

Volume XVIII, Issue XII, December 1982

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*Thank you  
Don*



## Training



### Helitac

**4 Dec., Sat.  
Landells Heliport  
Desert Hot Springs**

*By Mel Krug*

My first training in Helitac was 'on the job', or rather on one of my first missions. 'Keep your head down', 'don't walk to the rear of the helicopter', these were some of my first instructions. The importance of knowing what to do around the helicopter, how to move in and out of it is quickly appreciated when your first experience is getting in with full gear while it is hovering with one runner on a rock.

We met at Don Landells heliport bright and early to train with Don and his heli-

copter. Training came after coffee and donuts and some good fellowship with Don and his staff, and fellow RMRU members. The first item of training was to gather around the Bell Jet Ranger III helicopter while it was sitting on the ground so Don along with veteran member Walt Walker could go over the do's and don'ts regarding general safety and all the hand signals required when helping the pilot land safely in rugged terrain. At that time we also practiced getting in and out and moving from one side of the helicopter to the other without any sudden movements that may shift the weight suddenly and be a problem for the pilot.

At that point we got a chance to practice these skills with the helicopter in operation. Stepping out of the helicopter from about six feet in the air, guiding one runner down onto RMRU's wooden rock, climbing in while it is sitting on the 'rock' and giving hand signals to the pilot so he can set it down safely are important skills to know before dealing with it on a real mission. Everyone got several shots at each of these skills before we broke for lunch.

With lunch over we moved on to the next skills to be practiced...cleaning and polishing the vans inside and out. Not the most exciting thing to do in the world, but



**The RMRU 'Rock', on the move—**



**ONE RUNNER, WITH HELP** — In the left photo RMRU members Rick Pohlers and Kevin Walker, help the pilot by gently guiding the runner into position on the RMRU rock. Once down,



slight pressure is exerted downward to help maintain the position of the runner on the rock. Next, Ed Hill demonstrates the proper way of entering the helicopter

never the less an important one, as the equipment and vans have been entrusted to our care by the Sustaining Members.

As evening approached some members headed for home, some headed for the Sierra for winter climbing, while some lingered on to visit more with Don. On behalf of all the members, thank you Mike, Brian, Vance, Jim and Bill. And especially to Don and Elaine for making it possible to take some of the risk of our business away, and to help us do it more efficient which takes some of the risk away from yours. *Thanks!* • RMRU

dark so we could be out to Desert Hot Springs by 8 a.m. Shortly after 8 a.m. we began our annual Helitac training at Don Landells heliport. We finished training about 1:30 p.m., broke for lunch, then began our annual van clean-up and inventory of equipment. It was after dark when I left Desert Hot Springs.

When I arrived home I jumped in the shower to remove the dust and dirt that had accumulated during training. During dinner I told my wife, Sondra, about the days events, especially our practicing aerial pickups using long sling ropes. We turned on the TV and started to watch a movie, *when the phone rang*. You guessed it, an urgent call for RMRU, from the Banning Station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department. My son Kevin, picked up the No. 1 RMRU van, stopped by my residence and picked me up. We arrived at the lower terminal of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway at 11:45 p.m.

The captain of the Banning station, Ray Canova, was there waiting for us. He advised us that a 23 year old woman had slipped, fallen, and slid out of sight down one of the ice chutes near the top of the tram. he also, advised us that the Mt. San Jacinto Wilderness State Park Rangers were descending the chute in search of the young woman.

In less than an hour we had packed our own packs, assembled a tram car load of RMRU equipment, rode to the top of the tram and started over to the top of the chute where the young woman had fallen. We were met by some of the state park rangers and they told us that some

of their people had descended about 200 feet and had not located anything, except for one after ski boot.

While Jim Fairchild and I prepared to descend, Kevin Walker, Mel Krug, John Dew, Joe Erickson, Mark Hebert, Cameron Robbins, Ed Hill and Randy Iwasiek started setting up anchors for the descent. Mary Bowman was in the upper station of the tram, along with Sgt. Dave Weekly. Mary had to run base out of her pack that night.

We of RMRU have a natural positive attitude and I was hoping to find Dorothy Goldsmith less than 300 feet down and only slightly injured. I swung on a heavy pack, clipped into the rappel rope, switched on RMRU's portable spotlight and began my rappel in the darkness of the chute. When I got to the end of the 300 foot rope I used the light to look downward for disturbances in the snow, nothing! I set up another 300 foot rope and started down again. Jim started down on the rope I had just gotten off of.

Approximately 500 feet down I located a sock and an after ski boot that matched the one found above. Descending further I found some marks in the snow. Just before I had descended the complete length of a third 300 foot rope, I found the young woman. You did not have to be a doctor to observe that she had died sometime during her 900 foot fall. With a heavy heart I radioed, by code words, that I had located the body.

