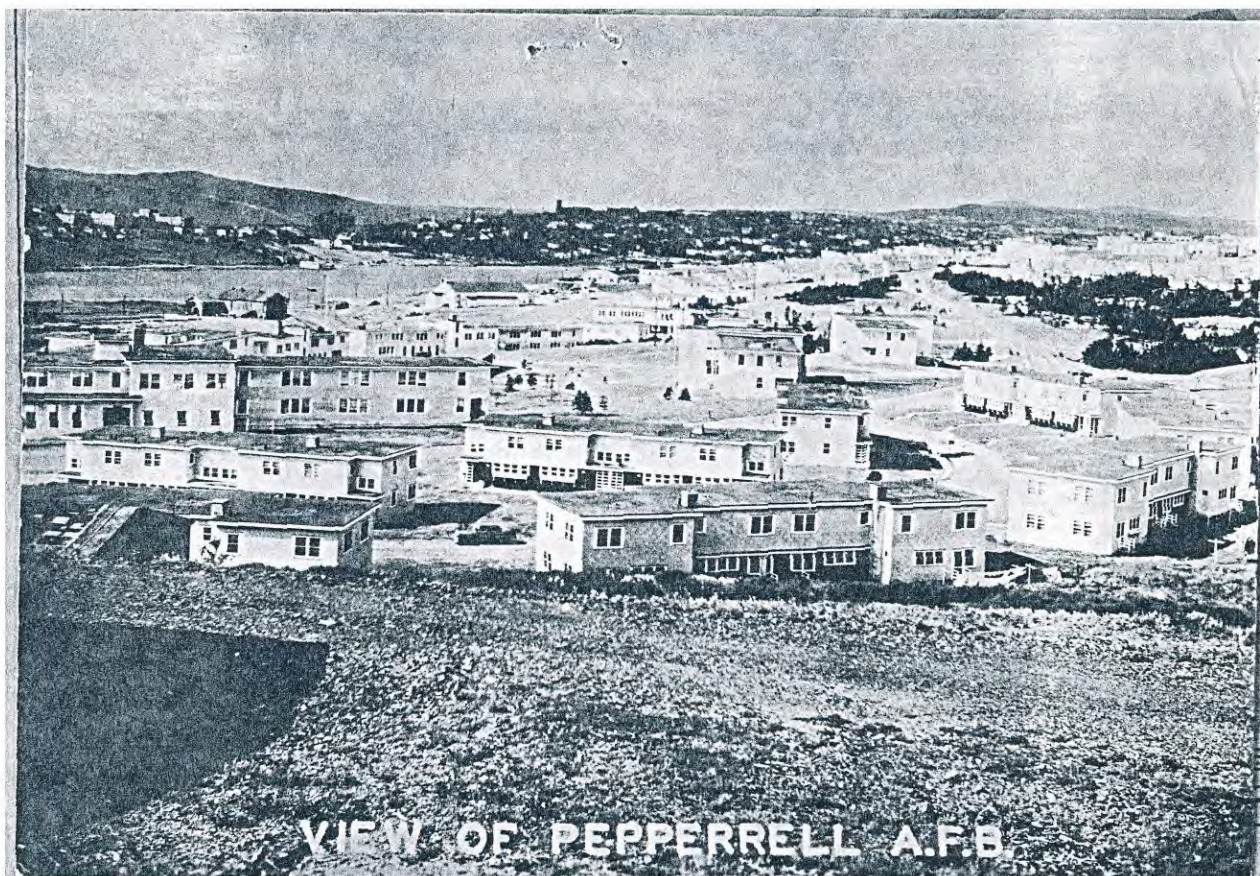


6TH AIR RESCUE GP

HISTORICAL REPORT

1 JAN 54-30 JUN 54

RCS: 1-AF-D2/ARS



News Letter

6th Air Rescue Group

Pepperrell Air Force Base

St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada

For Month of MAY 1954



The Cover

This is Pepperrell Air Force Base headquarters of the 6th Air Rescue Group. The base is named for Sir William Pepperrell, a mid-eighteenth century Maine colonist who assisted the English in wars against the French. The 6th headquarters is located in a building top right of the photograph.

