

In a land where the airplane is used more than the automobile, a five-man pararescue team is on constant alert to assist those who challenge the terrain and weather of our 49th state.



those angels in

NEAR the top of the saddle between the two peaks sprawled the wreckage.

One wing straddled the ridge. The other, battered by the impact, had slid some 50 feet down the mountainside. Relatively undamaged, the twin rudders and rear fuselage of the civilian aircraft formed the third corner of a macabre triangle. In the center, where the cockpit and engines used to be, lay the blackened residue left by explosion and fire.

No signs of life were visible from the circling C-123.

From the position of the downed aircraft, it was evident that it had hit a downdraft while crossing the ridge and was slammed into the saddle dipping between the two rugged mountains.

Aboard the C-123 *Provider* of the 5017th Operations Squadron at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, the pilot reasoned a similar fate awaited any helicopter attempting to land or hover over the area. Time involved in penetrating the rough terrain made ground rescue attempts impossible. There was only one way to get to the crash scene.

The Jump

A rear door of the *Provider* opened and a bundle tumbled out, blossoming into a small parachute. It was a spotter chute, released by pararescuemen TSgt. Frederick E. Springborn and SSgt. Kenneth S. Winn. It would determine the wind drift over the drop area. On ensuing upwind passes over the crash, both airmen, loaded down with equipment, including helmets and medical kits, hooked up their static lines and parachuted from the C-123.

The ground comes up fast when you are carrying extra baggage.

As each man smacked onto the frozen earth he disengaged and recovered his chute. Communications with the *Provider* were immediately established by means of a portable radio.

Assessing their situation, Springborn and Winn found they had come down in a depression some 1,500 feet below the crashed plane. Leaving their heavier equipment behind, but plainly marked, the two sergeants began their ascent up the shale and undergrowth that covered the mountainside.

This particular episode has no happy ending. After the strenuous climb to the accident scene, the two airmen found among the debris the charred remains of the two occupants of the ill-fated aircraft. As happens in many missions of this type, there was no actual rescue, only the collection of effects and the return of the victims' bodies.

Big Men in Big Country

Five airmen form the pararescue section of the 5017th Operations Squadron. They are responsible in their specialty for covering the 586,400 rugged square miles which make up the state of Alaska. Among the five, they assisted in the rescue of 459 persons during more than 250 mercy missions flown last year.

Rescue operations are big business in the 49th state. With a population of less than 250,000 spread throughout the immense area, a person can get lost easily. Simply wandering off a road or path can have dangerous consequences. Only a scant network of high-



Three members of the Alaskan Air Command pararescue team. Left, SSgt. David L. Gray, Scuba qualified for icy water. Center, SSgt. Kenneth S. Winn, had meeting with grizzlies. Right, TSgt. Frederick E. Springborn, a walk at 37 below.

by TSgt. DONALD W. COBLE
The Airman Staff

baggy pants

ways connects major interior cities with local road systems and the state's only railroad extends a mere 540 miles. Travel by air is the major means of transport. To emphasize this point, this sparsely populated state has more than 10 percent of the world's seaplanes, 690 airfields, and more planes per capita than any other state in the Union.

Pit the average civilian light aircraft against trackless terrain and unpredictable weather over long-distance flights, add the hundreds of Air Force operational flights in the region, and accidents are bound to occur. Among the geographical flight hazards are 11 major mountain ranges with 18,000 square miles of glaciers.

Rescue Coordination Centers combine the talents of military, civilian, and volunteer agencies to conduct rescue efforts.



Cognizant of the perils of flight in this environment, civil and military officials have combined to form Rescue Coordination Centers. As soon as notification is received that an emergency exists, centers are alerted and take over direction and monitoring of the rescue effort. Through this system, the combined forces of the military, state police, and local law enforcement agencies, FAA, Civil Air Patrol, and other volunteer groups are coordinated into an efficient working body. Elmen-dorf's pararescue team serves as an important part of the Air Force contribution to the centers.

In addition to Springborn and Winn, other members of the team are TSgt. Percy J. Blatchford, a full-blooded Eskimo; SSgt. David L. Gray, and A1C Richard A. Pamburn. Sergeant Springborn is NCOIC.

