

RMRU NEWSLETTER

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A VOLUNTEER NON-PROFIT CORPORATION
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MEMBER OF THE MOUNTAIN RESCUE ASSOCIATION

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Walt Walker, Publisher
Dona Towell, Artist

RMRU AND 'THE WINTER THAT WAS'

\$USTAINING MEMBERS —

BY MIKE DAUGHERTY

Stubai carabiners and the Cassin double eyed soft metal pitons, are the well worn remnants of RMRU's yesteryear. In the back row of that corps is the super-deep class B, sub-tertiary, last gasp, abandon all hope reserve. It was that bad, they actually called-out the S/M chairman.

A simple assignment really; get together all of your winter gear (take half an hour if you like), drive from Orange County to Riverside, stop three different places to pick up four-man tents, drive through a rain storm to pick up Dr. Castilonia in San Jacinto, put on the chains just above the turkey farm (twice! belly down in the slush), labor into Idyllwild, get to the roadhead, put on double boots, snowshoes and heavy pack, grab the radio and start up the Devil's Slide trail in a snowstorm. It was 0-5°F, snow drifted to four feet on the trail, where you could find it, wind gusting to 40 or 50 knots, 100 feet of visibility and darker than the inside of a cow. Well I won't go on. I got into the tent about 2 a.m., very cold, very tired and very hungry (no dinner). At that moment, things seemed a bit bleak. Bud White (my tentmate) and I could scarcely imagine how our nine young victims could survive under the circumstances. We wanted badly to continue the search, but the weather was so bad that we would have had to fall over the victims (literally) to find them. Our voices carried no more than 100 feet before they were absorbed by the mantle of snow covering everything or carried away by the wind. Most important, it was beginning to be very difficult for us to keep ourselves warm, in spite of our equipment. The bitter cold had rendered our flashlight batteries useless and it had clearly come time to conserve what resources remained to us. Under these circumstances, the major objectives must be to maintain the team's capacity to rescue the victims when the situation improves. It does no good for the rescuers to find the victims only to become victims themselves. So, we opted for four hours of sleep. As you will learn elsewhere, the boys were found next morning and in fair shape at that.

But, here's my point (finally). At that moment we were **it!** Beyond the other MRA teams who had been called, there was no other force of any sort behind us, no one to pull our chestnuts out of the fire. Imagine that! In this age of 'technology' it can still come down to a small group of men and women and **that's it.** No cavalry will ride to the rescue, no helicopter can operate under such circumstances, no marvel of modern engineering can find us, or our victims, no device will warm the hypothermia victim or save the injured. There are still a few times when

Since last he penned this column, your sustaining membership chairman has been disturbed from the warm security of his bureaucratic office. As you will read elsewhere in this issue, RMRU has been busy. In fact, things became sufficiently desperate over Thanksgiving that it was deemed necessary to reach **all** of the way to the bottom of the barrel. There, among the Plymouth nylon ropes, the steel

TRAINING



21 & 22 Nov.

by Pete Carlson

Training started out with 14 RMRU members eating dinner at the Chart House in Idyllwild on Friday night. Once our bellies were satisfied we drove to Humber Park. At 2100 with high winds, low temp., and a crystal clear night we had a fantastic hike up to little Tahquitz Valley (8,000 EI). At this point we picked up a new trail that is being built and followed it around below Red Tahquitz Peak. Here we found a spot on the ridge where we could look down into Palm Springs. This great spot was our home for the night at about 2330.

The next morning was unbelievable weather. Clear, warm and no wind. After breakfast we packed up to hike over to Antsel Rock for lunch. The new trail is like a free-way through the mountains. Cutting into hillside and rock at a 6% grade, always 3 feet wide, the new trail is a real scar to the back country and wilderness. It does go through some of the most beautiful country and has the best views of

NOTICE

from the publisher-

Yes, RMRU is alive and well except for the printing and distribution of the **RMRU Newsletter**.

July is a rather unusual time for a December newsletter to be printed. However, a number of things have occurred which affected me, which in turn affected the newsletter. I will not bore you with details, but I will mention: the death of my mother; a number of winter missions; a growing business with the addition of new equipment and the related headaches.

One of the new pieces of equipment was a computer photo-typesetter. This edition of the newsletter was completely typeset by the new process. It is my utmost desire to get the **RMRU Newsletter** back on a regular basis.

You will be receiving, until we catch up, two issues or more per month. I sincerely hope you will bear with us until we are caught up.

We are making a change in our reporting process. Formerly, November missions were reported in the December issue of the newsletter. We will now have December missions in the December issue and so on. This issue of the newsletter reports on November and December missions, to make the changeover. ■ RMRU

Search and Rescue

SEARCH

Mission No. 7624M

9 & 10 Nov., Sun. & Mon.
Deep Canyon,
above Palm Desert

by Gary Gillespie

Sustaining Members . . .

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nature must be met more or less on her own terms. In these circumstances it gets down to matters of substance, experience, judgement, training and preparation. The stakes can be human life and it can be an hour away, anytime. When I get into one of these operations, the same realization always comes home to me; it's just this. Our equipment looks pretty impressive, laid out on a warm Idyllwild morning in August at the Ike's pancake breakfast. There's the mountain we know so well, warm and familiar, the rock on which some of us have climbed for twenty years or more. We've got a first class radio system, all kinds of technical gear, tents, wheeled litters, down bags and jackets, helmets, headlamps, thousands of feet of rope, two doctors and almost 15 years of experience in mountain rescue. Yes sir, we have the best, an answer for everything. But, it isn't so. Nature can turn that rock or that mountain into something overpowering, against which all of these resources shrink into insignificance. Then the best equipment and training **may** just be enough, and they may not.

Before this outbreak of winter rescues, RMRU had experienced a long, relatively inactive spell. During these periods we train and prepare for something which seems remote and abstract. The pages of the newsletter are

filled with accounts of mock missions for training and the oblique pleas of the S/M chairman for money for this operating expense or that new piece of rescue gear. Sometimes it must seem to some that we are interested in this process solely for its own sake. And then... we have a "bad" mission and everything is set into crystal-clear perspective once again. There is simply no need to fear that we will be over-prepared. There is no such thing.

Those of you who are sustaining members are sustaining RMRU's continuing efforts to be ready to meet these situations. With your support, hard work and a fair measure of luck, we can hope that we will continue to prove adequate to our task.

