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Search and Rescue

EVACUATION

Mission No. 8726M

4 Sept., Fri.
Badland,
Riverside County

By Jim Fairchild



The initial information from the pager call was that we were to search for a man with suicidal tendencies. During the drive to the scene I was contemplating the extensive maze of steep dirt hills and gullies and how to search through them. By helicopter, of course!

The scene featured many emergency vehicles parked at the edge of the highway between Moreno Valley and San Timoteo Canyon, a pick-up truck perched on a perilously narrow ridge above a drop-off, and a Sheriff's Sargeant who wondered why I showed up! Seems I turned my pager off after the call, instead of re-setting it on stand-by. Therefore, the cancellation reached all the other members.

A bit of low-key fact-finding revealed that Mr. Peterson had consummated the suicidal tendency two days earlier, his body lay about 70 yds. down a gully, just below his truck. It also appeared that my full complement of ropes and hardware could be useful for recovering the body.

Following waits for officials and investigations, the writer took the cue to set up anchors and rigging for a raise. Mr. Peterson's truck and a heavy-duty fire truck served as anchors.

The double pulley system to effect the raise was really tested as the fire depart-

ment huskies pulled hard to bring the litter with Mr. Peterson and three also husky litter attendants up the sandy, brushy slope.

The writer then disassembled the many rigging components, coiled ropes, packed, and walked down to base. There were no teammates to go out with for a meal, so it was back home for supper. • RMRU

EVACUATION

Mission No. 8727M

5 Sept., Sat.
Blythe,
Riverside County

By Joe Erickson



RMRU received a call to assist in a Mine Rescue. Three adult males needed extrication from a mine near Blythe.

I was able to respond immediately, and arrived on scene much quicker than the law allows. Many agencies were there and I spoke to a CDF worker. He informed me that the subjects had expired and that two other RMRU members were at the mine.

The mine was approximately 1 mile off the main highway and I was able to catch a ride with a BLM truck. I joined Cam Robbins and Rob Gardner and was told of the circumstances and that this would be a joint operation to evacuate the bodies.

I hesitate to provide our readers with details, so bear with me as I develop the scenario. The mine being explored by these three folks was a vertical shaft 3 to 4 feet in diameter, eighty feet deep. It was unshored and had a make-shift scaffold structure over the entrance. The entrance was in a dry sandy stream bed. An inadequate air supply system was present. Eighty feet down water was seeping in, so these weekend miners had a gasoline powered pump at the bottom.

Apparently the pump stopped and one of the miners went down to fix it. He became unresponsive so a second person

went down to help the first. I am assuming the second person had the air system in use, because he attached the first person to the rope and had the people topside pull the first victim up using a jeep. As this person was approximately half way up he became detached and fell on the second person.

The rope was stuck down the hole, so the third person attempted to go down this rope hand over hand, he fell also.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is heavier than air and the mine was full of CO and exhaust fumes. We had air available from the CDF stores and used this to safely proceed.

The details I provided here are so you can better understand what we were getting ourselves into. Here goes:

After strengthening the "A" frame scaffolding, we set up for a mechanical advantage raise. One of the safety systems set up was that we would plan for only 11-13 minutes of air time. The air bottles fit on your back and you put on a full face mask and regulator.

This makes communication very difficult, and we could not use a hand held radio due to space limitations.

After looking into the lowering/raising system, checking air flow and last minute details, the group of rescuers would help position me over some planks of wood placed over this 4 foot diameter shaft. The opening of the boards was about 2 foot square. My flashlight would not reach bottom. So there I was, suspended over a two foot black hole, breathing through an awkward BA (breathing apparatus), knowing I wouldn't be able to communicate to those above me, they asked if I was ready. My eyes went wide and they took that as a reluctant yes.

The lower went well and smoothly. My breathing was very audible and it was difficult to keep it slow and regular. The only thing the top siders could hear was my exaggerated respirations.

Once at the bottom my light revealed a foot and a half of water and mud, a pump and the bodies. I was able to attach (with some difficulty) the line to one subject and signalled for him to be hauled up. Squeezing under a small hollowed out area, just barely enough to protect me if he fell, I

watched him being pulled up. Much too slowly. My emotions were running rather high and by the time this subject was clear, my air time was about up.

Upon reaching the open air again I knew clearly why people would be reluctant to go down again. I gracefully declined going down again for the next subject and another person was selected. In all it took three rescuers to get the three subjects as no one would go down twice. This was not a lack of bravery but a function of limited air time, the overwhelming circumstances and the confining nature of this hole in the ground.