What the 55th Proved

"Many military experts have said repeatedly that large scale military operations in the Arctic are impossible because of the cold, the high winds and the difficult terrain. Air Force strategists now say that if parachutists can operate in high winds, stay out for days in sub-zero cold without ill effects and then be picked up by helicopter, trans-polar paratroop attacks can no longer be regarded as impossible."

Ansel Talbert, N. Y.
Herald Tribune Aviation Editor

Information Officers

Hq 6th Air Rescue Group, Pepperrell AFB, Nfld
Major John B. Barron
51st Air Rescue Sq., Narsarssuak AB, Greenland
Capt Vincent L. Magnuson
52nd Air Rescue Sq., Ernest Harmon AFB, Nfld
Capt William R. Brown
54th Air Rescue Sq., Goose AB, Labrador
2nd Lt Richard Maznio
55th Air Rescue Sq., Thule AB, Greenland
Major Gordon Spencer

Group Commander
Colonel Smylie C. Stark

The story that follows - in the form of the mission report - is the real McCoy. It made Page one of the New York Herald Tribune on 17 May. The paper featured it under a two-column cut of S/Sgt Robert Christensen. The story was by Ansel Talbert, aviation editor, who just returned from Thule.

The mission report speaks for itself. Out of such experience comes knowledge of the Arctic, a potential theater of war, pride in unit and pride of two rescue airmen in themselves.

With Sgt Christensen, T/Sgt Elliot L. Holder has been recommended for the Soldiers Medal.

Report of Ground Party During Mission "6-55-4-16 April 1954

On 16 April 1954, United States Navy P4Y2B, #59925, was unreported on a flight from Thule to Alert and return.

No word had been received from the aircraft after a position report 100 miles out. On 26 April 1954, the wreckage of #59925 was found on the coast of Ellesmere Island, Northwest Territories, Canada, at 78° 02'N 76° 05'W.

On 28 April 1954, SA-16, #7178, departed Thule Air Base at 1000 with M/Sgt Raymond L. Perry, T/Sgt Elliot L. Holder, and S/Sgt Robert H. Christensen aboard, all members of the Para-rescue Section.

The following is a diary kept by S/Sgt Christensen during the eleven days ending 8 May 1954 and edited by Major Gordon Spencer, information officer of the 55th.

Wednesday - 28 April 1954

When we arrived at the crash site we all looked for a place to land either the SA-16 or a C-47 but there was no suitable landing place anywhere near the wreckage. Sgt Holder, Sgt Perry and I volunteered to jump on the icecap about two miles from the crash and go over there on foot. We made several runs over the area, dropping smoke bombs and spotter chutes to evaluate the wind. In this way we were thoroughly oriented with respect to the crash location.

The surface wind was indicating 10 to 15 knots. The jump area sloped downhill. Sgt Holder, Sgt. Perry and I talked over the situation and Sgt. Holder discussed it with the pilot. We decided we could make it. Sgt. Holder strapped on his medical kit below his reserve chute and jumped at about 1130. Upon reaching the ground, Sgt. Holder was dragged about a quarter of a mile before he could collapse his canopy. He stood up and waved to us so I got ready to go next. Sgt. Holder used a four count past the target and was blown and dragged quite a bit downward or downwind, so I used a ten count when I went. This was not enough as I landed a little upwind of Holder but was dragged past him almost a quarter of a mile.

55TH

The wind was now blowing about thirty-five to forty knots with strong gusts. Sgt Holder ran up to me and grabbed the URC-4 radio I was carrying. He called #7178 and told them not to drop Sgt. Perry because of the increasing winds. After talking to Sgt. Holder, I discovered he was trying to stop me from jumping by waving his arms. We decided that the next time, the first man out of the plane would carry the URC-4 radio and establish contact with the plane before the next man jumps.

Sgt. Holder asked the plane to drop us our supplies and equipment. #7178 dropped five bundles, two with parachutes and three free-fall. The bundles with parachutes fell upwind of the campsite and were easy to retrieve, utilizing the chute as a coil.