New Sustaining Members this Month:

M/M Goncharoff
M/M R. W. Stack

Renewing Members:

M/M Emmanuel Fischer
M/M M. Hefferlin
*Mr. Theodore Luther Young
Mr. G. W. Gardner
Mr. J. R. Kolenich
Ms. Virginia Black
Dr. Paul H. Trotta
Mr. Theodore C. Pruess
Mr. Irwin J. Kelly
M/M D. L. Miller

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

The part I find most difficult in writing these articles for the newsletter is explaining how it all began. Actually, it all began quite simply.

At exactly 10 o'clock Sunday night my phone went off like a fire alarm jolting me out of bed. Still very soundly asleep I nearly knocked the lamp off the nightstand as I stumbled to the phone.

The voice was very familiar. It was Walt Walker, team president, talking to me in a voice he reserves for small children and adults who are still half asleep. Walt was telling that we had a search in Indio and I was trying, rather sleepily, to figure out how anyone could get lost in Indio in the first place. Walt clarified the situation by explaining that we had been asked by the Sheriff's Office in Indio to search for two men reported overdue on a hiking trip in the Santa Rosa mountains. I was beginning to wake up and it was beginning to make more sense to me. Walt said we would meet at the fire station across from the Sugarloaf Cafe on Hwy. 74.

I arrived at the fire station at 12:30 Monday morning and found the Sheriff, the rescue van, and half a dozen members of the team already there. I signed in and Jim Fairchild, the Operations Leader for this mission, briefed me on the current situation. Two men, Dave Hoptry, 36, and Robert Kolenich, 41,

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Mission No. 7624M . . .

(From Page 2)

had set out at 9 o'clock Sunday morning to hike from where we were now, down Deep Canyon, to the wildlife preserve just south of Palm Desert. They were to meet Bob Stevens, a friend, at the wildlife preserve. When they failed to arrive at the preserve Bob contacted the Sheriff's Office.

The trip down Deep Canyon would be about seven or eight miles long and would involve a descent from the 4000 foot level to the 1500 foot level. More importantly, Dave and Bob would have to pass several waterfalls. One of these waterfalls was reported to be 75 feet high. We could expect them to have run into some difficulty with this large waterfall because Bob Stevens had told us that they only had one 50 foot rope.

In canyon searches like this one, the team has developed a definite method of operation. We first send a team into the canyon on the path we believe was taken by the victims. This team will try to pick up tracks and if possible, provide the operations Leader with a definite identification of the type of footgear worn by the victims. This team will also keep the Operations Leader informed of the direction of the tracks and will hopefully meet the victims if they try to work their way back out of the canyon. The Operations Leader, based on his knowledge of the area and the information provided by the first team, then deploys additional teams into the canyon ahead of the first team. In addition, a team is sent up the canyon from the bottom to meet the victims if the victims have managed to get by the waterfalls.

Tonight, a strong five man team consisting of Pete Carlson, Keith Borges, Jim Garvey, Bernie McIlvoy and myself, would be going in from the top. We would be carrying 450 feet of rope and three radios in addition to food, water, first aid gear and extra clothing for the victims. Since Deep Canyon parallels Hwy. 74, John Dew had already been dispatched to cruise the highway calling for Dave and Bob where ever possible in an effort to make voice contact with them down the 800 foot

high canyon sides. The other team members would be deployed later based on information provided by our team once we were in the canyon.

At one o'clock Monday morning we went into the canyon. The terrain was steep at first but we soon found easier going and were into the gentle bottom of a tributary of Deep Canyon in a few minutes. Bernie, who was in the lead, immediately found two sets of tracks heading down into Deep Canyon. The tracks were very distinctive and we were sure they belonged to Dave and Bob.

We had been warned by our 'intelligence' experts that we would encounter the first of the waterfalls within a mile or so. Minutes turned into hours and we ran into no waterfalls despite our rapid pace. In fact, we were all amazed at how gently the canyon dropped towards Palm Desert. It was very pleasant going. The night was balmy, the canyon beautiful in the starlight, and we were having no difficulty following the tracks.

But all good things eventually come to an end. At three-thirty we lost the tracks and immediately ran into the first waterfall. Bob and Dave had somehow managed to get around it, but the steep canyon walls gave us no clues. I dropped a few rocks into the pool of water at the bottom of the fall and found that it was much too deep to wade through. The north wall looked impossible, but the south wall might go. A half hour on the south wall, tiptoeing gingerly over unstable rock, reminded us that discretion is often the better part of search and rescue. We elected to bivouac.

Deep Canyon is very appropriately named and we had had some difficulty communicating with the rescue van. Jim Fairchild solved this problem quite nicely by driving the van down Hwy 74 until he found a place where the signals were easier to pick up. Before dropping off to sleep we were able to communicate well enough to decide that additional teams would be sent into the narrow part of the canyon a mile or so downstream from our team. We would also request a helicopter join the search at first light. We had found a soft, sandy spot and sleep came quickly.

Dawn came even more quickly. At five forty-five the radio woke us. None of us really wanted to get out of our sleeping bags but we knew that, although we had slept warmly in our down bags, the victims had spent a cold night and would be moving at first light. We wanted to get to them before they got into trouble, if they weren't in trouble already.

The helicopter was on its way. Rich Quackenbush and Steve Stevens were dropping into the canyon a little below Rich and Steve.

Back at our waterfall, the south side which seemed possible in the dark didn't look very promising in the early morning light. Bernie was able to down-climb past the waterfall on the north side. He found another, larger waterfall just below it and no tracks between the two.

Dave and Bob had definitely climbed out of the canyon. If they

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Training . . .

(From Page 1)

anywhere in the San Jacinto Mountains.

As we strolled along we pointed out the canyons: Tahquitz, Andreas, Murray, Palm, and Deep. To the south we could see Rabbit Peak, Martinez, and the Sierra Juarez Mts. of Mexico. To the West was the Pacific Ocean. Soon we did not notice the views so much. As this trail is still under construction it ends into heavy brush and a rocky ridge. We found the old Sam Fink Trail and had a great time following it over to Antsel Rock. After a short scramble we all assembled on top for lunch.

After lunch we began our descent to the top of Apple Canyon. This is a very steep descent and several times RMRU men jumped behind trees as rocks were knocked loose and came rolling down. At the top of Apple Canyon we all looked down the ridge towards the desert and wished we could continue for another day. But people had plans for Sunday, so down to our cars at the roadhead.