Although the entire team is jump qualified, parachuting into an accident scene is a somewhat unusual type of operation. Most emergency calls are handled by H-21 helicopters which can normally make pickups by landing or by using their powered slings. Depending on the mission, one or two pararescuemen ride a chopper. As aircrew members, they are able to give medical treatment, paradrop supplies, perform the actual save, or aid in any other phase of the rescue mission.

Two airmen of the team are always on alert. One stands hangar alert and must be ready to go with complete equipment within five minutes. The second man must be within reach by telephone and accessible to the base within a short time.

Employment

When the operations squadron is initially informed of a mission, it is usually impossible to know if a pararescueman will be needed. The unit's C-123s and H-21s are not capable of landing or hovering under all conditions of terrain, weather, and altitude. However, many of these restrictions do permit safe parachuting. Therefore, the assumption is made that pararescue services may be used.

Most wrecks are sighted by search aircraft. Viewing the accident from altitude at better than 100 knots normally confirms little except pinpointing the location. If there are persons still alive in the wreckage, that fact usually must be determined by someone on the ground. Instant death is not a steadfast rule in light aircraft accidents. Exposure and shock brought on by burns, fractures, amputations, or crushing, are major mortality factors. Death by exposure or shock takes time. Speed is then of essence to the pararescueman. The faster he can get to the accident scene, the better chance he has to save lives.

In addition to terrain and weather features, nature has other means of frustrating a rescue effort. Two years ago, Sergeant Winn was preparing to jump to the scene of a civilian plane crash near the base of a mountain northeast of Anchorage. Just as he was about to leave the rescue aircraft, three grizzly bears approached the accident scene. Now parachuting is hazardous duty in itself, but to compound the danger by leaping into the arms of one of Alaska's ferocious grizzlies is quite another thing.

powerful landing lights of a C-123 illuminate the scene during rescue of C-47 crew down in Alaskan wasteland.



Without firearms aboard, the C-123 was forced to turn and head for a nearby radar site to pick up weapons. After landing at the site, the weather closed in and operations were suspended for the day.

On the following day, a helicopter arrived to assist in the mission. Winn climbed aboard with a carbine. Arriving at the crash scene it was found that the bruin population had increased to six. The chopper made a number of low passes over the downed aircraft and succeeded in scaring the bears away. However, the harm had been done. Upon alighting from the helicopter, Winn, with carbine in hand, raced to the crashed craft only to find the badly mauled remains of the occupants.

Whether the grizzlies had killed the victims or not, pararescue team members began insisting on obtaining high-powered sidearms for their rescue work. Winn admits that even the carbine would have been of little value in tackling the huge bears. Now each man carries a .44 Magnum, one of the world's most powerful hand guns. With this fistfull of might, the pararescuers are reasonably assured of protection, even against bears.

Training is Tough

The arctic pararescueman is a composite mountaineer, paratrooper, medical technician, guide, and aircrew member. Rigid training standards set down by the Alaskan Air Command are geared to keep the airmen at peak proficiency in each aspect of their trade. Scope of required knowledge includes rope-crossing ravines, crevasses, and streams, and unrelated subjects ranging from nursing techniques, prenatal and postnatal care for mother and baby, to legal aspects concerning the disposition of human remains.

To insure that the airmen are up to snuff in their jobs, the command insists that they participate in a field training mission at least once every 45 days.

Recently on one such exercise Sergeants Springborn and Blatchford parachuted into a remote area to the scene of a simulated crash. On the ground they treated two airmen with mock injuries. A helicopter airlifted the "victims" back to the base. Blatchford and Springborn were left to their own devices for the return trip. For four days the twosome battled the elements, including temperatures that fell to 37 degrees below zero before they finally arrived back at the base. They were observed daily by helicopter, for safety's sake, but no

help was offered them. Four days of snowshoeing through arctic wilderness provided convincing and realistic seasoning for the two sergeants.

During actual missions or training exercises, the remainder of the team must take up the slack and continue the alert function. Sergeant Winn recalls a 23-day stretch in which he and a teammate participated in 36 missions. Supper was left waiting at his home for 11 straight days in a row.

Although the 5017th Operations Squadron has the big job of airlifting cargo around the state, it has the dual mission of performing rescue operations. This can become a sizeable workload, especially in the spring, when planes, helicopters, and rescuemen get a real workout. River ice begins to break up and flow downstream. In shallows and narrow spots, the ice piles up and forms dams in the river. The backed-up water inundates many native villages yearly and the only means of evacuation is by air. As a result of this and similar types of operations, there are many Eskimos and Indians who have flown in airplanes but have never ridden in a car.