The bundles which were dropped free-fall hit very hard and much equipment and supplies were broken. In this category were rations, a carbine and an ice axe. The surface, which appeared to be snow from the plane, was in reality solid ice. The terrain was so irregular as to force the plane to fly higher than is customary on free-fall bundle drops.

As soon as all the bundles had been retrieved, Sgt Holder and I started for the crash site. An hour later we were told by #7178 that we were still a long way from the crash, and that, because of the high winds which had been gradually increasing during the afternoon, we were to return to the camp site and get ready for the night.

55TH
(Contd)

Soon after we arrived back at the camp, #7178 left for Thule with a final message advising us that the weather did not look too good and we should be particularly careful. We set up our "barren land tent" after we found it impossible to cut the ice with the ice saw in an attempt to build an ice house. The steel pegs for the tent could be driven about two inches into the ice before they bent, but this was enough to make them hold the tent. Something stronger, perhaps railroad spikes, would be better for this purpose than the pegs provided.

After the tent was up, Sgt Holder and I arranged our air mattresses and our sleeping bags, ate some rations, and turned in for the night. As tired as we were, sleep was almost impossible because of the noise made by the high winds. Most of the night was spent in holding down the tent. Based on previous experience on the icecap east of Thule Air Base, both Sgt. Holder and I believe the wind was over one hundred miles per hour during the night.

Thursday, 29 April 1954

At 1000 SA-16 #5302 arrived over our campsite and we were able to make contact with the URC-4. Contact was renewed each hour until 1300. During this time we broke out the rations, thawed them with sterno, which took about 30 minutes, and ate a good meal. Before returning to Thule, #5302 wanted to know if we needed anything. Sgt. Holder and I agreed that we didn't have enough sterno with us. We asked for a drop of sterno and entrenching tools to replace the ones broken on one of the free-fall bundles.

We received a request from "5302 to look for the "Gibson Girl" radio when we were able to get to the crash site. The plane informed us that the weather probably would remain bad for another day or two. Shortly after 1300 the plane returned to Thule.

Now, for the first time since we got into the tent the previous afternoon, Sgt Holder and I got out, mainly to urinate. The wind was so strong we had to hold on to the tent to keep from rolling down the icecap. It would have been a great convenience if we had had rubber containers in which to urinate while in the tent.

Except for this one excursion outside we stayed in the tent all day and most of the time we were in the sleeping bags for warmth. We could have used the sterno or some candles for heating, but we preferred to save these for heating the rations since we didn't know just when we would get any more. One can of sterno was found to burn one and a quarter hours. One can burning will keep the tent warm enough to be comfortable outside the sleeping bags.

For the rest of the day and night the wind made so much noise that sleep was impossible. Sgt Holder and I were glad we had replaced the wooden tent poles, normally used with the tent, with sectional poles of phonolic, 3/4 inch round. The wind placed a terrific strain on them, but they held up in excellent fashion. Friday, 30 April 1954.

55TH
(Contd)

I guess we finally fell asleep. At any rate we woke up at 0600 to find that the wind had finally stopped blowing. The silence was deafening. We got up and made some coffee. Then we fixed the tent and did what we could to make it more secure in the event of another storm. Finally, at 0730, we started for the crash. We took with us three 120 foot coils of nylon rope, the URC-4 radio, our crampons, a hand axe, and the remains of our ice axe, which was still of some use.

We had decided that the easiest way to the crash site was over the icecap so we went in that direction. We had started down the other slope of the icecap when #7178 arrived and we made contact on the radio. They told us we were off course and directed us by flying a path which passed over us in the direction of the crash. An hour later we came in sight of the wreckage. We were forced to use our crampons to negotiate the steep icy slope. We reached the wreckage at 1200.

The remains of the aircraft consisted of a section of fuselage, one wing, and the empennage. All of this was badly burned. In two hours we were able to find all nine bodies, but #7178 departed for Thule at 1330 with the information that we had found only eight bodies. The ninth body was found after #7178 left and was under a piece of wreckage.