We all agreed this was a very informative training and next spring we shall come back and go all the way down the desert divide. ■ RMRU

Mission No. 7624M . . .

(From Page 3)

had gone north, they were between the highway and the canyon and we had a good chance of finding them quickly. But if they had climbed the south ridge out into the desert it might be a long time before they were found. Pete and Bernie decided to give the north side a try.

Art reported over the radio that he and Larry were in the canyon below us and had found the victims' tracks leading **up** the canyon **toward** us. It didn't make any sense. Perhaps they were completely out of the canyon by now.

Suddenly, Steve reported that he thought he had voice contact with one of the victims. A few seconds later Bernie and Pete had voice contact with Dave and Bob. They were all right and were working their way back up the canyon towards us. Bernie went down to meet them and the rest of us followed. Dave and Bob were indeed all right - just very thirsty. While we waited for the helicopter to evacuate us, I listened to their story.

Dave and Bob had heard about the trip down Deep Canyon from some friends and had decided to try it. They had left the Sugarloaf Cafe at about nine o'clock Sunday morning. They were forced out of the canyon on the north side by the first waterfall - the one that stopped our team in the dark early Monday morning. They got back into the canyon further down but ran into two more waterfalls. They got by the first one with their rope (it was actually a piece of clothesline) but were stopped by the second one which was too high. (Ed. note: 100' high) They were unable to climb around it so they started back up the canyon. Somewhere along the way darkness caught them but they continued to move until perhaps four o'clock Monday morning. As we had suspected, they were cold and had begun to move again at first light. They had planned to come up the canyon to a point where they could see the guardrail on Hwy 74 and then climb up to the highway. But we found them first and flew them out first class on Western Helicopters - the only way to go.

Helping us throughout the night

were Phil Blank and Bob Mann of the Riverside County Amateur Radio Emergency Services. (R-CARES) They and the other members of R-CARES provide our team with a vital link to the outside world during our missions. Thank you, gentlemen.

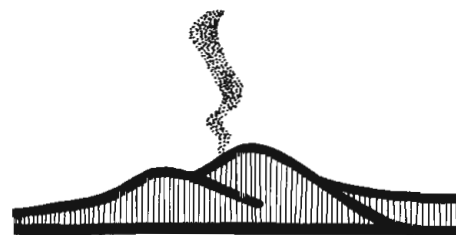
And thank you readers for making it possible for us to help those in the wilderness who need help. ■

**The Road Runner Sez-**

By Jim Fairchild

Until a week ago today (this is being written Friday, 5 Dec. '75) RMRU had been called for missions only 25 times, twenty of which were missions where we deployed men into the field. In this newsletter you're reading about the next twelve missions. Starting even earlier, with mission No. 7525, we have what was quite an introduction to search and rescue for our brand new member, Tom Aldrich. He wondered how strange are our calls when rolling on the alleged plane wreck, and when called to assist in finding a car wreck victim where the car was under a freeway bridge. Then, the whole essence of our reason for existence as a SAR unit became exceptionally well-defined when we spent several days searching for and assisting 22 people in the San Jacinto Mountains. Tom was suddenly thrown into severe weather, strenuous snowshoeing, first aid for cold, frost-bitten boys, helicopter search, and even survival in a way. He told me later he learned a tremendous amount relating to SAR. Due to the conditions and circumstances of those seven operations, he got many months' experience in a few days. Sadly, he even learned what it is to experience the stigma of defeat because we found and assisted 21 people, not the full 22.

(See Road Runner, Page 5)

**SEARCH****Mission No. 7525M****23 & 24 Nov., Sun. & Mon.
Rouse Hill, east of Hemet**

By Walt Walker

A peaceful Sunday afternoon was interrupted when a number of reliable witnesses reported seeing and hearing what appeared to be a probable plane crash. (Both smoke and a loud bang were reported.)

The Hemet office of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department called both RMRU and the Hemet Valley Search & Rescue Team. Both units assembled at the Cranston U.S.F.S. station. Captains William Park and Ray Canova, of the sheriff's department, were at the scene to co-ordinate the mission.

Members of the Hemet unit had driven the back country dirt roads in their four wheel drive vehicles while two other members searched by fixed wing airplane. Since both of the above had failed to turn anything up, it was decided to transport RMRU members into the general area by the Hemet vehicles to conduct a ground search.

RMRU member and commercial pilot Steve Stephens arrived just before dark complete with a Bell 47G helicopter. He and I took to the air and searched the prime area until darkness forced a halt. All this time the sheriff's department had been contacting all agencies that had any connection with flying of any kind. The results were negative, nobody had a missing or overdue aircraft. It was decided to suspend the search and look again in the morning using the helicopter.

Early Monday morning Steve and I again flew the area, plus widening the search area by a considerable amount. This additional flying was also fruitless. Since still no aircraft were reported missing, the mission was cancelled. ■ RMRU



SEARCH

Mission No. 7526M

**28 Nov., Fri.
Below Prado Dam,
near Corona**

By John Dew

IT ALL STARTED LIKE THIS..

At 4:15 a.m. on Friday, November 28, the phone rang. Walt Walker advised me that the California Highway Patrol had asked for help in an automobile accident situation near Prado Dam just west of Corona.

A thirteen year old girl was picked up on the freeway, bleeding and incoherent, and insisting that her brother was 'still in the car.' The car had traveled several hundred feet, landed in the river and was almost

submerged, but no sign of another person.

The team assembled at the sight, searched for a victim along the river bank on each side for about a half mile in case he had wandered. No tracks could be found in the mud except those of the men working in the wreckage and the girl.

About 8:30 that morning, we came to the conclusion that either there had been no other person in the car with the girl or he was underwater in the river somewhere.

The scuba divers were there by the time we left and we considered the mission secure for RMRU members. We read later in the paper the scuba divers did find the victim in question 50 - 75 yards downstream, totally submerged.

While driving home, we thought this would be a quiet weekend, but this was **ONLY THE BEGINNING!**

Road Runner . . .