It was decided that Bernie McIlvoy would descend also, and in the morning he would help Jim and I move the body to a small clearing in the trees on the very

# Search and Rescue

## EVACUATION

**Mission No. 8240M**

**4-5 Dec., Sat.-Sun.  
North Chino Canyon,  
San Jacinto Mountains**

*By Walt Walker*

Saturday had begun very early (5 to 6 a.m.) for most RMRU members. It had been necessary to arise while it was still

steep slope. Shortly before 7 a.m. Mary radioed that Don Landells would be coming in with a cargo sling attached to a sling rope that would be connected to the bottom of the Jet Ranger Helicopter.

It was hard to get moving after sitting for better than two hours during the wait for morning light. We placed the subject in the body bag, secured a rope to it, and while Jim lowered the rope, Bernie and I descended with the body.

In a very short time we could hear the helicopter coming up the canyon. When Don came into sight, we signaled to him. He hovered over us and we disconnected the cargo sling from the 100 foot sling rope. Don applied power and flew a short distance away. Both to make it easier for us to hear and more importantly, to not have a blast of cold air blown onto us from the main rotor blades. As quickly as possible we loaded the body into the cargo net and radioed for Don to return. Once again he was hovering over us, we connected the cargo sling to the sling rope, gave the up hand signal and Don flew back to the lower tram parking lot. A sadness overcame me as I attached my Jumars to the rope for the ascent up the steep chute. We had not been able to be a 'rescue' team in the sense I, and others, like to think of. • RMRU



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

**SAD TASK** — RMRU member Walt Walker finishes securing a sling to the body of Dorothy Goldsmith who was tragically killed when she lost her footing and slid over 800 feet down an ice chute near the tram.

## SEARCH

**Mission No. 8241M**

**22 Dec., Wed.  
Skyline Ridge,  
San Jacinto Mountains**

*By Cameron Robbins*

On Tuesday December 21, two young men, 18 & 19, started hiking from Palm Springs to the tram via the Skyline Trail. The weather forecast was for snow in the high country, and rain down below, and later that afternoon the storm hit. The hikers walked up into the snow just a short ways, when they decided to turn back because of the storm and cold, which they were not prepared. When it became apparent that they would be forced to bivouac they tried to use their small radio, it did not work. As they suffered through the night, their parents, now quite worried, called for help.

Early in the morning the call came through. In the meantime the parents had hired a helicopter and it was flying with two P. S. Mounties when the first RMRU members arrived.

Plans were quickly formulated and Randy Iwasuk and Mark Rhoads were sent up the tram to check out the ridge along Long Valley. Bernie McIlvoy and J.R. Muratet were to go from the tram down the Skyline Ridge. Mel Krug and I were to fly up the trail as far as possible

and then be let off, and hike down the trail. The winds kept the bird piloted by Mike Donovan from Landells Aviation from going much above snowline. Kevin Walker rode as observer as Mel and I were being flown into position. Mel spotted the subjects hiking down into Tahquitz Canyon above the third falls, where they would have had some major difficulties, being unfamiliar with the area. Mike set the bird down and let the three of us out. After making contact with the subjects, we loaded them in the back of the bird, Mike then flew them back to Ann Dolly's, and then returned for us.

• RMRU

## EVACUATION

**Mission No. 8242M**

**28-29 Dec., Tues.-Wed.  
Palm Springs Tram,  
San Jacinto Mountains**

*By Craig Beasley*

There I was sitting in my apartment in Salt Lake City, Utah, having just completed a ski-climb of the Phiefferhorn in the Wasatch Mountains. All of a sudden a premonition struck me - RMRU was going to have a mission. What else could I do but grab my gear and begin the 14 hour roll to Southern California. My premonition must have slightly premature since I arrived in Riverside a whole two days before the mission. Anyhow, I was pre-

pared to spend part of my Christmas break with RMRU.

As I had hoped would happen, my parents phone rang with news of a rescue. Just as in the old days, I grabbed my gear, left word with my parents that I didn't know when I'd be back, and away I went. The rescue was for John Rivera, a 22 year old cross-country skier who had fallen down the desert facing slopes out of Long Valley. Evidently John had taken off his skis and walked to the edge to take a look. The slopes were very icy and the skier slipped, and down the slopes he went without even his ski poles to help invoke a self-arrest. John's brother Todd watched the incident occur. When Todd could not make visual or voice contact with John, he went to the ranger station in Long Valley and reported the accident. RMRU was notified and the mission was underway. Prior to RMRU's arrival, a ranger and a ski hut employee began rappelling down the icy slopes to look for John. The pair went down nearly 1500 feet stopping their search when they reached a technical ice face.

