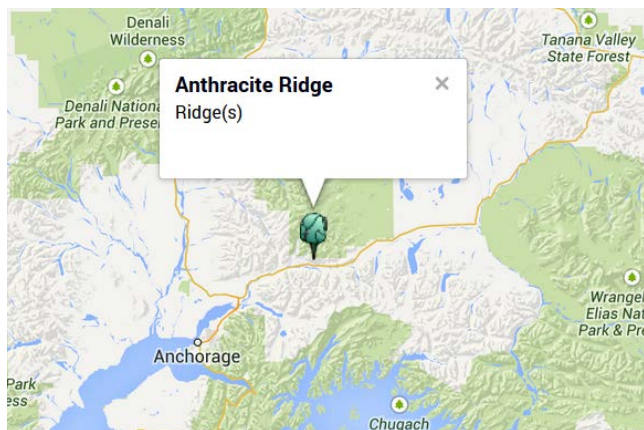


This Day in ARS History – 8 June

On this date in 1976, five pararescuemen assigned to the 71st ARRS Elmendorf AFB, Alaska launched on a SAR to rescue survivors of a Civil Air Patrol DeHaviland DH-2 with 3 persons on board, that had crashed on the Anthracite Ridge mountain, Alaska.

The weather at the crash site was mostly closed in by low cloud cover; constant heavy rain; snowing at night; air temperature variable between 32° and 45° F.; winds WSW 10 to 20 knots; visibility on ground: between 50 and 100 feet (except for short period of high visibility when clouds broke up temporarily).

Because weather was preventing direct access to the crash site by HH-3 helicopter, SMSgt Udo Fischer assembled a ground team to climb up to the crash site. Team members were SSgt Robert LaPointe, A1C Stephen Buerger and A1C Michael Bupnaugurio. The ground team assembled equipment that would support them and survivors for three days. The H-3 alert PJ was A1C Ward Warren. The Alaska State Police sent one Trooper to accompany the PJs.



Alaska CAP DH-2 Beaver

The alert HH-3 crew flew to the crash site and observed that the weather in the area had improved enough to drop the ground team within 100 meters of the crash site.

All five PJs disembarked and headed for victims; litters, blankets and medical kit were taken along. SMSgt. Fischer handled radio and delegated two PJs to each of the two victims.

The victims sat huddled together next to the burned out and smoldering engine; both appeared to have multiple injuries; they were in an obvious state of shock and hypothermic; they were soaking wet from the cold rain and wind; they wore each a thin shirt, a pair of pants and shoes. Both were breathing; no uncontrolled hemorrhaging was visible which could be life-threatening. One man was able to talk intelligently; the other was semiconscious.

There was no smell of fuel fumes; no sign of spilled fuel; the wreckage was smoldering but not burning anymore. The victims received their initial PE and treatment where they

were found. Upon questioning, the talking survivor said that a third person was in the wreckage; he was found by SMSgt. Fischer in the cockpit/cabin area and completely charred beyond recognition and help.

On-Scene treatment of survivors: Upon reaching the survivors and after a quick visual PE, both were covered with blankets to retain remaining body heat; the PE continued. Multiple cuts, contusions, abrasions, and fractures were noted on both victims. Hypothermia appeared to be the life-threatening condition in both victims and required immediate counter-action; the best remedy was to place the victims into the helicopter and turn on the heaters. Since this was the decision, IV procedures were not started until inside the helicopter.

The two survivors were placed on litters (and kept covered with blankets and sleeping bags), and transported onto the helicopter. SSgt. LaPointe and AIC Warren were delegated to treat the injured inflight and return to base. SMSgt. Fischer, AIC Buonaugurio and AIC Buerger were required by helicopter load limitation to remain at the scene to be recovered later on by another flight. They unloaded their field packs and the tent.

Shortly after the H-3 departed, the weather once again covered the mountain in clouds and rain. The PJs remained at the crash site that night. At 1345L, the weather was still IFR with a mixture of rain and snow. SMSgt Fischer that they would walk out to the highway. The team hiked down the mountain through a chute covered with talus. Then they walked through thickets, bush and forest, across several streams toward the highway. During the travel, we noticed many signs and droppings of large moose and bear but did not encounter any of them.

Arriving at the highway, they flagged down a passing car and asked the driver to stop at the next available phone and notify the state police that the rescue team was at milepost 93 and awaiting transportation. At 1710L King 34 circled above the clouds and made radio contact with SMSgt Fischer who was using a PRC-90 survival radio. This was before the days of PJs using SATCOM or cell phones. The HC-130 informed the team that a truck was on the way to pick them up. At 1800L the Trooper arrived and the team was driven back to Elmendorf; arriving late in the evening to drop off gear and go home.

Because the sun did not set in June, after mission completion the team proceeded to an off base bar and celebrated a successful mission with a cold beer.