Sgt Holder recovered a wallet from one body which identified it as Lt Summers. A camera gadget bag near one of the bodies bore the name Jennison and another gadget bag contained a wallet with the name Kaminski. Other identification of the bodies was not possible. Each body was tagged and photographed in the position in which it was lying when found. The personal effects and a log book that was found were taken back to the campsite.

Before "7178 departed for Thule they notified us that a party of two men was approaching our camp. Apparently they had seen the plane making a cargo drop at the campsite and decided to investigate. When Sgt Holder and I were on our way back to the camp we met the two men. One was an Eskimo and the other a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman.

They were from the post at Alexandra Bay and were returning from Craig Harbour, where they had been to deliver mail. A second Eskimo, with dog sled, was camped at the foot of the icecap below our camp. Sgt Holder and I offered them coffee and they offered us tea. They also offered to assist us in the removal of the bodies the next day, and left at 1915 to move their camp to a more convenient spot. The RCMP told us that May was a particularly bad month for storms.

After our guests had left, Sgt Holder recovered the cargo drop which consisted of entrenching tools and sterno, while I thawed out some rations. By 2000 we were quite ready to climb into the sleeping bags and call it a day. We guessed we had traveled at least ten miles, most of it up or down hill. We also noted that we had seen no wild life of any kind in the area. Undoubtedly there is game in the arctic but it is difficult to find. In general, Air Force personnel must have food with them or arrange to be supplied by air if they expect to survive.

Saturday, 1 May 1954

We awoke at 0810 to find that it had snowed for most of the night and was apparently set to continue indefinitely. In a short while we heard an aircraft overhead but were not able to get our radio working. It had become much colder during the night, below zero, so we stayed in our sleeping bags most of the day.

At 1525 we heated some rations and took another look outside. It was still snowing and there was a complete "white-out." The wind was starting to blow a little. I fooled with the URC-4 for a while and discovered that there was a short in the cable connecting the battery and radio. By wiggling the cable the radio would sometimes work. By 1635 we were back in our sleeping bags to stay warm. Sgt Holder felt that we should save as much of the sterno and candles as possible because we had no way of knowing how long we might be there, and I agreed with him.

55TF
(Contd)

By this time we have discovered that the rations with a high fat content seem to provide more of the type of energy we need to keep warm. The canned hamburger and sausage patties are the best in this respect and the fat seems to make them heat up more easily. The other rations, such as spaghetti, chicken with noodles, and boned chicken, would burn in the can before they were heated through.

Monday, 3 May 1954

Sgt Folder and I didn't get much sleep last night because of the wind. It was back up to about one hundred miles per hour and threatened to rip the tent to shreds. We awoke at 1000 but didn't get out of our sleeping bags since the wind was as strong as ever and it was much colder again. At 1100 we fixed crackers and coffee.

Finally at 1700 we got up for the first time today to fix a little food. In desperation, because we haven't been able to get outside the tent, we cut a small hole on the downhill side of the tent through which we can urinate. A piece of cardboard keeps out drafts. On the uphill side we cut another hole through which we can get ice to make water and coffee. The ice is bright blue in color and, because it has no air in it, melts much more easily than the usual ice or snow.

Tuesday, 4 May 1954

At 0030 the wind had died down somewhat and it had begun to sleet. The tent has a few rips in it but is really holding together remarkably well. I fell asleep at about 0100 and woke up at 0955. The wind is blowing again, as hard as ever. Sgt Holder and I had some coffee but stayed in our sleeping bags all day. At 2000 we heated up a meal but stayed in our beds.

We are both hoping to get constipated because we just don't know what we'll do otherwise. We have been inside the tent for two whole days now. Moisture had collected and frozen on the bottoms of our sleeping bags and that makes it much colder. Then we discovered that this did not happen if we placed folded blankets between our sleeping bags and the mattress. Actually we have the tent floor, folded signal tarpauline, air mattress, blankets, and the sleeping bag in that order.

We haven't heard an aircraft for two days now and the RCMP never showed up again after that one time. I have been sleeping with the URC-4 radio for the last two nights so that it will be good and warm when we need it again.

