

A C-130 from the 305th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, Air Force Reserve, kept close watch over the rafting reservists, dropping supplies and searching the path of the river for hazards.



To get their patient out of the wilderness,
the PJs had a . . .

LONG ROW HOME

by TSgt. TOM DWYER
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John's face was cool, yet sweat beaded on his forehead. He laid back on the canvas litter while MSgt. Craig Newman, an Air Force Reserve pararescueman, knelt beside him.

They were floating downriver — fast. Craig and two other pararescuemen (PJs) were taking John Hefferon, 13, to medical help, still some 15 miles and several hours away.

When the long trek began that morning, their destination had been only 10 miles away, overland. But scrub oak and deep, thick marshland, combined with humid 89-degree heat, would have made such a trip exhausting and dangerously time-consuming.

With this in mind, Craig and his teammates, TSgts. Jon Hoberg and Mike Miles, chose the river as their way out of the Michigan north country. Now, to keep up with the current, Jon and Mike paddled the raft in strained rhythm.

The three men, members of the 305th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, Air Force Reserve, Selfridge ANG Base, Mich., were on a simulated rescue mission, as realistic as any actual one they had ever participated in. The problem? Find and rescue young John Hefferon.

John was listed as the sole survivor of a light plane crash. For him the fastest, safest, and most comfortable route would be on the river.

Only a few days earlier the two tech sergeants had reported to Selfridge for their two weeks active duty. When the training mission was laid on, Sergeant Newman drove up from his home, south of Detroit, to lead the team.

Early Tuesday morning, while the PJs prepared for an HC-130 flight that would take them to the scene of the "accident," MSgt. George Hefferon, the patient (his son, John), and TSgt. Bob Kelly drove north to the village of Mio, Mich. The elder Hefferon, who is NCOIC of the 305th's PJ section, would—with Kelly's help—monitor the training exercise.

Aboard the HC-130 the rescue

team studied maps of the area and listed rescue alternatives. Even then the river was the obvious route.

"As we flew over the accident area," said Mike Miles, jumpmaster for the mission, "I watched from the flight deck." Others peered from scanner windows in the rear of the plane, searching for the site.

The aircraft commander, Lt. Col. Bob Troshynski, was the one who spotted the "crash site" in a small clearing. The Au Sable River bordered one edge, tall pines the other.

While the rescue aircraft crisscrossed the site, the PJs surveyed the landing zone and tested the wind. Craig Newman and Jon Hoberg were ready. Both were veterans of Southeast Asia, and what they were about to do was all too familiar. Yet, that familiarity didn't breed any nonchalance and their faces reflected the seriousness of the task.

"On final . . . thirty seconds," Troshynski reported on the interphone.

Wind poured through the jump door, as Mike made a last-minute check of the gear worn by his teammates. Below them the river wound its way east.

Craig and John stood, knees and shoulders bent and straining under the weight of more than 100 pounds of gear. With trees and water in the landing zone, each wore a life vest and a padded tree suit as well as a reserve parachute and medical kit strapped to his chest. Their plastic face masks steamed up in the hot, humid air.

As they approached the site, the jumpmaster knelt on both knees, his head stuck out the side of the airplane watching for the exact moment to signal the jump.

"Ten seconds," said the pilot.

Mike motioned Craig to step onto the jump platform, more outside the plane than in. Jon stepped up close behind him. Their yellow nylon static lines were attached to a steel cable just inside the door.

Their faces were absent of expression as they stood motionless, as if thinking their way to the

ground, 1,250 feet below.

"Steady," Mike squawked to the pilot, "Steady . . ."

Seconds before the plane was over the site, Mike slapped Craig on the seat of his jumpsuit. Go! Craig bolted out the door with Jon one step behind him.

Sixty seconds later they were down. "As we got closer to the ground we could see stumps and ruts not visible from the plane," Jon said. "We had to run our chutes about 30 yards past the site to a path near the edge of the field."

John Hefferon was waiting for the jumpers. As soon as he and his father had spotted the HC-130 approaching the field, they had begun preparing the injuries.

Plastic moulage was strapped to John's left leg to simulate open fractures. A red liquid squirted over the "injury" added realism.

Because it was training, the jumpers took time to roll up their parachutes before they examined the patient. They carried medical kits across the rut-riddled and stump-spotted field. Hoberg began treating the fractures while Craig treated for shock and recorded vital signs.

