert Hot Springs.

Fellow team member John Dew drove to our house, and rode with us to the rendezvous point at Interstate 10 and Highway 62. Enroute, my dad told us that at 8:00 P.M. Christmas evening, the pilot had radioed a mayday to the Palm Springs tower. Shortly after that, radio contact was lost, and an Emergency Location Transmitter (ELT) signal was heard by the tower. During the night an Air Force C-130 plotted the ELT signal to be about three miles north of Desert Hot Springs. Using their ELT direction finding equipment, the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) found the downed Grauman Tiger in the bottom of a ravine at 6:30 A.M. They reported there were no survivors of the crash.

Upon reaching the rendezvous point, we were informed that base camp would be at the Mission Lakes Country Club just north of Desert Hot Springs. RMRU members were met by the CAP and Captain Ray Canova of the Sheriffs Department. He informed us that the Coroner was enroute, and that local helicopter pilot, Don Landells was also on the way with his supercharged Bell.

While waiting for Don to arrive, the weather worsened, it began to



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

With two bodies already placed in body bags and the rain falling, RMRU members (L to R) Don Chambers, Kevin Walker and Steve Zappe lifted the fuselage, while Walt Walker worked to remove the last body and John Muratet held the left wing steady.

rain harder and the cloud ceiling lowered. Operations leader Walt Walker instructed base camp operator Bernie McIlvoy to turn on RMRU's new strobe to assist Don in his approach. Upon his arrival, Walt advised Don of the situation while a RMRU radio was being installed in the bird.

Don and Walt departed base and headed in the general direction of the crash. They were guided to the site by information radioed to them by the CAP ground party. Their trip was hampered by the rain and low clouds. Don was able to land on a ridge where Walt climbed out, and was replaced by two of the three wet and cold CAP men. Jim Fairchild and the Coroner were flown in, and the remaining CAP member was lifted out. Due to the deteriorating weather conditions, the remaining RMRU members, John Muratet, Kevin Walker, Don Chambers, Jim Hanson, Steve Zappe, and John Dew were flown in one at a time, with Don receiving helitac signals on every flight.

As it continued to rain, the Coroner and RMRU began the sad task at hand. One of the victims was thrown clear of the plane, and the remaining two were still in the wreckage.

The victim who was thrown clear, was placed into a body bag. Then began the job of removing the first body from the wreckage; this was accomplished without a great deal of difficulty. However, the remaining body was pinned by the wreckage. With everybody except Walt, we began lifting under the tail section and left wing. With the plane tipped up on its nose Walt was able to get through the debris and cut the seat belt and remove the final victim.

With all three bodies secured, the final chore, was to air lift them back to base camp. It was decided that with the weather conditions being poor, it would be safer to fly them out in RMRU's cargo net beneath the helicopter. With Don waiting on the ridge above, two bodies were placed in the cargo net.

Don was advised by radio that we were ready for the first load. Don flew up the canyon towards us, and I gave him hand signals. This aided him in moving over my dad who was waiting to clip in the line attached to the cargo net. With the line secured, I gave Don the up signal. Don applied more power and the line tightened. Don slowly picked up the load and



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

Don Landells maneuvered his super-charged Bell helicopter into position, with the help of hand signals that were given by Kevin Walker (not in the picture), so that Walt Walker could snap the line to the helicopter. The line was linked to the cargo net (foreground) that contained the body bags.

moved down canyon to base. With the operation being repeated the final victim and our gear was flown back to base.

With the sad task completed, we climbed to a ridge top and Don started making trips to fly us to base.

My dad and I were the last two to be flown out. As we (both being pilots) waited our turn, we quietly spoke of the tragedy, trying to figure out how and why, and the sorrow that many would go through during this joyous holiday season. • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 7735M

**31 Dec. & 1 Jan., Sat. & Sun.
Santiago Peak, near Elsinore**

By Rick Pohlers

A long standing tradition for RMRU is to be called out on either

New Year's eve or day. We were not disappointed this year. Most old timers have their gear all ready packed and ready to go, knowing that the call is going to come. It came.

But Elsinore - that dreaded territory that evokes a groan from every member when he hears it. Elsinore! Ah, the scene of so many epic foulups and "weirdo" missions, like rescuing motorcycle frames from mine pits, drunk drivers' from off the road, or lost nudists. This mission would prove to be no different.

The "story" was that there was a downed plane in the incredibly brush-covered mountains northwest of the city. It had been located by a F.A.A. inspector tracking the emergency locator transmitter (ELT) that starts transmitting when a plane crashes. He had a visual sighting at about the 4,500 foot level near Santiago Peak.

We had just had a plane crash mission the weekend before, so we all boogied out hoping to get to the crash quickly and maybe find somebody alive for a change.

However, you can't be in a hurry in Elsinore as things generally seem to move pretty slow there. On recent missions we have yet to get out of the Sheriff's substation in less than an hour. As usual, that's where we met, and as usual, we sat around there for over an hour. It seems that we couldn't pin down exactly where the wreck was. It's not the kind of country you can stroll through what with nearly vertical canyon walls and brush so dense that you can walk on top of it.



Anyway, "Mr. Bad" (Walt Walker) called around to several agencies attempting to get air support. No way, guy. They were not going to risk flying in the dark. So he called our buddies from Sierra Madre who had ELT finding equipment.

We were all chomping at the bit by then (it was now 11:00 p.m.). So we decided to at least get out in the field since we wouldn't get much air help until light. It couldn't hurt . . . much.