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We would like to share some reflections on the intensive period of activity. The circumstances leading to the searches were classic: a holiday time, beautiful weather, attractive mountains. Then, a severe storm struck while campers were ensconced in the hills. Not just a storm, but one that suddenly dumped four feet of snow at the 9000' el., a bit more higher, a bit less lower. The biggest impression is that of finding the nine boys alive at Taquitz Valley when the severity of the storm and other circumstances dictated they should not have made it. This was one of God's miracles. It taught us a lesson, too. Another factor that gladdens the heart of the writer is the great spirit of cooperation and initiative that everyone we assigned tasks during the concurrent operations showed so willingly and effectively. May we

express our sincere thanks to all concerned: fellow team members, other SAR units members, helicopter pilots and crews, particularly Don Landells with whom we've flown so many times and in such 'hairy' situations, and the various members of Riverside County Sheriff's Dept., whose support and cooperation gives us a foundation of confidence that permits us to do the job to the best of our ability. We mention the rangers at Long Valley who always give us full cooperation and friendly assistance. Should it be necessary for RMRU to go it alone on these missions, success would be incredibly more difficult to achieve, often impossible.

Meanwhile, the disappearance of Mike Self persists, unresolved. He may be found before long in the high country as the snow melts, he may be found long into the future lower down, he may be found far away from the mountain. We are reminded of the oriental saying, 'All things come to he who waits.' ■

RESCUE

Mission No. 7527M

**28 & 29 Nov., Fri. & Sat.
Tahquitz Valley,
San Jacinto Mountains**

By Gary Gillespie

They were all dead. They have to be. Nothing can survive in this weather. It is 28 degrees inside the tent. Outside it is worse - zero to five degrees with the wind gusting to 35 - 40 miles per hour. With the wind-factor, the 'real' temperature must be fifteen to twenty degrees below zero. Exposed flesh freezes in a matter of seconds at these temperatures.

The tent snaps and pops in the wind. We are searching for nine boys, ages 12 - 14, who have been reported trapped in Tahquitz Valley (el. 7850') by the heavy snowfall brought by the Thanksgiving Day storm. We have camped after searching late into the night. To continue searching in this weather would have meant death or serious injury for all of us.

The call had come at one-thirty Friday afternoon. I arrived at the Fire Station in Idyllwild at three o'clock after a drive filled with tension because of the bad weather and the numerous accidents along Hwy. 74. Walt and Kevin Walker and John Dew were already there. They gave me the details of the mission.

Nine boys, ages 12 - 14, had hiked into the San Jacinto Mountains on Wednesday planning to stay through the Thanksgiving weekend. The weather was bad Thanksgiving Day and worsened during the night. The boy's tents had either collapsed under the weight of the snow or had been destroyed by the wind. Friday morning, two older boys, Paul Porter and John Sandberg, were struggling through the snow, trying to get back down to Humber Park in Idyllwild, when they ran into the nine boys. The young boys were already in trouble. Some of them were suffering from frostbite and hypothermia. They were disorganized and apparently about ready to panic. Paul and John left the boys their tent, sleeping

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Mission No. 7527M . . .

(From Page 5)

bags, and their packs. They told them to stay put and wait for help. Paul and John struggled through the snow into Idyllwild and contacted the Sheriff's Office.

At five o'clock the first teams had assembled and we began hiking up

the Devil's Slide Trail to Saddle Junction. There were nine of us in the first group - Walt Walker, Jim Fairchild, Pete Carlson, Rich Morris, Larry Brown, Larry Roland, Jim Garvey, Bernie McIlvoy and myself. All of us were on snowshoes except Bernie. Bernie was our guinea pig. If Bernie had trouble hiking in the snow, no one else without snow-

shoes would be permitted to join the search. And Bernie had trouble, a lot of trouble.

None of us could believe how much snow had fallen in this first storm of the season -- and it was still coming down. By the time we reached Saddle Junction (8100' el.) Bernie

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The scene above, drawn by Dona Towell, depicts the description of RMRU member Walt Walker's first contact with nine Orange County boys, who had been given up for dead by many, during the early and monumental Thanksgiving holiday snowstorm.

The boy on the left was almost incoherent, his uncovered hands were white and frozen, his one boot was off and both feet were severely frozen. The center boy was able to smile, but not able to move about. The boy on the right was one of two who were standing, waving and yelling.

Mission No. 7527M . . .

(From Page 6)

was up to his waist in snow and almost completely exhausted.

At the saddle, Bernie and Larry Brown set up a two man tent. They would be the radio relay passing messages to Base for us once we dropped down into the Tahquitz Creek drainage.

As I turned away from the cold and back to the warmth of the tent and the companionship of friends I thought of what one of the existentialist philosophers had once said about hope - to say that there was no hope implied that hope did indeed exist.

We were no longer alone on the mountain. Bud White, Ray Castilonia, Mike Daugherty, Rick Pohlers, and Tom Aldrich had followed our tracks as far as Saddle Junction and then searched the area to our east. They had found no trace of the boys. Also at the Saddle now with Bernie and Larry were five members of the San Diego team. The Sierra Madre team was being held on standby in Los Angeles. Two huge twin rotor Marine Corps helicopters would be in Idyllwild at first light. There was no hope, but we were still hoping.

Winter mountaineering mornings are brutal - a struggle of mind against body. The warmth and security of the sleeping bag and the tent against the cold bite of the wind. Another morning I would have hidden in my bag until ten. This morning I was up at six.

Jim Fairchild, Walt, Rich and I began a search of the area immediately surrounding our tents. Nothing. I headed for the Forest Service tent frames a hundred yards away. Their canvas roofs were gone now and they could provide no real shelter. I was filled with dread as I approached them. If the boys were in the frames they were dead. They weren't there.

The four of us continued up Tahquitz Valley searching the sheltered stands of pine and fir which border the now frozen meadows. As my trail crossed Walt's he suggested that I climb a small rise and take a good look at the area. I looked in vain. There was nothing. There was no hope. Head down I snowshoed down

the other side of the rise. I looked to my right at possible shelter among a stand of small fir trees. Nothing. There was no hope.

An anxious voice yelled 'Hey! Over here!' and over there was the strangest pile of humanity I had ever seen. Nine boys in one big ball of arms, legs, and heads sticking out every which way. I yelled for Walt and he and Jim and Rich materialized out of the thin mountain air.

The boys were found but they were not yet saved. Some of them were badly frostbitten and suffering from hypothermia. I had never seen anyone shiver so violently in my life. The other team members started triage - the treating of the most seriously injured first - while I headed back to camp for more food, warm clothing, stoves, more of everything. When I returned a half an hour later all of the teams were there treating the injured and preparing them for transport. Some of the boys could walk, five others were taken by sled a hundred yards to a meadow where the giant Marine chopper picked them all up and took them to the Hemet hospital in one trip.

