

74TH AIR RESCUE PRAISED BY
FOUR VICTIMS OF PLANE CRASH

The following item appeared in the Fairbanks News-Miner, Wed., September 9, 1953:

"(Editor's note: The following letter in recognition of the services of the 74th Air Rescue Squadron was written by Fred J. Weiler, land office official in Anchorage, and directed to Lt. Gen. J.H. Atkinson, commander-in-chief at Eilson air force base. Weiler was one of the four hunters rescued by the 74th after a plane crash in the Brooks range on August 18th. Weiler spent two weeks in the hospital here with an injured back and was flown back to Anchorage last week in a body cast.)

"We wish to call to your personal attention the outstanding achievements of the 74th Air Rescue squadron, of the Ladd air force base, in coming to our assistance when our plane crashed near Anaktuvuk Pass in the Endicott Mountains on August 18, 1953.

"It is quite certain that without their timely aid several of us would not be alive today. The entire squadron is entitled to our most heartfelt thanks but there are three men who we feel should be given special mention: Capt. Dave Gardner, the helicopter pilot, and S/Sgt Charles Chapman and A/IC Walter Atkins, para-medics.

"Chapman and Atkins parachuted to the scene of the crash on a jagged mountain peak, landing on broken rocks at an altitude of 5,000 feet at the risk of their own lives. It is almost miraculous that they were able to land on that terrain without being seriously injured, especially so because they had previously made a jump that same day.

"Capt. Gardner did an outstanding job of flying, also at the risk of his own life, in order to insure that we received prompt medical attention. He already flown several missions that day, and put in a total of 11 hours flying time, much of it under extremely hazardous conditions. In spite of this he made 4 successful landings and take-offs at an altitude of 5,000 feet, landing on a slope on loose broken rock. The only spot on which he was able to land did not exceed 120 square feet and was located very near the edge to an 800 to 1,000 foot sheer cliff. The last landing and take-off were made at approximately 10 p.m. in almost complete darkness.

"All three of these men went far beyond the call of duty in an attempt to be of service to us and we believe that they are worthy of special commendation and decoration. Anyone who has not been in that part of the Endicott mountains cannot appreciate the hazards to which they subjected themselves.

"We hope that these men will be given the recognition due them and that this letter will be made a part of the permanent record of the 74th air rescue squadron, and that copies will be placed in the personnel files of the men named.

"You have under your command an organization of which you can be very proud." (Note: Lt. General Atkinson is Commander of the Alaskan Theater)