55TH
(Contd)

Friday, 7 May 1954

We awoke at 0900 and at 1000 #3301 was overhead and contact was made. They told us that the weather forecast predicted clearing in the afternoon. We told them the fog had cleared somewhat and that it was now snowing a little. At 1045 #3301 left for Thule. We heated up some soup and then got into the sleeping bags about noon because it was starting to get pretty cold again.

In the afternoon, to pass the time, Sgt Holder read the manual he got from the hospital on the removal of bodies from the crash scene. I spent the time perusing my address book, little, black, but from another world for all the good its doing me right now. No more planes have come over and it is starting to snow at 1830.

We ate some rations and at 2200 we crawled in the sleeping bags for the night. At 2345, since we couldn't seem to get to sleep, we made some coffee. It was still snowing and a little foggy.

Saturday, 8 May 1954

Sgt Holder and I awoke at 0910 to find the weather clear and the wind about eight knots. At 1005 the SB-17 #3501 circled over us and we made contact with them. They radioed to Thule that the area was clear and suitable for the planned helicopter landing and evacuation. #3501 then flew to the Advanced Helicopter Base to observe enroute weather. At 1400 we got our equipment ready to go in case the helicopter arrives today. We then did some more work on the landing site for the helicopter.

After we had eaten, #3301 flew over us again and told us that the 'copter would be here in about five hours. The weather was good all the way to Thule. #3301 left at 1730 to survey the route weather again.

All of our equipment was ready so we had some coffee and waited for the evacuation. At 2305 we heard #5302 overhead and in a few minutes saw the helicopter coming toward us. I maintained radio contact with #5302 while Sgt Holder directed the helicopter to a landing. It made a nice landing, setting the helicopter down right in the middle of the area we had packed down. In less than fifteen minutes we had our equipment aboard and were on our way back to Thule via the Advanced Helicopter Base.

We landed at Thule at 0320.

55TH
(Contd)

55TH
(Contd)

While we waited in the tent for the helicopter, we used up the last of the thirty-six cans of sterno and started on some of the candles. We found that we could get more heating effect from a candle if we melted it into an empty ration can and used a paper wick. This produced a large flame and kept the tent adequately warm. It required only two candles for a six-hour period and the second candle was still burning when the 'copter arrived.

#

HQ
6TH

Major Henry O'Connor has joined this headquarters to head the new Rescue Control Center to be set up at the NEAC Com Center.

A veteran of 12 years service, he was previously assigned as Operations Officer, 86th Air Rescue Squadron, Palm Beach, Fla. He also served with the 5th and the 11th Air Rescue Groups.

#

51ST

They've got a species of fish in Tunngdliarfik fjord that brushes its teeth.

Without TV plugs or roadside billboards too, says veteran angler, Major Owen M. Akers, navigator.

The fish is the Arctic char, a close relative of the prized trout. Using a small "dare devil" that proved too light to cast, Major Akers added a spoon for weight. Then he tied on a tube of toothpaste, brand undisclosed. The fish bit - all six pounds of him and a beauty.

Local Eskimos were unable to provide an explanation - except that the char wasn't really hungry, was just brushing his teeth.

#

52ND

The "Arctic Owl", weekly news sheet of the 52nd, makes its bow this week. Edited by A/IC Fred Shoemaker, and staffed by A/IC Gerald D. Thomas and A/IC Gene Ciabattari, the paper offers an entertaining melange of gossip, news items, and cartoons.

#

51ST

Airmen of the 51st C E Section are not allowing the grass to grow under their feet - at least as far as educational opportunities are concerned.