In search and rescue, seldom is one individual singled out for recognition for it is the effort of the entire team - in this case several teams - that make success possible. But I believe that without the help of Paul and John, some, if not all, of these young boys would have died. Thank you Paul and John for your help. And thank you, readers, for your continued support. ■ RMRU

RESCUE**Mission No. 7528M****30 Nov. & 1 Dec., Sun. & Mon.
Boulder Basin Campground
(near Black Mountain)***By Walt Walker*

The bitter cold, personal discomfort and near tragedy were still very clear in my mind Sunday morning (mission no. 7527) when my daughter Lisa asked to go up to the snow. I really was not too enthusiastic about the idea, but I agreed to her request since I had been away from the family for nearly two days.

Lisa and I loaded the family four wheel drive Wagoneer while my wife Sondra gathered some snacks. Off we drove, and just below Mountain Center I had to shift the Wagoneer into four wheel drive because of the snow on the road. We drove on towards Idyllwild enjoying the fresh mantle of snow that covered everything. Passing through busy downtown Idyllwild we headed for Fern Valley and Humber Park. We just made it to Humber Park through the deep snow. Circling around the area of the parking lot I thought how different it was now, clear and sun shining, to the blowing snow and cold of the Friday night we started snow shoeing up the Devil Slide trail. Just then I heard something on my rescue scanner (a radio receiver that can listen to a number of different frequencies, including the sheriff's department) that caught my attention. The Banning office of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department was broadcasting to a patrol car in the Idyllwild area that a pilot flying over Black Mountain had spotted a man waving from the fire lookout tower. With that kind of message being transmitted I knew that RMRU would be called. I drove down to Idyllwild and called the Banning office. The dispatcher said that Captain Ray Canova wanted RMRU to assist. I called Al Andrews and gave him the information and started driving towards Banning. About half way there I heard the dispatcher broadcasting my name and asking me to meet the captain, who was being flown by helicopter pilot Don Landells, at the Vista Grande U.S.F.S. station. Just as I drove in the helicopter landed. Captain Canova stepped out and described the situation to me. He gave me a sheriff's department small hand-talkie and I climbed aboard the helicopter knowing that I was faced with a difficult situation. It was going to be dark in about 45 minutes, I did not have any of my rescue gear, except my boots, wool sweater and shell parka.

Don Landells supercharged Bell helicopter climbed very quickly in the cold mountain air. Shortly we were circling the Black Mountain lookout. No one was there, but it appeared as if there were tracks in

(See Mission No. 7528M, Page 8)

Mission No. 7528M . . .

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the snow, ascending and descending. Don began following the tracks and we spotted people waving from the Boulder Basin campground.

The problem now was to find a place for me to get out of the bird. Don and I had been this route once before, except it was during a search in the summer. He finally decided on a bend in the road that goes to the lookout. It was a very tight spot and almost surrounded by tall pine trees. Don advised me what he was going to do and what I would have to do, mainly jump from the hovering bird and stay low as he swung around and climbed out.

As is said so often, 'the time had come', Don reduced the power and we descended down between the trees. Don nodded and I climbed out onto the runner as he hovered the powerful machine. Another nod and I stepped off the runner, sinking thigh deep into the snow. As Don began to swing the tail around I flattened myself in the snow.

It had all worked well, Don was up and circling to check on me, and I was fine except for a little snow here and there. Don started back to Banning while I started following the tracks to the campground. A quarter of a mile isn't far normally, but wading in knee to thigh deep snow suddenly makes it much harder. I stopped to listen and heard a dog barking. Pushing on again I spotted a young couple with their snow bound van. Behind them was a motor home, also snowbound.

Talking to the young man, he stated that they had arrived Thanksgiving day and upon awakening Friday morning, found that they were stuck. He said that they were both fine and had enough food for one more day. I trudged over to the motorhome and knocked on the door. I was greeted by Richard and Maureen Kelly and their 3 daughters. They were all in good condition except for the two year old who had a chest cold.

Using the sheriff's radio, I contacted the Banning office. I relayed who the people were, their condition and the general situation. Also, I listed the equipment I wanted to be

air dropped to me that evening, as it was quickly turning dark.

The RMRU van had arrived at the Banning Airport along with a number of RMRU members. They had heard most of my message and were quickly assembling the gear I had requested. They loaded all the gear into a large bag and connected it to the bomb hook on the bottom of Don's helicopter. They radioed that Don was on the way with cargo.

In the growing darkness I could see Don approaching, landing lights on. He circled once and flew over the campground clearing. I vainly tried to radio him to release the cargo load. (He could not hear me as the sheriff's handitalkie he had sat beside him on the seat was just not loud enough.)

Don released the load just as he passed over the clearing, the load landing 25 feet past the clearing in morning and if that failed, then the to retrieve the gear, finding a rather large lump of gear resting on the snow. Opening the bag I found that everything was in good condition. Turning on the enclosed RMRU radio I transmitted to base that the gear had arrived and was in good shape. Base radioed to me that a snow cat would try to reach us in the morning and if that failed, then the helicopter would be used.

With everything secured, I spent an enjoyable evening with the Kelly family in their motorhome. The next morning the snow cat from the Southern California Edison Company arrived. It took some doing but we loaded everyone on and started out towards the highway. We were met part way by RMRU members Pete Carlson, Bernie McIlvoy and my son Kevin who had drove the trusty family Wagoneer. We transferred some of the people into the Wagoneer and continued on out to the highway where we were met by deputies from the sheriff's department. They transported all of the rescued to Banning. **Read on . . .** for RMRU's work was not done yet.

**SEARCHES**

**Mission Nos. 7529M,
7530M & 7531M**

30 Nov.-Dec. 3, Sun.-Tue.

**High Country,
San Jacinto Mountains**

By Rich Quackenbush

At 0830 November 27, Thanksgiving Day, Kenneth Micheal Self was dropped off at the valley station of the Palm Springs Tram. At 1000 he was issued a wilderness permit at the Long Valley Ranger Station, near the mountain station, indicating Deer Springs as his destination. He was seen shortly there after, heading up the trail in deteriorating weather. He has not been seen since.

What happened to him in the next few hours we can only surmise. We do know that the storm gathering Thursday morning dumped 3 feet of snow in the San Jacinto Mountains and was accompanied by high winds and sub-freezing temperatures.

The severity of the storm was unknown to people not at these high elevations. His mother reported him overdue on the evening of November 30.

