

# **AIR RESCUE SERVICE**



**FIRST ANNUAL  
PARARESCUE COMPETITION  
FOR  
THE DON FLICKINGER TROPHY**

**29 NOVEMBER - 3 DECEMBER 1954**

**ORLANDO AFB, FLORIDA**

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## THE DON FLICKINGER TROPHY

### A DEDICATION

In 1808, high over Warsaw, Poland, a balloon caught fire. The man it was carrying jumped, jerked and prayed—and reached the ground alive. His name was Jordaki Kuparento. His was the first life to be saved by a parachute.

Since then, countless thousands of airmen owe their lives to the silken canopies that have floated them safely to earth when the machines that carried them aloft failed.

In early August 1943, Lt Colonel Don Flickinger, Sergeant Harold Passey and Corporal William MacKenzie jumped from an airplane flying over an uncharted mountainous area near the China-Burma border. They, too, jumped to save lives but the lives they jumped to save were not their own. They jumped to the aid of twenty souls who had been forced to bail out of a crippled C-46 flying the dangerous run over "the Hump."

News commentator Eric Sevareid was one of the twenty to whose aid Flickinger and the two medics jumped. He stood on the mountain below and watched the plane carrying them make its run—black against the storm clouds. He watched what he presumed to be three bales of cargo tumbling out and three 'chutes open. He later wrote that he, "wondered what could be so important as to necessitate this late trip. Somebody let out a yell—the bales were growing legs." The leg-sprouting bales were, of course, Flickinger, Passey and MacKenzie.

In his book, "Not So Wild a Dream," Sevareid pays the trio a beautiful and eloquent tribute. "Callant," he writes, "is a precious word; they deserve it."

Flickinger was--and is--a doctor; Passey and MacKenzie, medics. Their jumps pioneered a new technique in the field of aerial rescue, a new concept concerning the use of parachutes for saving lives.

The pararescue men of the Air Rescue Service carry on the heroic tradition which Flickinger, Passey and MacKenzie began. Early this year, for example, two parachutists of the Air Rescue Service, Technical Sergeant Elliott Holder and Staff Sergeant Robert Christensen, jumped from an aircraft flying far north of the Arctic Circle. They landed on the Polar ice-cap as a storm closed in around them. Before they were able to collapse their 'chutes they were dragged hundreds of yards across the jagged ice, one almost to his death.

They jumped near the wreckage of a Navy patrol bomber that had crashed on the ice-cap several days earlier. Faint radio signals of undetermined origin, indicated that someone might have survived the crash. Complete evaluation of the wreckage from the air was impossible. There were no areas nearby suitable for landing an aircraft or helicopter. They jumped to determine whether or not there were survivors and, if there were, to bring them aid.

They found that none of the nine crew members had survived the crash but this grim discovery in no way alters the fact that Holder and Christensen jumped to save lives. They spent 12 days on the ice-cap in sub-zero temperatures sustained chiefly by their courage and their knowledge of arctic survival techniques. That the men they jumped to save had all met instant death when their plane plowed into the icy mountain cannot detract from the heroism of the two Air Rescuemen. Their selfless act was in the great tradition.

The heroism of Holder and Christensen is not uncommon. It is, in fact, typical of this special breed—the pararescue men of the Air Rescue Service. In a proud organization devoted to its motto, "that others may live," they are of the elite. It is fitting that the trophy symbolic of supremacy among the pararescue teams of this world-wide rescue organization be named the Don Flickinger Trophy.

## PARARESCUE PIONEER

-A Personal Account by Brig. Gen. Don Flickinger of  
His Historic Jump into the Wilderness-

During the spring and summer of 1943 (operating in the Assam area with headquarters at Chabua - India-China Wing Air Transport Command, we formed a small jungle rescue unit composed of medical and other personnel picked especially for their physical stamina, resourcefulness and knowledge of the jungle, and general survival procedures to proceed into the jungles over land and rescue downed aircrews. Several rescue missions of this type were successfully carried out, aircraft being used to transport the team to the landing strip nearest the site. Later, the aircraft would return to pick up the team and rescue personnel. Various supplies were air dropped to the expedition as weather and/or enemy action permitted.

Provisions were made early for air drop of a rescue team to a site inaccessible by the overland route and a system of signalling was developed which allowed survivors to signal to the search plane concerning the status of their party and their needs - especially as regards medical care.

On approximately 3 or 4 August 1943, a C-46 carrying a total of 21 crew and passengers got in trouble and parachuted out everyone after radioing an SOS. Among the passengers were civilian OSI and State Department officials enroute to China, one of whom had intimate knowledge of the war plan for the coming North Burma campaign. One or two high ranking Chinese army officers also were aboard.

The Commanding General of the India-China Wing (General Alexander) directed that we establish contact immediately with the survivors and institute necessary rescue procedures. We had no accurate plot on the crash and had only a general idea

from their last position report where the plane might be, namely in so-called uncharted territory on the map in the northern portion of the Naga Hills. It appeared that the most expeditious means of getting to the survivors was by paradrop into the area.

I decided to volunteer for the reason that I was the only medical officer who had made a previous parachute jump (1943 in Hawaii - testing sea rescue and survival gear and techniques). Two medical corpsmen, Sergeant Harold Passey and Corporal William MacKenzie, volunteered also and the three of us were airlifted by C-47 flown by Major George Katzman (now of American Airlines) to the search site approximately 150 - 200 miles from our advanced base at Chabua.