C O P Y

Page 2 of 7

55TH AIR RESCUE SQUADRON
6TH AIR RESCUE GROUP (ARS-MATS)
APO 23, c/o Postmaster, New York, New York

201-Holder, Elliott L.
AF 6277970

12 May 1954

SUBJECT: Recommendations for Award of Soldier's Medal

THRU: Commander
6612th Air Base Group
APO 23, c/o Postmaster
New York, New York

TO: Commander
6th Air Rescue Group
APO 862, c/o Postmaster
New York, New York

1. It is recommended that the following individual be awarded the Soldier's Medal:

Holder, Elliott L.
Technical Sergeant,
55th Air Rescue Squadron, Para-rescue Technician, 92170
1302 South Main Street, Henderson, Texas

2. On 28 April 1954, the wreckage of a United States Navy P4Y2B #9925 had been located on the eastern coast of Ellesmere Island, Northwest Territories, Canada, at 7802N-7605W. Since there was a possibility that there were survivors of the crash, the area was carefully examined for a possible landing site. The scene of the crash was bordered on three sides by a glacier and ice cap with extremely steep slopes, and on a fourth side by sheer 1900 foot cliff, dropping to the sea. The impossibility of landing an aircraft anywhere in the vicinity of the crash site was immediately obvious. T/Sgt Holder, a Para-rescue Technician with the 55th Air Rescue Squadron, volunteered to perform a parachute jump close to the crash site, and to proceed to the wreckage on foot, in order to ascertain whether there were any survivors. Sgt. Holder was fully aware at the time that the surface winds in the area were greatly in excess of the twenty miles per hour normally considered to be maximum for a safe jump. He was also aware that the area forecast, which had just been received from the Base Weather Office indicated rapidly deteriorating conditions and several days of cold weather and high winds. The actual jump was preceded by several runs over the area, during which smoke bombs and spotter chutes were dropped in an effort to appraise the wind conditions. Sgt. Holder was given every opportunity to refuse the jump but he decided that he could make it. T/Sgt Holder jumped from SA-16 #51-7178 at 1130, 28 Apr 54, onto the ice cap, about one and one half miles from the crash site. On landing, he was dragged almost a quarter of a mile over rough ice before he was able

to collapse his parachute. Using a URC-4 Radio, Sgt Holder advised the pilot of the SA-16, "Don't drop any more people. The wind is too strong, about forty knots." Just as this message was received another Para-rescue Specialist also jumped. Supplies were dropped to Sgt Holder and he immediately set up his camp. The terrain was solid, clear ice, so hard that steel tent pegs bent when driven into it. It was not possible to build an ice house because the ice saw would not cut the ice. After much difficulty, the barren land tent was finally erected. The next morning the winds had subsided and Sgt Holder proceeded to the wreckage. Travel on the steep, icy slopes required tremendous effort. At one point Sgt Holder spent three hours in traveling a quarter of a mile. At the crash site, Sgt Holder found no survivors and proceeded with the task of recovering the remains. After a day and a half, the weather suddenly became very bad with high winds, low temperatures, and very restricted visibility. Sgt Holder was forced to stay in his shelter almost continuously for eight days. At one time he was unable to go outside the tent for a period of sixty-seven hours. Wind velocities during this period were frequently in excess of one hundred miles per hour and the temperature remained at zero or below. Supplies ran dangerously low, since the weather prevented the planned re-supply of the campsite by aerial drop. Sgt Holder was forced to ration his food and his "canned heat", his only source of warmth. Supplies finally were dropped on the eighth day, during a break in the weather, and on the eleventh day, 8 May 1954, the weather improved and Sergeant Holder was evacuated by helicopter.

3. a. Technical Sergeant, Para-rescue Technician - 92170, 55th Air Rescue Squadron.
b. Staff Sergeant Robert H. Christensen,
4. The service of Technical Sergeant Elliott Holder, subsequent to the act for which this award is recommended, has been honorable.
5. a. No supporting official records inclosed.
b. One (1) eyewitness statement inclosed.
6. Three (3) copies of a proposed citation are inclosed.
7. No other recommendations for awards to Technical Sergeant Holder are pending.
8. a. No previous award of decoration for the act described in par 2 above has been made.
b. No previous decorations awarded.
9. Award is not posthumous and the recipient is not missing in action or a prisoner of war.

Incls:

1. Proposed citation
2. Eyewitness statement

MICHAEL V. PEDULLA
Major, USAF
Commander

HERE IS A CAREER NCO WHO HAS
BEEN IN THE ARMY AND NAVY,
BUT PREFERS THE AIR FORCE...