This same evening, Walt Walker had been helicoptered to the summit of Black Mountain and the rest of us were eating in Denny's before sacking out and securing this mission (No. 7528) in the morning. At this juncture, Captain Canova, Commander of the Riverside Sheriff's Substation in Banning, came in with the report about Mike Self.

After conferring with Captain Canova at the substation, it was decided to call in other rescue teams and to get a team up the tram as soon as possible.

Gary Gillespie, Rick Pohlers, Larry Roland and Tom Aldrich went up the tram and the rest of us sacked out on one of the tram parking lots. Don Landells and his helicopter were also notified to join us in the morning.

Thirteen RMRU members were joined by four from San Diego

(See SEARCHES, PAGE 9)

SEARCHES . . .

(From Page 8)

Mountain Rescue team, six from Sierra Madre, one from Montrose, three from San Dimas and one from Saddleback in Orange County.

Our problems started to grow as more people were reported overdue by friends and relatives. David Jeffries was supposed to have started at Humber Park and planned on hiking to the top of Mt. San Jacinto. Not much was known about what kind of equipment he was carrying. Brothers Tom and Tim were reported to be well equipped and also headed for Mt. San Jacinto. Suddenly we were searching for four, not just one!

At 0640 December 1, Don Landells started flying men to the high country and at 0755 the tram departed with men. At 0730 Jim Garvey and myself were landed at about 1,000 feet below the summit of San Jacinto. The weather was clear but windy. We started snowshoeing to the summit and found the going very difficult. The snow had not had a chance to consolidate and we found ourselves sinking about 18 inches each step. Without snow shoes, the going would be exhausting and very slow indeed.

We established that no one had been inside the hut since the storm. The other teams reported like results in out buildings at Round Valley and Tamarack. Mike Self had not made use of any of them and none of the teams had reported crossing tracks. The helicopters had now criss-crossed the area and also reported negative results.

By mid morning there were two teams on the west side of the mountain and five teams searching the east side. The helicopter was also searching by this time.

At 1240 the San Dimas team reported seeing a fire in the Tahquitz Creek Drainage. At 1320 the bird spotted three boys beside the fire and ten minutes later set Ray Castilonia down about a mile away. Bernie McIlvoy was set down nearby and both he and Ray began hiking toward the boys who turned out to be Tom and Tim Gonchoroff, brothers, and David Jeffries, all of whom had been reported missing. After snow shoes and additional gear were drop-

OCTOBER 2, 1976

SAVE THAT DATE

HELP RMRU CELEBRATE ITS 15th ANNIVERSARY DETAILS IN THE NEXT ISSUE

ped, Bernie, Ray and the boys hiked up to the Caramba helispot and were flown out.

While all of this was happening, a Bell 205 helicopter from the Los Angeles Fire Department joined the search. Also, a radio relay manned by Arnie Moulton, Saddleback Search and Rescue was established on the Banning to Idyllwild Road and Jim Garvey and I reached the hut at the summit of Mt. San Jacinto.

As the afternoon wore on, the teams on the east side of the mountain, having covered their assignments, started returning to the tram or were picked up by the choppers. On the west side, the San Diego team pressed on to Little Round Valley reaching it at 1617 - a very hard days work. The Sierra Madre team snowshoed out from Deer Springs and were picked up at 2300 - a harder days work. Jim and I stayed in the hut that night and the San Diego team pitched a tent on the snow in Little Round Valley.

On the morning of December 2, Jim and I snow-shoed down to Little Round Valley and along with the San Diego team, were picked up by the L./A. Co. Fire Dept. helicopter.

Most of the day was spent making use of the helicopter searching and running down leads including a reported mirror flash somewhere on the western slopes and a set of tracks in the Taquitz Drainage below where the boys had been picked up. Both leads produced negative results.

Satisfied that all leads had been covered on the ground and that the area had been covered by air, the mission was terminated.

On the morning of December 3, we were informed that the Sheriff's Office had decided to use Landell's helicopter for another day. I met Jim Fairchild and we drove the Van to the Banning Airport.

I flew observer with Don and Jim, aided by John Dew, operated base. We investigated another reported mirror flash which proved to be the sun reflecting from windows of the Black Mt. Lookout. We flew the entire area all afternoon on until after sundown thinking we might see a fire in the darkness. None was seen.

During the afternoon we could easily see animal tracks and the snow shoe tracks left by the search teams. Sometimes we could even tell squirrel from rabbit tracks. ■ RMRU

RESCUE**Mission No. 7532M****30 Nov., Sun.
Taquitz Canyon***By Bernie McIlvoy*

While on mission No. 7529M, Ray Castilonia and I assisted in the helicopter evacuation of mission No.

(See Mission No. 7532M, Page 10)

Mission No. 7532 . . .

(From Page 9)

7530M and No. 7531M.

During the final part of the evacuation the sun went down, and in the excitement of all the missions, base camp sort of mislaid us. After a few words to base camp concerning our predicament, 'darkness', Don Landells agreed to fly his helicopter up the mountain to Carumba helispot to pick us up. On the way up he spotted a campfire at the 4,000 foot level in Tahquitz Canyon. Raising our hopes that his was the young man missing in mission No. 7529M. After we were picked up we flew down Tahquitz Canyon to investigate the campfire. As we hovered about 100 ft. over the camp, we determined that whoever was there would be alright for the night, as we could see they had a tent and a large campfire. Due to the extreme hazardous situation of flying the helicopter at night in a narrow canyon we could justify no further action. We decided to fly in at daybreak.

At daybreak Don flew me in to the campsite. It was at this time we determined this was not the missing young man in mission No. 7529M. This was altogether a new mission. It was a married couple who had gone hiking for several days in Tahquitz Canyon. After the heavy snowfall they became trapped and could not go up or down the canyon. The 'trap' was caused by a steep slab of rock traversed to reach the campsite that was barely negotiable going in, but icy and impassable now. The other side of the canyon was sheer cliff. The girl had a knee problem as well. ■ RMRU

SEARCH**(Continuation of the Search for Mike Self)****Mission No. 7533****13 Dec., Sat.****San Jacinto Mountains***By Ed Hill*

The Thanksgiving Day weekend was a very busy time for RMRU. We were searching for and evacuating people from all over the San Jacinto

high country who had been trapped by the storm that dropped three feet of snow. One of the people we were searching for was Kenneth Micheal Self who had gone on a two to three day trip just before the storm. We called the other MRA teams to have enough manpower to search Self's probable route. We also flew a helicopter for four days and ran to earth all the reported leads. The deep snow hampered ground searchers. At the end of the initial effort we had no positive indication that Self was on the mountain. At the last conference, we decided that we could not send ground searchers in until we knew where to send them, and we would wait two weeks for the snow to consolidate and would search the prime areas again.