After 3 - 4 hours of search we finally picked up a ground signal display on the side of a hill in the jungle on a small plateau near some native huts. The signal read "need urgent medical care." Since the position indicated at least a ten or twelve day trip over land through unexplored head-hunter territory, the decision was easy to make. I told my medical corpsmen that I did not feel that they should jump with me but they would have none of this and followed me on the bailout.

Our pilot, Major Katzman, was a major factor in our landing on the plateau rather than down the mountainside. He gauged the wind with great accuracy and we bailed out on his signal at about 800 feet above the plateau and we all landed within easy reach of the camp.

We found the group alive except for the co-pilot who had not cleared the plane with his chute and crashed with it. The radio operator, T/Sgt Oswalt, had a broken leg, another passenger had a broken ankle and there were six other personnel with less severe injuries.

Without the help of Sgt Passey and Corp MacKenzie the job of administering the necessary medical care and caring generally for the survivors would have been extremely difficult but with these two it was relatively easy. We had jumped with our own constructed packs and were well equipped with all necessary supplies and equipment. In truth, the net success of the entire rescue mission was largely due to the courage, stamina, resourcefulness and spirit of these two medical corpsmen and it is impossible to accord them too much credit in this, their first undertaking as pararescue medical personnel....

I cannot say too much for, or praise too highly, the courage and complete unselfishness of those men, officers, nco's and enlisted men who worked in the first air rescue squadron at Chabua, Assam. There can never be recognized nor proclaimed a full and true account of the many acts of heroism which they performed routinely and regularly as a necessary part of their work.

## PARARESCUE TEAM CAPABILITY

Countless successful Pararescue Team operations are a daily tribute to the highly effective training of the Pararescue and Survival School of the Military Air Transport Service. Following a recent reduction in the number of Pararescue Teams and the subsequent reporting of surplus personnel, it was determined that no further justification existed for this training. As a result the school was deactivated 24 December 1953.

Air Rescue Service Commanders should be fully aware of the capabilities and limitations of their presently assigned Pararescue Teams. As a guide to a better understanding of these capabilities and limitations a brief summary of the primary aims of the training received should be most helpful.

Pararescue and Survival Training provided Air Rescue Service with personnel qualified in precision parachuting, administration of medical aid, and the care and rescue of survivors in all climatic areas under all conditions.

After careful screening and selection, the Pararescue and Survival trainee was sent to the Airborne School, Fort Benning, Georgia, for a three to five weeks basic airborne course. There he received instruction in parachuting techniques and completed five "live" jumps, qualifying as a rated parachutist.

Specifically, training at Fort Benning included: (1) Demonstrations of physical ability; (2) Development of emotional stability; (3) Demonstrated ability to perform parachute jumps from troop carrier aircraft into open fields, carrying field equipment and combat gear; (4) Demonstrations of familiarity with procedures for emergency landings; (5) familiarity with the care, handling, storage, packing and other characteristics of operation of the troop-type parachute assembly.

Upon completion of the Basic Airborne Course, the student proceeded to the School of Aviation Medicine at Gunter Air Force Base, Alabama, to attend the Air Rescue Specialist Medical Course. During the four-week course, the trainee received instruction in all types of advanced First Aid, including: (1) How to determine nature and extent of injuries. (2) How to render advanced First Aid. (3) How to describe survivor's condition over radio to physician so as to receive and execute physician's recommended measures. (4) How to protect disaster victims from environmental hazards.

Successful completion of the ARS Specialist Medical Course qualified the student for additional training at the Pararescue and Survival School. The ten-week curriculum of the Pararescue and Survival School had six general areas of instruction for the trainee. For example, before graduation he was indoctrinated in the physical characteristics and environmental problems found in arctic, desert, tropical, coastal, and mountain terrains. Given basic information of native psychology of various areas, he is able to improvise in the field as the necessity arises.

For tropical field training the Pararescue airman actually lived in the Everglades of Florida. Coastal survival instruction was conducted at Boca Grande Key, an uninhabited island about 10 miles southwest of Key West, Florida. The desert survival and mountain climbing training was conducted in the Joshua Tree National Monument area of the Mojave Desert, California.

The trainee gained his arctic indoctrination near McCall, Idaho, where winter and summer conditions are similar to polar conditions. Before completing his training, he learned about the capabilities and limitations of the Rescue team and its equipment and proved his ability to select landing areas from the air, computed and corrected for existing wind conditions.

The Pararescue airman, besides learning how to survive in the various terrain areas, also learned how to travel. He learned how to read a map and a magnetic compass. Not only did he learn how to live, but also learned how to travel to his destination over rocks, mountains, snow and desert through all types of geographic deviations. In brief, he is able to navigate back to civilization or to pre-determined rendezvous points.

Tracing the rescue operations through its four stages of notification, search, aid and rescue, the Pararescue team members learned the techniques of ground interrogation, land search, entrance into disaster areas, and return of victims to stations of safety. Underlining the phases of training is a constant daily reminder that operational readiness and speed are of the essence.

Since Air Rescue Service is world-wide in scope, working with both national and international civilian and military authorities, Pararescue personnel must know and understand certain legal procedures. In this phase of training, the Pararescue man learned about the correct disposition of human remains and personal effects, and how to mark and safeguard aircraft wreckage.

The curriculum of the Pararescue and Survival School acquainted the Pararescue airman with a host of allied skills dealing with the successful Rescue mission.

The Pararescue men of today have the capability and desire to be a primary rescue facility. He may be called upon to participate in operational missions any minute of day or night--so others may live.