

Signal flares spotted

October 17, 1984
Indian Canyons, San Jacinto Mtns
1984-026

By "Major Disaster"

We got the call bright and early that some Palm Springs city workers had seen some signal flares coming from the Tahquitz and Andreas canyon area. Boy, did that sound marginal. The last time we went out to that area someone had seen a signal mirror and after hours of searching, we found nothing. Must be those NINJAS fooling around again.

The turnout was slim as we collected at Ann Dolley's place at the mouth of Tahquitz canyon. Don, our favorite helicopter pilot, flew in just as the last of our small band arrived. It was decided by our commander Walt "General Grump" Walker, that he, as usual, would fly search for a while along with a trusted observer, Joe "Lieutenant Ludicrous" Erickson. Gee, some people get to have all the fun, but rank has its privileges.

It was warm there at Ann Dolly's but higher up it was cool enough for snow and quite windy. We had taken the doors off the bird to facilitate not only entry and exit, but observation as well. Anyway after about an hour of flying around Don landed with a very blue Joe, who had not taken a parka.

Well, enough of this flying around big, the troops were chomping at the bit to get out in the field. So teams were made up, assigned radios and points on the map picked for them to search.

Kevin "Colonel Klutz" Walker and I were the first to be put out on the east ridge of Tahquitz canyon. Don could barely get the ship to land, the wind was so squirrely. I could see why Lt. Ludicrous was green as well as blue.

Another team made up of Jim "Admiral Hornblower" Fairchild and new guy Ray "Dr. Ghoul" Hussey were put out higher up the ridge. The last team made up of Bernie McIlvoy and new guy Curtis Pontynen was put out even higher. It was a good game plan that covered a large area. If anyone was about they could not only see us (with bright orange shirts) but hear us as well. The only response we got was the howl of the wind. No sign of anyone.

Meanwhile, back at base, the General had deployed another team to check out a trail

leading up to the ridge. That team was led by Mel "Captain Chaos" Krug along with Rob "Squeaky" Gardner and Mark "Here's the Beef" Rhodes. They too found nothing.

By this time it was getting to be mid afternoon and we were running out of leads to search. Also people were showing up in droves. Even Pete Carlson showed up for his one mission of the year he does. Glad you could make it Pete, we really needed you. So General Grump made the command decision to pull the plug after consulting with the sheriff.

So Don once again fired up the 'ol chopper to pick up the field teams. The Col. and I were first to be picked up. To help Don get an idea of wind direction and speed we lit a smoke signal. Since these are old flares, one needs to hit them on a rock to get them going. Unbeknownst to me, sparks shot out along with the smoke and set some grass under the rock on fire.

So here we are guiding Don in, when we notice the smoke is working too well. Don about fell out of his helicopter with hysterical laughter as he fanned the flames with his blades. Col. Klutz and I somehow managed to put out the blaze despite Don's help.

(ED. NOTE: For this outstanding act Major Disaster was given RMRU's highest award for a distinguishing act in the field, THE GREEN WEENIE! Congratulations Major).

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.