On Saturday, we went back along with teams from Sierra Madre, Montrose and San Dimas. We decided to search the area bounded by the Marion - Jean ridge to the West; Wellman's Divide to the South; the desert escarpment to the East; and the San Jacinto - Cornell ridge to the North. All the drainages and bowls were to be checked. The day was cold and very windy. The weather report indicated that a storm front was to pass over the mountain that evening. All the searchers were heavily dressed and kept moving because of the cold. Any water bottles in outside pack pockets soon froze. The snow had consolidated, but the drifts were still deep.

After lunch, a wrecked camp was found. A blue pack, green tube tent, and a baseball cap were found. All the teams in the area fanned out from that point and started searching with renewed interest. The camp was checked with the ranger, and it turned out that it had been abandoned just before the storm. At dusk, all the teams returned to the tramway having found nothing positive.

Sometime next spring after the snows have melted, we will go back and look again. The sheriff will list Mike on the missing persons list in hopes that if he is not on the mountain, someone will report him.

The unit hates to leave a search like this, but at this point, we have no viable alternatives. ■ RMRU

RESCUE**Mission No. 7534M****17 Dec., Wed.****Above Little Tahquitz Valley***By Jack Schnurr*

The call came about 10:30 a.m. A beginner - intermediate hiking class from Biola College had become incapacitated in Little Tahquitz Valley with at least four members of the group suffering from hypothermia (lowering of body core temperature leading to freezing to death). Arriving much earlier than the rest of the unit, Walt Walker and John Dew were immediately flown to the Chinquapin Flat helispot, by Don Landells and descended a half mile and several hundred feet to the group's camp just east of Chinquapin Flat trail to Little Tahquitz Valley. Despite initial reports of unconsciousness among the hypothermic victims, the rescuers found no one in extreme danger.

Four more helicopter shuttles and RMRU had ten men on the mountain with much gear and a toboggan. The toboggan was prepared for transferring the four supine victims the several hundred foot elevation gain to the helispot. The rest of the student group began breaking camp and packing their gear for the hike to the lift point.

The soft, two foot of snow made the toboggan transfer slow and arduous for RMRU members. Long ropes were attached to the front and rear of the sled and six men pulled from the front while two men guided the rear through the severely sloped and wooded hillside. Once the toboggan rider reached the helispot, he was quickly transferred into the bird with a RMRU attendant and one other student for the quick descent to the ballpark in Idyllwild.

As has been experienced in the past, one of our 'extreme' hypothermic victims suddenly lapsed into rescue collapse, the sudden letdown of the body's will to live at the relief of being rescued. Walt was attending the young lady in the helicopter as it was descending to the ball park. The girl dropped off into uncon-

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Mission No. 7534M . . .

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sciousness. Trying to get the girl to respond without success, Walt 'volunteered' one of the warm female hikers to strip down to undies and get into the sleeping bag with the comotose victim and supplying the critical body heat so dearly needed by the victim. Walt then asked Don Landells to fly directly to the Palm Springs hospital. With the added body heat, the girl started to revive and respond about half way through the flight to the hospital, Walt breathed a little easier.

Meanwhile down on the ground, the 'dog sled' team was slowly getting the remainder of the victims to the helispot. The last carry was a bit grim with the sun disappearing behind Tahquitz Peak and the wind suddenly whipping up viciously. The rescue team was extremely fortunate to be using Landell's new bird, a turbine powered Bell 206 Jet Ranger, which was making trips from the helispot to the ball park and back in about 8 minutes, about half the time of the Bell 47B we're so used to working with. We were still trying to get the remaining ten students and all their gear plus the rescue unit and their gear off the mountain before darkness grounded the aircraft. The last two loads of rescuemen flew down in the dark despite considerable winds at the helispot, another fantastic effort and fine piloting by the Dean of Mountain Flying.

Fortunately, all the hospitalized victims were treated and released without much problem but probably a bit wiser about the insidious killer, hypothermia. A tired crew stopped for a 'bite' to eat and slept well that night for sure. ■ RMRU

RESCUE**Mission No. 7535M****21 & 22 Dec., Sun. & Mon.
San Jacinto Mountains***By Walt Walker*

Late Sunday afternoon the telephone rang and once again the word was relayed that RMRU's skills were needed to rescue a young man who

was very ill in the high country.

My son, Kevin, packed the Wagoneer as I telephoned the members on my list. Fellow member John Dew and I discussed the situation and we decided he would ride up the hill with my son and I. In less than 20 minutes I pulled up in front of John's house and as usual he was waiting with gear piled at the curb. We loaded up and sped away for Idyllwild.

Upon arrival at Idyllwild we were met by Captain Ray Canova of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department. He introduced us to the informant and advised us that Don Landells was on the way with his turbine powered Bell 206 helicopter. The informant said that he and two other young men had left Humber Park Saturday morning and hiked to the summit shelter on Mt. San Jacinto, planning to stay the night. That evening one of the hikers temperature began to rise and he generally felt like a cold was coming on. By Sunday morning he felt worse and was having problems breathing. The trio packed up and started hiking for Humber Park. The ill young man's breathing problem became extreme and he could no longer continue. They decided one person would stay with the stricken hiker and the other would hike out for help.

We then all drove over to nearby Camp Maranatha to await the arrival of Don Landells and complete our packing for snow and cold conditions. Another problem began to arise as the sun eased down towards the western horizon, we were running out of daylight in a hurry. Don landed and we quickly loaded packs and ourselves into his new bird, John and Kevin in the rear seats, myself in the front along with Don. As we climbed up towards the ridge I described the situation to Don.

This just wasn't our day, the wind was blowing steady at about 25 knots, with gusts up to 40 knots. As we gained the ridge, right at Saddle Junction (8,050 ft. elevation), a blast of wind bounced us around. Don turned the bird, north, heading up the Angel's Glide trail toward Mt. San Jacinto. A small group of people were spotted, gathered around a person in a sleeping bag.

Now Don was faced with a very difficult problem, where to touch

down to let us out. He circled, looking for a clearing in the trees. We even discussed jumping at Wellman's Cienga (having done this on previous missions), but that was a long way off. Back to the ridge, Don said he would try a spot he had seen as we approached the ill hiker.

