

NEXT ISSUE
OCT. 27

DEADLINE
OCT. 20
NOON



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ARS Pararescuemen Plan Mercury Recovery Project

Fifty-six Air Rescue Service pararescuemen are in training today as SCUBA divers in preparation for America's first earth-orbiting manned space flight -- the selected astronaut's final hope if anything goes wrong.

Special techniques developed by ARS will enable the pararescuemen to leap from hovering aircraft while wearing complete SCUBA equipment and land within yards of the Mercury capsule at any point on the world's seas.

The rescue men carry specially designed flotation devices to be attached to the one-ton capsule within minutes of reaching it. The equipment will stabilize the vehicle and keep its escape hatch above water.

In both cases cones were secured within 15 minutes after being spotted by the rescue crews.

ARS became America's ace-in-the-hole for its recovery program in 1959 after the National Aeronautic and Space Administration, overall boss of Project Mercury, requested the MATS service to prepare techniques for planned Mercury recovery operations.

Today the OAFB-based ARS headquarters controls more than 48 aircraft with special receivers able to pick up a capsule signal from a distance of 60 miles. Present plans call for all these aircraft to be deployed or on standby when Project Mercury lofts its earth-circling flight.

After completing his circuit, the astronaut is expected to land in one of nine pre-planned impact areas and be picked up by surface ship.

But if emergency disrupts

that plan, or performance becomes erratic and the astronaut falls elsewhere in the world, his life may well be in the capable hands of MATS' Air Rescue Service.

In those moments the patient planning and training during boring flight and careful practice jumps will bear fruit when ARS men snap their hawsers aboard the capsule and report "All secure."