It was dark when RMRU members reached the sight of the fall. Walt Walker and Mark Hebert were the first RMRU members to begin what was to become a very long search down the slopes. Walt and Mark continued their search downward past the ranger and ski employee, supported with more rope by RMRU members Kevin Walker, Glenn Henderson, Bernie McIlvoy and Joe Erickson. At



1500 feet down from the top Walt and Mark made voice contact with someone. The voice came from out of the fall line, but it still seemed reasonable that this was the subject. After all, who else would be down these chutes in need of help at this time of night. Strangely enough, the voice was not from John, rather, it came from another person in dire need (see Mission No. 8243M). Hence the original subject was still missing.

With this new development, more **RMRU** members began descending the fixed ropes in search of John Rivera. Searching was difficult because of the night and dark shadows from the surrounding trees gave everything a grayish appearance. Kevin, Glenn, Joe, and Bernie searched down 1600 feet before running out of rope. Mike Deden and myself then proceeded down the fixed lines with more rope for a continued decent. At 1900 feet the six **RMRU** members decided to bivouac till morning (I for one was glad to have carried my sleeping bag with me). With news that Walt, Mark and subject were resting comfortably (see Mission No. 8243M), we bedded down for a couple of hours of sleep. Come morning Joe and Bernie headed down while the rest of us

began ascending, thinking we had possibly missed the subject since we were searching in the dark. This turned out to indeed be the case. Not too far into our ascent, we were notified that **RMRU** members Bruce Gahagan and Mark Rhoads had found the body of John Rivera approximately 600 feet down from the point of the fall. The subject had broken his neck in the fall. We proceeded up, gathering the fixed lines with us. As we did this Bernie and Joe found a helispot, and were airlifted out. The body was raised by the Sierra Madre Search and Rescue Team, while **RMRU** members continued bringing gear, and assisted in guiding the litter. The mission was complete once the body and all rescuers and equipment were in Long Valley. Unfortunately, this mission had a very sad ending. Ironically, this mission resulted in the saving of another life (see Mission No. 8243M). • **RMRU**

*A note from the author: I wish to say that it was great to once again work with my friends on **RMRU**. **RMRU** is a great organization and I miss being an active part of it. My years with **RMRU** were invaluable. If only the skiing in the San Jacinto's could compare to the Wasatch in Utah.*

## RESCUE

**Mission No. 8243M**

**28-29 Dec., Tues.-Wed.  
Palm Springs Tram,  
San Jacinto Mountains**

*By Mark Hebert*

Team members were called to a rescue concerning a victim who had fallen down an ice chute. Apparently the victim had stepped over the edge to get a better view of the desert. In response to this call **RMRU** members had voice contact with the supposed victim. The voice wasn't coming from the ice chute where the fallen victim was supposed to be, a trivial matter since we were to respond to the victim and not necessarily a specific geographic location. This is where the above mentioned mission really begins.

Upon arrival at the Palm Springs Aerial Tram, **RMRU** was advised as to the location of the fall victim by his brother. They had been skiing together when the brother removed his skis to get a better look at the desert. In a flash he was gone. The job of **RMRU** was to search the ice chute and render assistance to the victim. Survival of such a fall is not likely, but possible.

Approaching the problem with optimism, it was only proper to assume he survived the fall. Thus the search began. The first men on the scene repelled down the ice chute in search of the victim when voice contact was established with the injured victim. The circumstances didn't add up. The voice calling for help was not coming from the chute the team was supposed to search. Regardless of the lack of logic in the situation there was indeed a victim in need of help and was alive. It was decided to go in search of the voice calling for help. Two team members, Walt Walker (team leader) and Mark Hebert roped together to traverse three rather severe ice chutes in order to locate the victim.

Upon locating the victim Walt began to descend the ice chute where our supposed victim had come to rest at a large tree stump. Mark stayed behind to tend the rope in the case of a fall by Walt. "Oh—~~censored~~—!", was all Mark heard as he was pulled off his feet by the impact of Walt at the end of his rope. There was little or no time for thought only reflex action. Mark had his eye on a small fir tree just about 10 feet in front of him. It was essential that his body end up on the proper side of the tree in order to save both himself and his partner from what would be a long slide to probable death. The collision with the tree was fierce but Mark's body did end up on the proper side of



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

PREPARATION FOR EVAC — **RMRU** members Jack Schnurr, Bruce Gahagan, and Kevin Walker (obscured), prepare to place the snow covered body of John Rivera into the litter. John was the second person in a matter of weeks to slide to his death in an ice chute.



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

**SUPPORT GROUP** — This is what it takes to support the few who go down a chute in a winter technical mission. Assisting RMRU members in the combination search/rescue/evacuation missions (8242M & 8243M) are Sierra Madre Search & Rescue Team members and personnel from the Mt. San Jacinto State Park.

the tree enabling the rope to arrest Walt's fall.

