

All Alaskans Proud Of U. S. Para-Medics

(Times-Post News Service)

LATOUCHE, ALASKA, — A man stopped his team of dogs and sled on this remote Prince William Sound island today and tramped out a double "L" in the deep snow.

"L L" meant all was well.

It was in answer to a message streamer dropped from an Air Force rescue squadron Albatross.

"If you require a doctor, tramp out 'I,' medical supplies, 'II,' food and water, 'F,' fuel, 'L.' If all is well tramp out 'LL,'" read the message from the plane.

The lumbering Albatross circled 200 feet above the ground, then wagged its wings and flew on to other islands in the bay — to miners' camps, prospectors' shacks, to fishing villages, Indian and Eskimo settlements and tiny towns on the Alaskan mainland.

Since Friday's earthquake, tidal waves and devastating Alaskan fires — and for at least another week — 28 Californian airmen and para-medics from Hamilton Air Force Base are flying thousands of miles daily in four mercy planes.

They're the anges of Alaska's vast wilderness.

One crew of the 41st Air Rescue and I flew more than 1,000 miles on a day-long mission.

Maj. Bob Freshwater, operations officer, detailed the mission to Pilot John Holm, para-medics Bob Loud and Randolph Smith, and crew.

"There's an Office of Special Intelligence agent missing near

Sterling. Check out that area then fly up College Fiord above Whittier where three miners haven't been heard from since the quake.

"Check every cabin, every village and every settlement you see. Then fly up the Copper River near Chitina where a natural dam is supposed to have been created by an avalanche."

Settlers along the length of the Copper River have reported the river's current beneath its three-foot ice cap has stopped flowing.

If a natural dam is blocking its flow, it could spill over and flood those who live along its shores.

We flew the length of the Kenai Peninsula finding no sign of the missing OSI agent. We tried to fly through narrow Whittier Pass to get up College Fiord but turned back in a blinding white out of white clouds, snow and snow covered mountains.

Another whiteout over the Harding Ice Field and finally a swing south across frozen lakes, muskeg and tundra islands into the gulf and back up over the Prince William Sound. Weather also cancelled the trip up Copper River.

But the men of the 41st who risk their lives each time airborne in the winter wilds of Alaska still chalked up a successful day.

They located snow slides blocking rural roads, the Seward Highway and the Alaska Railroad. Countless settlements like Latouche were checked.

"Everything looks good. Horses feeding. Snowshoe tracks leading to each cabin. A few people looking up and waving,"

repeated co-pilot Bill Wolfe to Captain Holm as they checked village after village.

So far scores of stranded rural Alaskans, several of them injured, have been spotted by the airmen, who in turn have guided Army and Air Force helicopters in to the rescue.

If a person on the ground should indicate someone is critically injured, the para-medics on each flight are prepared to jump in and render immediate aid.

Para-medics are members of a little-known elite group.

Only 70 young men in the nation are para-medics. They're skilled scuba divers, jumpers, trained medically to perform everything up to major surgery and experts in survival techniques.

And the Air Force rescue squads are unique too. The United States has an even dozen, the 41st being the only on the west coast.

They'll fly anywhere at any time — land on ice, snow, water, anyplace they can squeeze their planes on mercy missions.

All Alaskans are tipping their hats to the men of the squadron and to the para-medics who flew up from California to rescue miners, trappers, natives and others in inaccessible areas.

Many coral-reef fishes change colors at night, presumably to make themselves Tiny pigment contract to reveal