Hunters and fishermen are also of great concern to the rescuemen. Attempting to get into some near inaccessible spot to catch a big trout or bag a prize trophy, the sportsmen suffer minor accidents or are caught in storms. It is up to pararescuemen to get to them, treat them, and arrange for evacuation.

Remarkable Save

Sergeant Springborn, who has spent over 12 years in Alaska, has participated in innumerable rescue missions. A few years ago he jumped near Eureka onto a 7,000-foot-high mountain to aid a couple with three young children. The family had crashed in a small plane. Parachuting from an SA-16 into a 40-knot wind, Springborn landed in waist-deep snow.

He made his way to the crash scene, where the family had been curled up in sleeping bags for the last 24 hours at temperatures ranging from 20 to 30 below. He treated the wife for a broken hip, an 18-month-old

Carrying his medical kit, and equipped with a sidearm, pararescueman joins pilot in dash for helicopter as rescue mission gets under way.

child for a broken leg, and the other two tots for lacerations. Additional medical supplies and survival gear were paraded to him. Finally after eight hours the wind died down enough to allow a helicopter to land and pick up the party. The family would have surely perished if the rescue had not been performed.

This summer the range of operations conducted by the Elmendorf pararescue section will probably be expanded. Sergeant Gray and newly arrived Airman Pamburn are both Scuba qualified. Their mission will now include underwater activities.

Training and peak physical conditioning keep injuries to the pararescuemen to a minimum despite their hazardous duties. However, they are sometimes incurred. Sergeant Winn was aboard a helicopter when its engine cut out. Coming down by auto-rotation, the chopper descended rapidly and hit on a 30-degree grade. The machine flipped over, tearing the external gas tanks loose. They exploded, setting the main tank afire. The pilot and copilot were able to scramble out the forward section of the copter, but Winn and the crew chief had to run through a wall of fire covering the rear exit. Winn sustained the only injury, a gash in his leg, inflicted when the chopper flipped.

Sergeant Blatchford is somewhat of a legend in Alaska. Born and raised there, he served as a member of the Eskimo Scouts during World War II. With over 20 years of active service, he has spent the majority of it right in Alaska. His native Eskimo background proves invaluable in conducting arctic operations.

These five airmen are heroes many times over. Respected by both military and civilian alike, they wear their wings, jump boots, and baggy pants with pride.

And anyone who has ever lain helpless in the wilderness and watched these men descend from the heavens will understand why people call them angels. ★



CAN YOU NAME THE AIRMAN?



FAMILIARITY with military insignia could give you a clue to the identity of this officer. The diamond-shaped devices on his lapels in this World War II photograph indicate his present and some of his areas of responsibility.

He was born in Washington, D. C., on March 1914, and was graduated from McKinley High School there at age 17. He participated in the ROTC program at the University of Maryland where he earned a Bachelor's degree in business administration, and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Army Reserve June 1, 1935. He later earned a Bachelor of Laws degree at Georgetown University Law School, Washington, D. C., and attended courses at Duke University at the Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany.

A year prior to his graduation from law school he passed the District of Columbia bar examination and was admitted to practice before the U. S. District Court. In March 1942 he was admitted to the bar of the U. S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia circuit. He is also licensed to practice before the Tax Court of the United States.

He was called to active duty as a first lieutenant in March 1941 and assigned to the office of the Chief of Finance, U. S. Army. He saw foreign service in World War II in Australia, New Caledonia, and Hawaii. After reverting to inactive status in 1946, he practiced law in Washington, concentrating on real estate, corporate and tax probate law.

In October 1950 he was again called to active duty at this time with Headquarters USAF. He served in many capacities as Deputy Comptroller, Headquarters USAF from September 1954 to August 1957, then was assigned to the Air Proving Ground Center, Elgin AFB, Fla., where he served successively as comptroller and chief of staff.

Later assignments included duty as comptroller, assistant vice commander for Air Force Systems Command, Andrews AFB, Md. In June 1962 he moved west to his present city of assignment. One final promotion. He is presently a brigadier general, having received a temporary promotion to that grade in August 1963.

Can you name this general officer and his current assignment? Turn to page 30 for the answer.