Injuries to both team members were slight, but both were badly shaken. After recovering from the fall it was ascertained that the victim found was not the victim being looked for. This person turned out to be Robert Lear, age 33. This man had started from Palm Springs and had hiked up the Skyline Trail heading for the Tram. Because of deep snow he got off route and was hiking along the edge to the ridge. In doing so, at one point, lost his footing on the icy slope and fell an indeterminant amount of feet. This fall left the victim with head injuries, fractured ribs, and a fracture to the lower leg that was open and still bleeding.

Walt and Mark pooled their skill and equipment. First cutting a shelf in the slope next to Robert, then maintaining traction on the injured leg moved him onto it. Walt had an airsplint and that was applied. Then extra clothing carried, was put on the victim. With Robert as comfortable as possible, Walt and Mark spent a cold and long night. The search for the original victim continued on (see Mission No. 8242M). Bernie McIlvoy took charge of the other mission, and Kevin Walker coordinated down to base to have Don Landells for the morning.

At 6:00 a.m. Don Landells arrived at the lower tram station. There a helicopter sling was readied and attached along with a Stokes litter. The helicopter then flew up to Walt and Mark's location,

hovered over and Walt disconnected the litter from the sling. Robert was then loaded into the litter (with great care due to the steepness), and secured in. Don then came back into the extremely tight spot for the re-hook up. Once hooked on Don backed out and flew the victim down to the lower tram station and a waiting ambulance.

With Don's own invention for flying Elk under the helicopter secured to the sling, he returned to fly out human cargo that being Walt and Mark. Mark with his injured knee went first followed by Walt, for both it was definitely an "E" ticket ride down to the Skyline Ridge, where both could then get in the chopper and be flown down to base and a waiting doctor.

Truely a richly rewarding experience for all RMRU members involved, though tragedy had occured on the previous mission. • RMRU



## RESCUE

**Mission No. 8244M**

**29-30 Dec., Wed.-Thurs.  
Devil Slide Trail,  
San Jacinto Mountains**

*By Joe Erickson*

We were called to Idyllwild to rescue an individual with an injured back on the Devil's Slide Trail. The trail switchbacks up the steep slopes and in many sections a hiker can see the trail crisscrossing below. Many imprudent hikers will cut trail taking a short cut to the next portion of trail. Robert Schuppe and Michael Schuppe were hiking down the trail mid-day. Robert decided to slide down the icy snow, on his rear, until he came to an uncomfortable stop in a gulley.

Complaining of back pain and apparently unable to help himself out, his friend made his way to him injuring himself slightly. A woman and man were day hiking and came across the injured hiker and brother. They helped as best they could, making a bit of shelter with a tarp, they got a small fire going near him. The weather was getting nastier so the woman continued down to get help.

And help she got. Some members of the U.S. Forest Service hiked up to aid this young man. He was made as comfortable as possible and they got another fire going to warm the rest of the folks.

RMRU was called around 3 p.m. We zoomed up to Humber Park hoping to get this guy down and out of the increasing weather. We couldn't make it to the trailhead because the snow was accumulating pretty quick.

The sheriff's deputy drove Kevin Walker, Craig Beasley and I in his 4WD to Humber Park — where we started hiking into what was alternating rain, sleet and snow.

We had called for extra help from the associate members due to a low turn out of members. (The low turn out because many members were still on their way home from the previous two missions.)

As Craig, Kevin and I rounded a turn we could finally see a fire up ahead and hurried on to the scene. What we saw was some cold people trying to warm up and dry off by a good sized fire on the trail. The subject was down maybe 30 feet in a small gulley; clothes, sleeping bags, tarps stuffed around him in an effort to keep him warm. Water and some debris were flowing past him further complicating his predicament.

In first aid classes people learn to not move someone with back injuries unnecessarily, but after assessing the situ-

ation, Kevin, Craig and I decided this guy was in more danger and discomfort from the cold and wet than from his injuries. We examined him and decided that with his help and much of his own effort we could walk him up to the trail where we had a warm sleeping bag and some shelter on a platform waiting. In ten minutes his wet clothes were off and dry ones on and himself in the sleeping bag.

We had help putting him in the wheeled litter and we all took turns carrying/wheeling him down the trail and out to an awaiting ambulance.

We went by the hospital after eating a meal and he was being released. He walked to a motel where he and his brother were to be picked up the next day by family members. • RMRU



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

**ICY WHEEL OUT** — RMRU members Glenn Henderson and Craig Beasley guide the litter containing Robert Schuppe with possible back injuries down the Devil Slide trail. As they do so they are belayed at both ends by fellow members to prevent any slipping on the icy trail.