



U.S. AIR FORCE

LOADING UP—Sgt. Joseph Yrsha (right) helps Sgt. Chuck Laine with final adjustments of his parachute and survival equipment. The two Air Force sergeants were at Shannon Airport here for two days in case their rescue services were needed in connection with the crash of a Marine Corps plane. In foreground is equipment that is dropped from plane after rescuer jumps.

Laden Air Rescue Workers Would Rather Land In Trees as They Parachute to Lost, Injured

By CHARLES ROWE

"They've sighted some wreckage on a mountainside near Luray," the tall Air Force captain said as he put down the telephone. "You fellows better get your gear ready and stand by. You might have to go in there."

The two men he was talking to started to leave the room. One of them, a lanky sergeant dressed in fatigue uniform, said, to nobody in particular, "If we have to jump, I certainly hope there are plenty of trees around. Whenever I go down in a parachute, give me plenty of tall trees to land in."

Everybody who heard that figured their ears were deceiving them. After all, who wants to parachute down into a tree if there's plenty of open ground around?

NOT KIDDING

But Staff Sgt. Chuck Laine insisted that he wanted the trees to be his landing spot. Laine is a member of the Air Rescue Service group sent here to Shannon Airport from Westover Air Force Base, Mass. to aid in the search for a downed Marine Corps plane from Quantico. Their rescue services weren't needed this time, but the unit stood by for two days just in case.

Laine explained that often when a parachutist lands on open ground he'll break an ankle or a leg if he hits a rock or other hard object. "But when you land in a treetop, those branches give you a nice easy cushion. No broken bones. How do you get down? Just lower yourself with the 100-foot nylon rope you carry."

DESCRIBES SERVICE

There was no further report on the wreckage that had been sighted, so Laine took time out to explain to a reporter what the Air Rescue Service is.

"Most of our work comes when a plane—Air Force, Navy, Marine or civilian—goes down. But when hunters or kids are lost in the woods, we get called in, too. When a missing plane or lost people are located from the air, an Air Rescue team will parachute down to give the survivors

(one line missing)

people are located from the air, an Air Rescue team will parachute down to give the survivors medical assistance and food and get them out of desolate areas so they can be carried back to civilization.

FOUR IN UNIT

"There are four of us in the rescue unit that was sent here to Fredericksburg. Capt. Jack T. Woodyard is our pilot and commanding officer. Capt. John V. Eusner is deputy commander and navigator. Staff Sgt. Joseph Yrsha and I do the parachuting.

"Yrsha and I are trained in all phases of rescue work but each of us specializes in one field. I'm a survival specialist. I have to know how to hunt, fish and trap so that if we can't get out of an area right away we'll have plenty of food. Yrsha's a medical specialist. He patches up the wounded and takes care of them until we get back to civilization.

DOCTOR IS MEMBER

"We generally have a paradoctur with us, too. He's a full-fledged doc who jumps with us if it looks like his assistance will be needed. This time, though, he was assigned to some other duty, and couldn't come along with us."

Captain Eusner broke in to suggest that Laine dress up in his jumping outfit so we could see what it's like. With Sergeant Yrsha's assistance, it didn't take long for Sergeant Laine to don the heavy canvas suit, parachute, football-type helmet and all sorts of canvas bags, stuffed with equipment, that hung here and there on the jump suit.

A bulging pocket on his right trouser leg contained the 100-foot nylon rope that Laine would use to lower himself from a tree after he had landed. A tightly packed canvas bag contained an emergency first aid kit. Another bag contained some of Laine's survival equipment. Parachute and all, Laine figured the extra gear he was wearing weighed over 150 pounds.

Piled around Laine was more equipment that would be parachuted down after the jumpers leaped from the plane. The sergeant rattled off the list like a youngster saying his ABC's. It included a handy-talkie radio, a medical supplies container with "everything from headache pills to sutures for sewing up wounds," a case of blood plasma, a litter bundle and splint kit, powerful binoculars, a case of "C" rations, an air mattress, a sleeping bag, extra clothing, candles, red flares, orange smoke grenade, pure water, gasoline stove and fuel, cigarettes, signal mirror, signal tarpaulin, plus a disassembled .22 rifle. The rifle, which you can read more about on page 5, weighs only 3½ pounds and fits into a flat package only 14 inches long and two inches thick.

WAS AIR GUNNER

How did he get into this type of work? "Well," Laine replied, "I was an engineer-gunner on a B-24 bomber in the Southwest Pacific during the war. I had to make a couple of emergency jumps and liked them so much that when the war was over I talked my way into the Air Rescue Service. Never have regretted it, either.

"Yrsha did quite a bit of jumping during the war, too. He was with the 82nd Airborne Division in Europe."

What sort of training does it take? "Plenty," was Laine's answer. "First you have to go through the airborne infantry school at Fort Benning, Ga. They teach you how to jump there. Then you are sent to MacDill Field at Tampa, Fla., where you have to parachute into the swampland and live off the land for a week. Then you make five jumps into the tallest trees in Florida.

ALSO IN DESERT

"After that you go to El Paso, Tex., where you make a few more jumps and learn how to survive under desert conditions. Then, to learn how to stay alive under arctic conditions, you are sent to Goose Bay, Labrador, where you give the parachute a workout a few more times."

Captain Eusner stopped by just then to interject a few words of praise for the jumping sergeants. "You know," he said with pride, "there are only 66 guys in the whole Air Force who can do this type of work. Laine here has been in the service for better than seven years and has made 46 jumps. Yrsha, an eight-year man, has jumped 40 times. And, it's a funny thing, they'd rather land in treetops than on open ground."

That was where we came in.