

THAT OTHERS MAY LIVE

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By Karl Detzer

AN AMERICAN Air Force sergeant, on duty in a hut on the bleak and lonely coast of Greenland one fall morning, suddenly snatched off his radio headphones. "Distress call!" he yelled.

Fifty pilots, navigators, engineers, radio operators, and survival experts went into action. A fishing boat in trouble in the Arctic had asked for aid, and these members of the US Air Force, living just a short hop from the Pole, were ready to risk their own lives to save the crew.

That same week another American radio operator, sweating it out at an Air Rescue Service post on a blistering Arabian desert, picked up a faint signal which told him that a small plane had cracked up less than 100 miles away. He sounded the alarm.

Within minutes a search plane took off, followed by a helicopter. The plane spotted the wreck, gave its location to the helicopter. With an Air Rescue doctor aboard, the helicopter picked up the injured British pilot from beside his crashed plane and flew him to the nearest hospital.

Every day, somewhere around the world, these highly skilled, well-organized life savers of the air are going about their delicate and dangerous errands of mercy. The forty-six units, called Squadrons, are divided among eleven Groups scattered from the tropics to the polar seas, from the Persian Gulf to Alaska.

Wherever they are, they are ready, every hour of the day or night, to help men, planes, or ships in trouble.

More interested in action than in statistics, the Air Rescue Service has not kept track of the exact number of lives it has saved since it was organized in 1947. A conservative estimate would be 15,000, and the figure grows day by day. Of these, nearly 10,000 were in or near Korea. There the rescue planes and helicopters evacuated the more seriously wounded from the front, pulled UN air crew men out of the sea, and under enemy fire snatched to safety nearly a thousand allied fighting men trapped behind enemy lines.

[For such "distinguished service to airpower in the field of flight," the

Air Force Association, at its last Convention in Washington, D. C., presented its annual Flight Award for 1953 to the men of the Third Air Rescue Group. In the Korean war this unit flew more than 16,000 sorties and became the most highly decorated air unit of the war.—The Editors.]

The 6,000 daring, ingenious youngsters who make up the Air Rescue Service, together with veteran pilots and medical parachutists, have undergone rigorous training in survival schools that teach them how to live through extremes of weather and exertion, how to conquer fire and flood, how to overcome deep snow, pack ice, hurricane winds, the desert sun, thirst, starvation—and Communists. They are an elite corps, each man picked for stamina, alertness, and agility. Above the door of every headquarters shack in all the far-flung outposts, is their slogan: "That Others May Live."

The exact number of airplanes and helicopters, boats and land vehicles used in these benevolent operations is a military secret. Of planes and helicopters, there are more than 300 used in rescue work. They range in size from small search planes able to climb in and out of narrow valleys, to huge bomber types with thirty-foot lifeboats clinging to their bellies, ready to be launched by immense parachutes. The larger helicopters may carry a dozen men.

The parachute boats are of metal or plywood, with engines that drive them up to nine miles an hour. Some boats have a cruising range of 500 miles. Depending on their size they can carry fifteen to thirty survivors, are stocked with kits that de-salt sea water, food to last up to 360 man-days, blankets, first aid chests, radios, maps, heavy weather clothing, fishing tackle, and Bibles.

Among the ground crews are experienced mountain climbers, "desert rats," men accustomed to the jungle and the Arctic. With jeeps and amphibious vehicles, and sometimes afloat, they travel overland to points no airplane or helicopter can reach. But before a ground crew gets to the scene of a disaster, Air Rescue Service medical service corps experts and technicians, with blankets, water, food, surgical and medical supplies, often have parachuted to the exact spot where they are needed.

Some of the most daring exploits of the Korean war were performed by Air Rescue Service men. Typical is the story of Capt. John J. Najarian, a black-eyed, 29-year-old Californian, and his four-man crew one dark evening in June 1951. They were the alert crew and were eating supper when the alarm sounded.

Capt. Kenneth Stewart, a fighter pilot from Covington, Ky., had abandoned his damaged plane and parachuted into the Taedong River, behind enemy lines. Other pilots had seen him splash into the water and inflate his life raft. Communist troops opened fire on him from both banks. He ducked under the raft and darkness closed down on the water.