Don settled down towards a large boulder, watching the very close trees, fighting the gusty wind, to put a runner down on the rock. Another strong gust, Don pulled in the pitch, increased the power and climbed up up and away. He circled back to try again, stating we would have to jump. Down we went, in 14 years of flying in helicopters, these were the worst conditions I had ever experienced. Don's hands and feet moved constantly as he fought to keep his bird level and over the boulder. He nodded and John climbed out onto the right runner, another nod and John was on his way. Kevin handed out the three packs and climbed onto the same runner, after Don's nod. Once again the nod, and Kevin was away. John and Kevin climbed off the boulder. Don maneuvered the powerful bird over, nodded, and I climbed out the left side onto the runner. I was faced with an extra problem, exiting on the left, put me out looking down a 40 foot cliff. With the second nod, I carefully dropped down and flattened myself on the rock. Don swung away and over me, heading back to Idyllwild for more members.

The three of us shouldered our packs and headed toward the stricken hiker. We had to watch out for icy patches of snow in the growing darkness and sometimes even broke through the crust to our knees. A few minutes and 400 feet later, we were beside the sick young man. As I introduced myself and asked questions, I opened my pack and got out my stethoscope and thermometer. Placing the thermometer in the victim's mouth, I started counting beats of the heart through the radial pulse. The heart was racing, 160! Respiration was almost double normal and his temperature was 104°F. My immediate thought was, this young man is gravely ill, with High Altitude Pulmonary Edema.

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Mission No. 7535M . . .

(From Page 11)

While I was taking life signs, John and Kevin asked the bystanders to help them collect firewood. Just then the small two watt handtalkie I was carrying came to life, I recognized the voice, fellow unit member Jim Fairchild was calling from the RMRU van at Camp Maranatha. I radioed back the situation and suggested he send in the wheeled litter, rescue sleeping bag and the unit's large oxygen bottle. He concurred and said that the rest of the team would have to be flown to Skunk Cabbage Meadow because the ridge helispot was just too dangerous in the dark.

Jim called again on the radio and said he would send the oxygen system on the first load and have the members with it, hike as fast as possible. I answered Jim. He called again. I replied again. He called again. The batteries in my radio were just too cold and weak to send a message. I now could only listen.

In what seemed like a long time, but was actually only 30 minutes, the first group of RMRU members arrived with the needed oxygen. We quickly assembled the valve and the mask. The valve was opened and the mask was placed on the victim's face. In less than five minutes he was breathing easier. Next to arrive was the unit's wheeled litter and rescue sleeping bag. We placed the young man into the bag and loaded him on the litter.

With six members around the litter and another manning a belay rope we headed downhill towards Skunk Cabbage Meadow. The movement was causing the accumulated liquids, in the victim's lungs, to slosh around and this increased his respiratory distress. We radioed base and requested them to advise the doctor at the Loma Linda Hospital. After transmitting the requested life signs, we received directions to increase the flow of oxygen. This helped the young man considerably, but it also meant that the oxygen would not last as long.

We radioed base to advise them we were only ten minutes away from the meadow. They told Don and he fired up his helicopter. Just

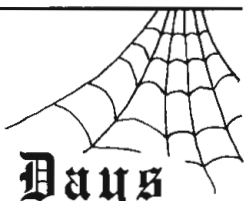
as we entered the northern end of the meadow, Don descended into the center of the clearing. We discussed the situation with Don and decided I would ride in the back seat with the victim and oxygen system. Pete Carlson would ride up front with Don to balance the load. We quickly loaded the victim and the oxygen system. Pete and I climbed in, shut the doors, and Don increased the power and we lifted up. The bird swung around and sped downhill into the darkness. Suddenly, trees straight ahead, were spotlighted by the landing lights. Don pulled the powerful bird up and to the right. We cleared the trees, but I really don't want to know by how much.

In a few seconds we were over Saddle Junction and headed down towards Loma Linda Hospital. As we flew along I watched the oxygen dial near the zero mark. Don contacted the hospital by radio and advised them of our estimated time of arrival. It was an extremely clear night, due to the strong northeast winds, and the orange and white rotating beacon atop the hospital blinked into view.

We slowed as Don circled around to land into the wind. The lights on the heliport atop the north wing were on. The big bird had just landed when the hospital doors opened and out rolled a gurney along with attendants. We transferred the victim to the gurney, disconnected the oxygen mask from our almost empty bottle, and reconnected it to the hospital's full one. We handed our victim record card to the attendants, climbed back into the waiting bird. The mission was almost over. As we flew toward Banning, we could hear over our unit radio, that the rest of the team members were hiking down the Devil's Slide trail toward Humber Park. ■ RMRU

(Editor's note: RMRU received word that the rescued young man indeed had High Altitude Pulmonary Edema. But more important, that he has recovered and is back at his college studies.)

from
Old'en Days


Five Years Ago

We mentioned a serious accident and rescue in the last issue, so this time will give a couple of personal notes, both in the Dec. '70 Newsletter.

Bob MacPherson underwent surgery for an infected knee at Circle City Hospital under the direction of our team physician, Norman Mellor, M. D. He recovered well and was back running and climbing soon.

Pete Carlson, who had broken a hip, was off crutches and quickly back in harness with pack, hiking up the mountains on missions.

That issue was printed in a soft red color, and there is a picture in it showing Bernie McIlvoy instructing on climbing techniques. Quite hard to recognize him because he then had quite short hair!

Ten Years Ago

Our Newsletter was quite short in those days, and the four-line paragraph on training said, in part, 'The weather cooperated enough so that the training was under slightly adverse conditions'. Picture us working on litter evacuation from a cliff with a strong wind, temperatures in the 'teens, and skimpy clothing. It was a test of endurance and persistence as well as skill.

Walt wrote on my copy of the Newsletter to send him the names and addresses of the two new fellows who attended the last meeting. One was Ron Harris who served as a fine member of the unit for several years, the other is Al Andrews who joined at the same time, served as a regular, hiking member for some years, then became our Personnel Coordinator and Communications expert, not to mention other valuable duties. Al, we figure, spends at least three hours per mission in phone calls and other support tasks.

Incidentally, Ron and Al were Boy Scouts in a Troop for which I was Scoutmaster, they came along in about 1950, we shared many fine wilderness adventures for the next five years.