As the HC-130 roared overhead once again, the jumpmaster parachuted to the site, from where he directed the air-drop of supplies.

The first medical problem was solved quickly. Young John, the three PJs, and the two training monitors carried gear to their campsite. It was the middle of the afternoon, but thick storm clouds darkened the area.

"In a real rescue operation," Hefferon explained, "they would make sure their patient was comfortable. Then they'd make the same decision they did for training."

"Keeping our patient comfortable is always our primary concern," said Craig, the team leader. "Rather than try to navigate the stormy river in the dark and take the chance of causing more pain and discomfort, we'd camp." A nearby clearing, overlooking the river, would serve well for a one-night campsite for the group.



Mike and Jon began to set up camp while Craig tended to their patient. On the medical chart he entered: "Open fractures of the left femur, tibia and fibula." The intravenous feeding, started in the field, was set up again, the needle only taped to the boy's arm.

It was hot and sticky, and black flies buzzed about the men as they hurriedly set up their camp. Clouds, growing thicker and darker, rolled in from the west.

Before the first tents were up, large raindrops began to splatter the site. Wind began to churn and force its way through the trees and across the river. It was soon followed by thunder and lightning while the first flickers of flame in their campfire quickly turned to smoke and clung to the ground. It was going to be a long night. Wet wood would have to keep the fire alive. They'd eat supper cold out of C-ration tins. A warming cup of hot chocolate for their "patient" and coffee for themselves, heated over a can of Sterno, would be the only satisfying part of it.

It was only 11:30 p.m. when the two PJs, resting fitfully in sleeping bags, and sheltered only by tents on the hot, muggy night, were awakened abruptly. "He's stopped breathing," Craig yelled into the night as he bent over his patient to begin mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. The simulated problems weren't waiting until morning any more than a real patient's problem would.



Top: The pararescuemen bundle up their parachutes in the Michigan north country.

ABOVE: The "patient," 13-year-old John Hefferon, sips a cup of hot chocolate by campfire under the supervision of Sergeant Newman.

Jon and Mike struggled out of their bags and rushed through the rain, their stocking feet soaking up rainwater along the way.

Mike began administering closed heart massage.

Jon knew he couldn't do anything to help, right then. Later, maybe, he might have to relieve one of them. For now, he foraged for firewood and stayed close-by in case he should be needed.

George Hefferon had trained a lot for the 305th and he watched their actions closely now. Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and closed-



Sergeant Newman (left) and TSgt. Mike Miles study their patient on the raft.

heart massage were the correct treatments for the problem.

Craig and Mike sat back on their haunches and breathed a sigh of relief, their shirts clinging to their wet bodies.

The rain finally stopped. Hopefully the dawn would bring a good day for the trip down the river.

They slept soundly.

With morning, the sun forced its way through a thick, humid sky. Patches of blue were beginning to separate the clouds. The campsite was still soaked through. On an actual rescue, most of the gear would be left behind and retrieved later, but now, they loaded wet tents, tarps, and packs onto two trucks

and headed for the river.

Nine hours of rafting lay ahead. The trio prepared to lower their patient down the steep side of a muddy knoll and into the raft. The litter was propped up at John's head and an oar served as a post on which to hang the intravenous bag. Craig stepped into the stern of the raft and knelt to examine his patient, a stethoscope hanging from his neck. Young Hefferon lay quiet, relaxed, and comfortable, obviously enjoying the trip. The two monitors, in a second raft, stayed slightly ahead of the PJs.

They paddled the raft with thin oars meant for rowing. The river, rushing eastward at more than



ABOVE: Using a lensatic compass, Sergeant Miles charts a course through the dense growth. RIGHT: Throughout the trip, the pararescuemen conducted medical training aboard the raft. Here, Sergeant Newman (left) and TSgt. Jon Hoberg discuss a medical technique.



eight knots, was swelled from the heavy rain. Loose logs and brush floated past the reservists as they made their way downriver.

It was quiet for the most part. The only sounds were rushing water breaking over dead branches and the oars rippling the surface of the water.

Craig had asked the HC-130 to stay nearby in case they needed help. It, too, could be heard. The night before, the aircrew had searched the path of the river to make sure there weren't rapids or other hazards lurking around a quiet bend in the Au Sable. On a real mission one of the PJs would have talked to the crew, relayed the patient's condition, and requested any needed supplies.