S/Sgt STANLEY CROUCH
51ST ARS NARSARSSUAK AFB



JUMPED WITH 82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION,
SICILY, JULY '43... INJURED IN PARA-RESCUE
JUMP WHILE WITH 1ST ARS, PANAMA, 1950...

★ ★

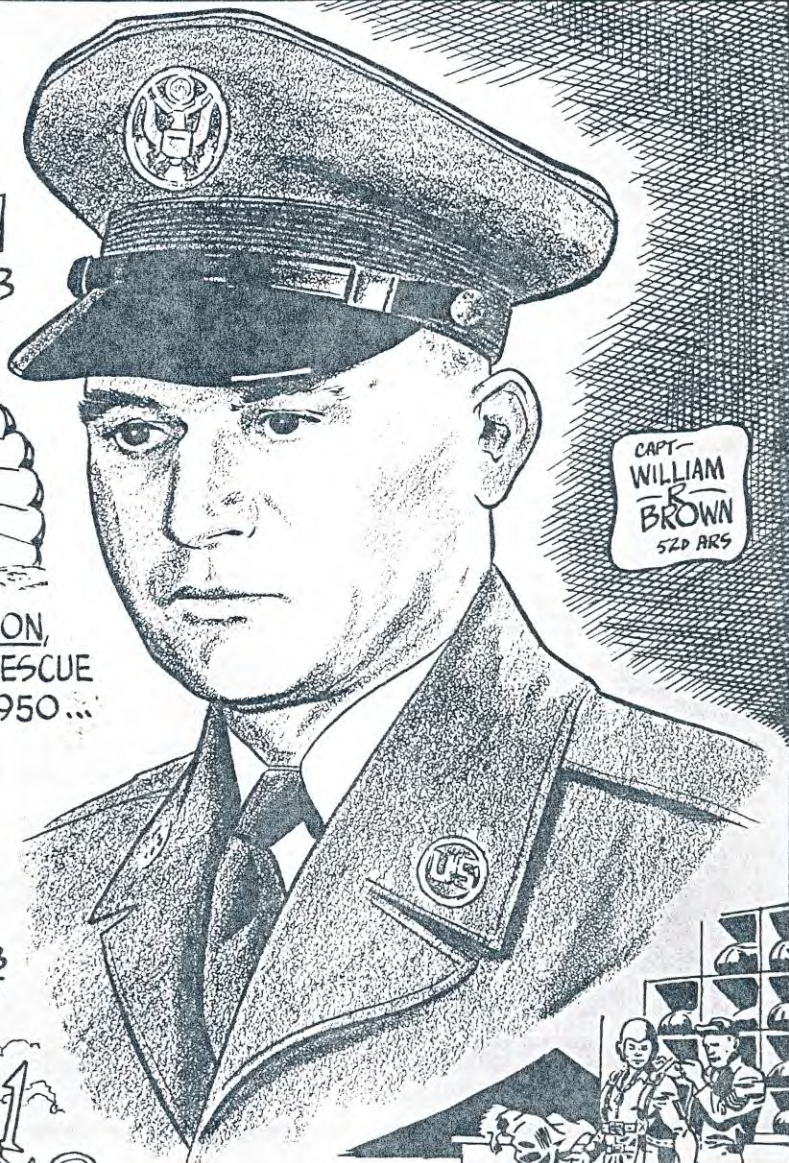
GUNNER'S MATE
ON BATTLESHIP
"MISSOURI" 1946
INITIATED INTO
SHELLBACK CLUB
WITH PRESIDENT
TRUMAN...



IN AIR RESCUE SINCE
1948... SERVED WITH
10TH ARS, ALASKA... 46TH ARS,
WESTOVER... 1ST ARS, PANAMA
... 48TH ARS, MAXWELL... AND
49TH ARS, SELFRIDGE...



PERSONAL EQUIPMENT
SPECIALIST WITH 51ST
ARS, NARSARSSUAK...
AN EXPERT ON PARACHUTES
AND SURVIVAL EQUIPMENT...



CAPT-
WILLIAM
BROWN
52^D ARS