On the drive home that afternoon I became rather ill to my stomach and pulled over at the Whitewater rest-stop. I thought I might lose my cookies, and my head hurt a little. After several minutes I felt better and continued home. I think I have been involved in approximately 19 body recoveries in the past ten years and this was the most wrenching. Many nights I have been awakened with these memories and visions. I reach over to my wife and touch her hair or shoulder to bring my heart back on track, never waking her, just needing that reassurance and kindness. Time does heal wounds but it takes so long. My heart goes out to the family and loved ones hurt by this tragedy. • RMRU

RESCUE

Mission No. 8728M

**6 Sept., Sun.
Fuller Mill Creek,
San Jacinto Mountains**

By Bill Blaschko



Guy Mike Baker, 32, of Indio and his friend, Paul Munsee took a hike uphill from the Fuller Mill Creek area on September 6, the Sunday of Labor Day Weekend. Guy and Paul had hiked up a trace of a

trail off to one side of a very steep canyon. Upon returning the two chose to come down the center of the canyon rather than follow the trail. Guy encountered a 40 foot waterfall and tried to climb down it. Although the steep rocky slope was dry, the rock was water polished, and Mr. Baker slid down the near vertical slope landing on his right ankle. When Paul saw the fate of his hiking companion he chose a safer route to go and get help. Mr. Munsee contacted the Pine Cove Volunteer Fire Department, the agency with jurisdiction for medical problems in that area. Volunteers from Pine Cove Fire Depart-

ment were able to reach Mr. Baker and administer first aid, but they did not have enough manpower to extricate the victim. At this point, about 11 AM, RMRU was called out. Bud White and the author were assigned as a bash team to assess what further materials would be needed to safely evacuate Mr. Baker. On our arrival the subject had a compound fracture of the right ankle that had been well splinted, some scrapes and bruises, but no other injuries. Mr. Baker lay at the bottom of a 40 foot waterfall with steep slick rock on three sides and another waterfall below on the fourth side. Under the author's direction paramedic Chuck Benson inserted an intravenous line and gave the subject morphine for pain.

Bud White meanwhile devised a plan for raising Mr. Baker and radioed out for the additional necessary supplies. With volunteers from RMRU and the Pine Cove Fire Department, Guy Baker was strapped into the stokes litter and raised out of the canyon bottom, and in stages, brought over to the narrow path he had hiked up. At numerous points the going was tight and steep, so other team members were repeatedly setting up anchors and belays to make sure there would be no further problems. Using the wheeled litter Mr. Baker was transported to Highway 243 where a Pine Cove Fire Department ambulance was waiting. Mr. Baker was taken directly to Hemet Valley Hospital and underwent orthopedic surgery that evening. This mission demonstrated

the benefits of good cooperation between agencies, each contributing its expertise.

• RMRU

EVACUATION

Mission No. 8729M

**7 Sept., Mon.
Long Valley,
San Jacinto Mountains**

By Henry Negrete



Sometimes the calls we get are not so glorious, such was the case on September 7th. The call was concerning the discovery of a man's body, found in a steep drop-off by a tourist near the top tram-way

station. We were requested by the Riverside Sheriff's Office to assist the investigating officer and Deputy Coroner in recovering the body for identification. Our plan of action was to meet at the lower tram station at first light and take the first tram car up normally used to carry supplies and employees up to the top. Our hopes were to try to complete the task before normal tourist traffic began.

As we loaded our personal gear and technical team equipment on the tram car thoughts began to formulate in our heads about our familiarity with the area and the probable location of our demised subject.

We split into two teams, the first group of six arrived at the top with the R.S.O.



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

CARRYOUT — RMRU members and Pine Cove Volunteers work together to evacuate injured hiker Guy Mike Baker back to Highway 243 and the waiting ambulance.

investigator to relocate and assess the extraction out of the rough terrain. The second team at the lower tram station was standing by to bring up any additional equipment needed and also coordinating the availability of helicopter assistance if so designated. All seemed to be going according to plan, with our first team en route towards the location and air support confirmed.

Just as our team neared the area they met up with the Long Valley State Park Rangers, who had been recruited by an anxious Deputy Coroner, to work through the early morning hours and extract the body.

We were quite puzzled as to the lack of coordination between agencies, and considerable discussion ensued about how we might tighten up our coordinated efforts. This mission for RMRU without a doubt ended on a positive note. We worked out steps towards more effective cooperative efforts and the task at hand was very well accomplished by the State Park Rangers.

• RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 8730M

7-8 Sept., Mon.-Tues. San Jacinto Mountains

By Ronnie Pierson



It was a cool night as Henry Negrete and I started up the Devil's Slide Trail from Humber Park.

