

Floods

**February 21, 1980
City of San Jacinto
1980-006**

By Kevin Walker

Well, to tell you the truth I thought it would be like the previous day when we were asked to help with all the rain oriented problems around the City of San Jacinto where I live. Nothing extremely serious, just isolated homes and ranches that were on low ground.

Five of us (all valley residents) were helping to fill sand bags at one of the local dairies, when Walt Walker said that there was a more serious problem at another location. Walt, Brian Hixson and Hal Fulkman rode with Capt. Bill Park and Chris Noon joined me in the rescue van. As we were driving Chris and I talked about what could be wrong now. Maybe some resident who had an excessive amount of water flowing toward his house or something like that. But instead of going to the area that had been having all the problems, we headed through the city and out to where our business is, and where I live.

Just as we reached Arrow Printing, it was a very bad feeling that I got as I watched a 50 foot section of the levee break open. No more fooling around, we had a real problem now. To all the residents who had had problems previously with water, I now knew what they were feeling, because the mobile home where I live and the business where I work was just about to become a flood statistic. By the time we had moved two picnic style



Jim Fairchild

MOUNTAINEERS AWASH - Fast running water is not one of the usual elements for mountaineers. However, on that infamous Thursday RMRU members braved the waters that inundated the City of San Jacinto. RMRU members Jim Garvey, Brian Hixson and John Dew provided one of the many rescues that day.



Jim Fairchild

EVACUATION - RMRU members carry an elderly woman by stretcher to a waiting rescue helicopter. Most residents were evacuated to the Hemet Fairgrounds where the Red Cross had set up a refugee center.

tables around to the front of our business and some large chunks of concrete to weight them down, we were in water up to our knees. By that time there was nothing more to do but leave and try and help in the city. Brian carried one of my dogs, while I led the other, a large Blood hound. He was nearly having to dog paddle to keep his head above the water. It really was a helpless feeling to have to leave your home surrounded by water.

Once back in the city, we set up base camp on high ground across the street from where my parents live. We quickly started filling large plastic bags with dirt from my parents' drive way. We were about halfway complete with the shoveling when the first trickle of water could be seen in the street. In less than 15 minutes the water had reached the top of the bags, and was starting to lap over the top. The bags soon gave way and the water came flowing into the property. We saved what bags we could and put them in front of doors, low windows, and the garage. While we worked outside, my mom, sister, grandparents, and friend of the family, Dona Towell, sopped up water as it leaked through the exposed walls. The water finally peaked out at about 18 inches on Walt's house. By this time more team members had made it into the valley and were ready to help. With things finally straightened out at my parents' house, we were able to start helping the less fortunate.

Our first assignment was to check some homes that were isolated north of the city. To do so we would need a helicopter. That was not a problem at this time as there were numerous choppers helping to evacuate residents from their homes. As luck would have it, a familiar white and gold bird with blue trim was flying by at that time, so with no delay Walt radioed to pilot Don Landells and requested his help. Don soon returned, and Walt and I were on our way to check out the assigned area. It was strange to see all the streets that I



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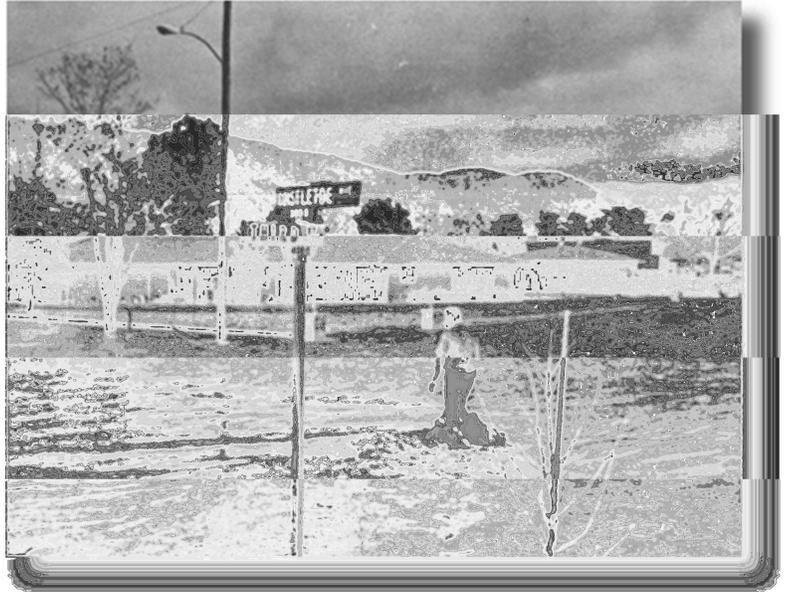
WET FEET - RMRU members Brian Hixson, Rick Pohlers and John Dew stand by while Jim Garvey, Hal Fulkman, Kevin and Walt Walker head towards one of the many homes containing stranded residents.

grew up on, to be totally submerged under swift moving water. As we flew over the isolated homes, one of which was my grandparents', we saw that all were fairing quite well under the circumstances. Since there were no life threatening situations in that area we were flown back to our base camp. Once back we were assigned to check homes that were worst hit, east of the city, and evacuate anyone in that area. Pete Carlson remained at base while the remaining 10 of us were driven by a large lumber truck to the homes in question. Once there we started checking the homes that now had a good four feet of water running into them. Those that we found were all older people that did not get out in time. All were in good spirits though, as we helped them (carried piggyback style) to an

area where the choppers could land.

There was one set of homes though that would be a problem getting to. We would have to cross one street that had a good five to six feet of water running in it. Since the current was much too swift to try and swim, a helicopter would have to be used. After getting one to land on a small sand bar, Walt and Rick lifted off to help those on the other side of the street, while the rest of us continued on the south side. Walt and Rick had their work cut out for them.

They were let out on a shed roof top, and then had to climb down and bring one elderly couple out of their home and then help them up onto the roof where the chopper could set down.



As you can see, we had a very long and very busy day. I want to emphasize though that we were not the only ones helping in the evacuation. The Hemet team, Red Cross, Air Force, National Guard, Hemet and San Jacinto Police, CDF, Sheriff's Department, and many residents took part in helping those hit by the flood. The water has since receded, but the scars still remain. It was a day that I will never forget. Years from now I will look back and remember the Flood of 1980.

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.