Back at the Air Rescue station, Najarian and his co-pilot, navigator, radio operator, and engineer raced to their big twin-engine amphibian and roared into the air. They found Stewart's buddies still circling their planes over the dark Taedong, trying to break up Communist ground fire from the river bank. One of the circling fighters turned on his landing lights and dived toward the place Stewart had last been seen. Najarian followed him down. When the fighter swung back, several hundred feet above the water, the Rescue ship continued to nose down and splashed into the river.

The enemy responded with even heavier fire. Stewart abandoned his raft and, signaling with his tiny pencil flashlight, swam toward the amphibian. Najarian raced his plane to meet him. The crew dragged the weary, waterlogged flyer aboard, Najarian gunned his engines and the big ship took off. It was a Grumman SA-16 Albatross, a fourteen-ton flying boat with a hull sixty-two feet long and a wing-spread of eighty feet. The water was only six feet deep, with many sandbars, and the hull of the plane drew five and a half feet.

In airplanes, helicopters, boats, jeeps, and on snow shoes, Air Rescue Service has saved 15,000 lives in seven years

Moreover, the river lay at the bottom of a valley ordinarily too narrow to maneuver a plane of this size. But skill and luck got it out of the valley and it sped for home with flak breaking all around, above, and below it.

Back at headquarters, Najarian nonchalantly chalked up another "routine mission" on the blackboard and finished his supper. Less than a month earlier he had landed and taken off among seven-foot waves in the sea north of Japan to rescue the crew of a plane that had crashed into the ocean.

The Air Rescue Service went into last action in 1951 when the Kaw and Missouri Rivers flooded and isolated thousands of Kansas farmers and villagers. Crews, planes, and equipment were rushed from California, Colorado, Washington, Massachusetts, Texas, Alabama, and Michigan. The surface was full of floating debris but big converted bombers dropped lifeboats and a score of life rafts. In only one of the boats did anyone take time to count the number of rescues: this boat saved 439 persons, mostly women and children. Slower moving helicopters followed the planes into the flood area, and windmilling their way across the wide waters picked survivors off roofs and the tops of trucks and cars. Cargo planes parachuted 200 tons of food, blankets, and medical supplies to isolated high points where victims huddled above the flood.

The life savers of the Rescue Service have gone to the aid of sailors, soldiers, airmen, and civilians of more than a dozen nations. Even the Iron Curtain does not halt their mercy flights. Last year when a Czech airliner was overdue on a hop from Rome to Athens, American Rescue planes took off from both Germany and Africa to assist in the search. It was an American crew that found the wreckage on a Greek mountainside, but no survivors.

In April 1950, in the Atlantic forty miles north of Kingston, Jamaica, an Air Rescue Service plane discovered four Jamaicans on a rubber raft, tossed by giant seas. Unable to land on the stormy surface, the plane called for help and directed a surface vessel to the spot. The Rescue crew circled over the raft, homing the vessel in, until the last survivor was safe aboard.

Early in 1952 a Dutch KLM airliner with sixty-six persons aboard crash-landed in the desert twenty miles from the air base at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, near the Persian Gulf. Twenty minutes later an Air Rescue team parachuted to the hot sand close to the plane, bringing first-aid equipment. In ten more minutes a doctor stepped out of a helicopter, carrying blood plasma and his surgical kit. Ambulance jeeps came next, with Air Rescue and other Air Force ground teams. None of the passen-



An ARS team parachuted in to save Mrs. Gene Jack and her baby, snow-bound in an Idaho mountain pass.

gers had been seriously injured and all were on their way to Dhahran within two hours.

One of the most difficult and dangerous tasks ever undertaken by the Service ended happily in September 1952 off the northern end of the Greenland ice cap. A British RAF Hastings bomber had flown up over the ice cap to drop supplies to a scientific expedition. From a distance the waiting scientists saw the bomber crash and radioed for help.

The Air Rescue Service squadron based at Thule, northernmost US Air Base, picked up the distress call but due to frightful Arctic weather could not respond for two days. Snow-laden gales kept the planes on the ground. Meanwhile the scientists made their way across the ice to the wreck, found the crew of eight still alive but all hurt, some of them critically. They could not be moved, so the smashed airplane was converted into a first-aid station and victims and rescuers waited for help.