Earlier we had been alerted that a mother and son, Louellen, were overdue from a hike to San Jacinto Peak (elevation 10,831 feet). They had started that morning from Humber Park (elevation 6,500 feet). Louellen's husband, who reported them missing, also added that his wife weighed about 250 pounds, but was an experienced hiker from her younger years, had good judgement, and was a real gutsy lady.

Considering Louellen's weight we doubted that she and her son would be able to make the peak and return trip in one day. So a decision was made to also have Eric Townsend and Bill Blaschko hike up the Seven Pines Trail (which starts near the Dark Canyon Campground on the other side of the south ridge) in case the overdue party had aborted the hike and were trying to take a short cut back to camp by another trail.

As we hiked on we stopped periodically to shout the subjects' names and listen for replies. Arriving at Saddle Junction (elevation 8,100 feet) we checked in with base operations by radio, then continued on up

the Angel's Glide Trail. After we had hiked about another mile to the 9000 foot level, we were quite pleased to hear a high pitched reply to our calls. Quickening our pace we soon met them coming down the trail.

They were in good spirits, but Louellen was quite weary and complained of having sore feet. She went on to tell us that they had gotten within about a mile of the peak, at about the 10,000 foot level, when she could go no further. She had sat down while her son had hiked to the peak and back. Louellen said they knew they could make it down on their own eventually, but they were still glad to see us since their only flashlight was starting to fade. They really didn't relish the thought of hiking all night in the darkness.

It turned out that Louellen needed considerable help and physical support to make it back down the trail. For the next two and one half hours, Henry and I worked shifts to support her. At one point we even considered radioing for the wheeled litter because we were fast becoming fatigued ourselves. But Louellen proved herself to be a gutsy lady through sheer determination. We finally arrived at Humber Park at 3 A.M.

RMRU members participating in this search were Henry Negrete, Ronnie Pierson, Jim Fairchild, Eric Townsend, Bill Blaschko, Bernie McIlvoy, Ray Hussey, Bob Sairs, Kevin Walker, Dona Halcrow, Bob Wintz, Cliff Benton. • RMRU

ABORT

Mission No. 8731A

20 Sept., Sun. Lawler Lodge, San Jacinto Mountains

By Eric Townsend



Well, almost a search. This one ended before it began. Threetwelve-year-old boys started out chasing a ball that had rolled away from them at Lawler Lodge and ended up spending several hours finding their way back to where they started. By the time the three of us who responded to the call had collected the pertinent facts and organized ourselves to start the search, the boys arrived back, sweating and thirsty, but unharmed.

The area downstream of Lawler Lodge can be very confusing if you don't pay strict attention to landmarks. We were glad to have the boys back safe and sound. Henry Negrete, Ron Pierson and Eric Townsend responded to this call for a total of nine volunteer man hours. • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 8732M

23 Sept., Wed. Desert Divide, San Jacinto Mountains

By Kevin Walker



Just before noon the pages activated with news of a search. We were to respond to the CDF fire station in Garner Valley. I was the first to arrive, and there I interviewed Robert Bracken, 18, of Riverside. On Monday, Rob and eight other friends started out from Garner Valley and hiked to the Desert Divide. According to Rob, the group became separated on Tuesday. Late in the day Rob had voice contact with two of the party. They were separated by heavy brush below the ridge. They stated that one person was slightly injured and a third member of this particular group had tried to make it out on his own. Five more persons were unaccounted for.

As team members gathered and loaded gear, a light rain began to fall. A helicopter was requested, and Steve DeJesus from Landell's Aviation responded with a Bell Jet Ranger. First flight out we flew over the top to the divide. Rain was falling on the southern side of the range, but on the northern side it had stopped raining and was only clouded over. After a short time smoke was spotted down a ridge. There were the two that Rob had shouted to a day earlier. Steve found a boulder several hundred feet above the pair, and let off Ray Hussey and Eric Townsend. As they made their way down to the pair, we returned to base. Once back, we learned that five of the nine had hiked out the day before and returned to Riverside. So now we were down to one missing person. Teams were put out near and below where we had located the two hikers, and the Palm Springs Mounted Police was activated to search Palm Canyon below our search area. As teams searched through the day, more was learned about the group. It seems that some did not have the best of records.

Now why would a group go out on a pleasure hike with poor gear into an area that offered little to the amateur. We quickly learned why. Bill Blaschko and Henry Negrete wandered into a marijuana plantation, one of considerable size. It was not an abandoned farm as there were multiple tents, sleeping and food gear, supplies for watering the plants complete with a book on how to grow. This was more than alarming, and quickly I dispatched Steve to pick up Bill and