Later in the afternoon, the plane returned, and the PJs directed the airdrop of supplies for their training benefit as well as the aircrew's.

Mike and Jon stroked hard to pull alongside the lead raft. "Suppose your patient were to move and pull the I-V lines loose?" George asked.

Craig directed his partners to "get to shore." They were lucky. The raft was close to the north bank and it took only a couple of hard strokes on the right oar to get the raft where it could be pulled ashore.

"With the raft steady," Craig said, "I could replace the I-V needle."

Jon decided to play the antagonist. "What if the vein had collapsed?" he asked. But Craig wasn't going to be that easy to stump, and Jon wasn't going to just sit back on one elbow and smile.

"Let's try a foot," Craig said motioning for Jon to get to work. Hoberg pulled the boot off the youngster's left foot and removed his sock. Craig indicated he would have prepared a fresh needle and been ready to insert it just below the ankle.

After a few more questions from Jon that led to other demonstrations of medical knowledge by both Craig and Mike, the raft was pushed back into the river. It moved swiftly, with little effort on

the part of its crew, except to keep it in the middle of the current. Later, the afternoon sun bore down and perspiration glistened on the three men. As they tended their patient and paddled, they talked of other missions.

Like the one in February 1972, the most recent rescue jump for any of the team. Mike had jumped then, 10 miles south of the Grand Canyon.

"We'd been called to look for a crashed civilian Cessna 172 with four passengers," Mike recalled.

It was early Sunday morning. But, by the time Mike reported to Luke AFB, Ariz., the mission had been changed. The Civil Air Patrol had located the wreckage, so he and MSgt. Wally Curtis were tasked with getting the four passengers to safety.

Unlike this training mission, Mike didn't have the luxury of a river to float on. The patients had to be carried overland.

Luckily, only one man was injured badly enough to have to be carried. But, he weighed 200 pounds. And that wasn't all — the litter was damaged when it was air-dropped. "After we treated our patient and made him as comfortable as possible, we had to 'treat' the litter," Mike said. He and his partner put a splint on the broken strut to make sure it was serviceable for the long haul.

"We got them out, but believe me, the raft is easier on everybody," Mike noted.

Mike packed a pipe with cherry-blend tobacco and lit it while Jon and Craig talked about their experiences.

Both had seen plenty of action in Southeast Asia, Jon in Thailand and Vietnam and Craig in the Republic of the Philippines.

On one mission out of Thailand, Jon was seriously injured. As a result he spent two years in a VA hospital. Plastic surgery has partially repaired injuries to his face but it's still partly paralyzed. Consequently, he's on a 100-percent disability pension from the VA.

Because of his VA benefit provisions, Jon receives no pay when

he flies and jumps with the reservists.

Craig, flying out of the Republic of the Philippines, did a lot of his work over water. That's something he's still familiar with in the Reserve unit.

"There's a lot of water in the area covered by the 305th," he said. "Basically, the midwest, north-eastern U.S., and Canada. We train at least twice a year to jump into water, normally more."

The 305th has also been outfitted for water jumps in the winter. In addition to cold weather unisuits, their equipment includes inflatable rafts with canopies and heaters.

"Reservists jump a lot," remarked Mike. "That's probably why we are always top contenders in the jumpfest at Hurlburt Field, Fla."

"It's not as much of a job to us because it's a break in our normal routine," he says. For Mike, that means getting away from the bank where he sells computer services. For Jon it's getting off the Arizona campus where he majors in electrical engineering and Chinese. But Craig normally brings a little of his work with him. He's one of the first physician's assistants accredited in Michigan.

Canoeists paddled swiftly by the reservists and vacationers on the river banks waved and smiled. The training was over.

It had been successful. They had been challenged from the very start. Although weather had hampered their efforts, they still succeeded. Now all they had to do was load up and head home, 200 miles south. Most slept as the trucks sped along Interstate 75.

The next day was filled with sorting and drying their equipment. After a night in the rain and a day on the river, it needed it.

Later that afternoon the phone rang on George's desk. An F-100 had crashed somewhere in Michigan. The PJs didn't know yet if they'd actually respond. If they did it wouldn't be training. But because of their constant training, the PJs of the 305th were, as the Air Force Reserve says, "Ready Now!"