At the first break in weather, supply planes took off from Thule and dropped medical equipment, blankets, and food by parachute. These planes were not equipped for snow landing. Close behind them came a rescue triphibian equipped with keel skid and skis and four JATO bottles to aid in take-off. It landed on the snow-covered ice cap, took aboard the three most seriously injured, two British and one American, and flew them to the hospital at Thule. Two days later, good weather permitting, a C-47 on skis landed and took off the remaining survivors.

The Rescue medical hero of heroes in the Korean zone was Lt. Col. John C. Shumate, a parachuting Medical Service Corps officer from Little Rock, Ark. On the front and behind the enemy's front, this cool-headed, clear-eyed medical man repeatedly landed by helicopter, and, with Communist bullets kicking up the earth around his feet, saved the lives of United Nations soldiers.

When a British fighter pilot crashed 125 miles north of the front one after-

noon in 1950, Shumate took off in a helicopter with Capt. David C. McDaniels as pilot. For more than an hour and a half they windmilled their way over enemy territory, drawing occasional hostile fire, until they spotted the crashed plane.

"Let's get down there," Shumate said and the pilot brought his ungainly ship to earth beside the broken fighter. Shumate jumped out, with Communist slugs snapping past his head, lifted the injured Englishman out of his plane, carried him to the helicopter. As they took off, Shumate went to work on the badly hurt pilot. Flak bloomed in black puffs around the "chopper" as it made its way back to the American lines, with the "doctor" administering blood plasma and ignoring enemy fire. The downed pilot lived. This was only one of the scores of daring, lifesaving excursions made by the "doctor" from Little Rock.

Another medical officer, nameless in the records at Washington headquarters, fought and won a desperate battle against time, immense snowdrifts, high winds, and cold in Idaho's Sawtooth Mountains in January 1951. Word came to the 43d Air Rescue Squadron, at McChord AFB, Tacoma, that a woman and child, both critically ill, were snowed-out alone in a snowbound cabin far up an Idaho mountain pass. A gale was blowing and snow falling so fast that no airplane dared take off to search for the lonely cabin. So a ground team was organized and started its climb within the hour. It carried a portable radio as well as food and medical supplies. After a few miles it sent back word that it was floundering in shoulder-deep drifts, would never make the cabin.

Just then the snow clouds parted and the doctor at the airbase called for volunteers. In a few minutes a plane was aloft and fighting its way out of downdrafts and tricky mountain winds. The doctor and his medical technician, Staff Sergeant Robbins, buckled on their parachutes as they flew. Suddenly through a break in the storm the pilot spotted the cabin. The doctor and technician jumped, taking their medical equipment and supplies down with them.

Mother and child were barely alive and the rescuers went to work, giving restorative treatment. When the immediate danger had passed, the doctor and technician took turns attending the patients in the cabin and smoothing a landing field in the snow outside the door. Using boards from an old shed they marked its boundaries and on their portable radio asked for a helicopter. A Sikorsky H-5 arrived with the slackening of the storm. The two patients were taken aboard and flown to a hospital.

Halfway around the world, in the Persian Gulf, the British launch *Trucial Maid of London* went aground in a storm and was threatening to break up. Surface craft, unable to approach it to take off the crew, asked for aid. Air Rescue planes sighted the launch, with waves breaking over it, and sent for a helicopter. In spite of the weather the helicopter managed to set down on the upper deck of the grounded wreck and take off two persons who were ill. It raced them to the British hospital on Bahrain Island, was returning to the ship when the storm slackened and the vessel's crew decided to remain on board and attempt to save it. They were short of food and water, however, so Rescue planes dropped these on deck.

In 1951 a Turkish patrol of ninety men was cut off and surrounded by Communist troops in North Korea. The Turks were among the best soldiers on the front and Allied officers sent frantic word back to the Rescue Service. Helicopters took off and other planes guided them to the beleaguered patrol, which was fighting hard to hold the surrounding enemy at a distance. The helicopters landed, saved every man in what was probably the largest air rescue in history.

Thus the ingenious and daring young men of the Air Rescue Service are writing a new chapter in the history of heroism and self-sacrifice, in the air, at sea, and on land, performing miracles of stamina, courage, and skill. Sometimes they die, trying. When they do they die proudly, for every man and boy among them believes in their slogan: "That Others May Live."—End