So we all trucked down the highway to a fire road that snaked its way up Santiago Peak. As many of us as could, piled into Walt's Jeep Wagoneer and the Sheriff's four wheel-drive rig and we were off. Almost - for after careening along over the rutted, rock-strewn, washed-out fire road, our progress was halted by a locked Forest Service gate. This steel monument was built to stop an M-60 tank, and four locks securing an anchor chain from the Queen Mary wrapped around the post and gate at least twenty times. Every key we had, from roller skate keys to safety deposit box ones, was tried to no avail.

Suggestions were made and some even tried like: breaking it down (didn't work), pulling it down with the Jeep (might break the Jeep), or shooting the lock off (the deputy said that only works in the movies). Now what?

The enterprising deputy, Sgt. Eastman, called up for some bolt cutters. An hour later, we had them. But would they work on an anchor chain? We thought a cutting torch would have been better. But sheriffs' are strong guys, so when he put the bolt cutter to it, the chain parted and we were off . . . again.

By the time we got to the general area where the plane was supposed to be, Sierra Madre was about twenty minutes behind us and we were in a new year. (Somebody forgot the champagne though).

When Sierra Madre got there, they showed us how their black boxes worked and drove around to get some fixes on the signal. However, their boxes seemed to be defective since the fixes, when plotted, indicated the wreck to be miles and miles to the north. That precluded any thoughts of bush-wandering in the cold wet sticks. So we all settled around a fire while SMRU got more fixes and waited for morning.

With the faintest glimmer of light, we heard the distinctive pop-pop-pop of Don Landell's Jet Ranger. He came directly to our base camp off the highway with the aid of our new, super-intensity strobe light. This saved him searching around for us

and was much appreciated by him. Soon a big, twin-turbined Rescue Huey from El Toro also came in and started looking.

Freezing, up in "mayhem" canyon, we all thought the wreck would be spotted in minutes. Such was not the case. All morning both birds searched the whole mountains, finding only old marked wrecks or rock formations that looked like planes. The signal was still there, but not the plane.

About this time, both choppers retired to refuel. Don, with Jim Fairchild, and one SMSR team member with the black box ELT locator, went to Riverside for gas and coffee. On the way, the signal got stronger. So after gassing up at Riverside "International," they flew over to Flabob airport at the foot of Mt. Rubidoux. And there it was - the phantom wreck! A red Cessna parked there had its ELT merrily bleeping away, bouncing off Mt. Rubidoux out to Santiago Peak where it was reflected up. Once shutting it off, the ELT frequency was silent. So ended our mission . . . almost.

The FAA pilot who had spotted the wreck through the fog was still convinced that we had not found it. It was white, not red. He then volunteered to fly over the area as he had done the day before at 7,500 feet and find it for us. So while he was rounding his "kite", we rounded up some grub at a delightful little cafe in Elsinore run by a merry little English lady. J.R. "the animal," Muratet ordered his usual mountain of food after starving all morning, while the rest of us admired the cute waitress who took our orders. It sure beats Sambos.

Meanwhile, back at the base camp, the FAA pilot was circling around high up in the sky like a soaring eagle. Like an eagle, he kept soaring and soaring. That's how we left him, searching for the phantom wreck. The Sheriff figured we had found our man at Flabob and would call us if anything came up (it didn't).

Some way to spend New Years, in Elsinore - the pits. However, we would rather be called than not, especially if there is a possibility of someone being hurt.

So with the FAA people flying off into the sunset, another exciting Elsinore adventure come to an end (about time). • RMRU

Thank you, Don Landells, for providing RMRU the opportunity to have a very successful Helitac training for year 1977.

For more years than I would like to count, RMRU members have been flown around the wilderness areas of Riverside County by veteran pilot Don Landells.

The first time I flew with Don, was May 5, 1962, as we were evacuating bodies from a plane crash in the San Jacinto Mountains. Fortunately for everyone concerned, we have had many more happy endings, than sad ones.

Over the years you have read in this newsletter how Don has made our job easier, but more importantly, the unfortunate lost or injured person has benefited from his great flying.

On behalf of all those unfortunate persons whose lives were made easier, and all of us of RMRU, *thank you again, Don!* — Walt Walker



RMRU PHOTO BY KEVIN WALKER

Prior to the start of the '77 Helitac training, the camera captured veteran RMRU Helitac instructor Walt Walker and veteran pilot Don Landells, as they discussed plans for the day.

(Helitac continued on page 6)



With Landells Aviation's Bell 206 turbine powered helicopter stationary at their heliport, even veteran RMRU members, like Ed Hill (exiting the rear door) practiced getting in and out of the bird to sharpen their Helitac skills. RMRU member Don Chambers is near the nose of the bird. Bill Landells is partially hidden behind Don and RMRU member John Dew has his back to the camera.

RMRU PHOTO BY KEVIN WALKER



RMRU PHOTO BY WALT WALKER

RMRU's youngest member, 18 year old Kevin Walker, leaves the step on his first jump of the day from the Jet Ranger. Pilot Don Landells takes a look out of the corner of his ever watchful eye while flying the powerful bird. RMRU's new van and Don's hanger at Desert Hot Springs are in the background



RMRU PHOTO BY KEVIN WALKER

One of Kevin's favorite hobbies, is taking photographs of helicopters, especially while they are being used by RMRU. He took the above photo while Don was demonstrating the use of the cargo net and sling. RMRU has put his capability to good use many times in recent years.