

Wing Talk

EDITED BY
FREDERICK R. NEELY

SEARCH and rescue for unlucky aircraft forced down in isolated spots of the globe are now highly efficient and systematized and will be a welcome holdover from the war to world air travelers.

Many of these operations at present fall to the Air Transport Command, each division of which has problems peculiarly its own. There is a separate technique employed for rescuing bombers from the Greenland Icecap. Likewise, there is a different procedure for picking up crews and passengers who bail out in the Himalayan Hump country.

But up on ATC's Alaskan Division is perhaps the most unusual of all search and rescue organizations. Fort Nelson, far north in British Columbia, is the home of the Parapups. On a 24-hour basis, Eskimo Huskies are alert to leave their comfortable doghouses in the woods, take to the air and be dropped by parachute to bring aid to downed Allied airmen in the bush and ice country.

While much of the experimental work that led to Parapups was doubtless accomplished in Maine, Newfoundland and Labrador, the first detailed application of this rescue operation has come to light on the Alaskan Division. Major Joseph F. Westover of Winnetka, Illinois, came to the conclusion that merely dropping food, clothing and medicine to crash victims was not the ultimate in rescue preparation. Many a ship was forced to crash land on the side of an inaccessible mountain in terrain forbidding to even the finest-equipped ground party. So the most plausible answer was the dropping of fully supplied and self-sustaining dog teams.

It was not easy to train 100-pound pack dogs to jump in pairs under a single 28-foot parachute. There was the problem of temperatures; often the mercury descends to 48 degrees below zero and stays there for days. Snow is several feet



With their 28-foot cargo chute fully opened, Jiggs and Maggie swing free above the wilderness

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Capt. Wm. R. Jacobs, Alaskan Division flight surgeon, prepares to jump with two Parapups. Mask is protection in case he lands in tangled brush

deep at the end of the jump and, most of all, the dogs must reach the ground healthy and ready for action. Each dog must land like a feather.

Two magnificent Huskies, Maggie and Jiggs, were selected for the initial test jump in British Columbia. For days the G.I.s in charge of the Fort Nelson kennels worked to design and produce a special chute harness. The finished product weighed five pounds and was abundantly lined with sheepskin. The rigging was not unlike the parachute harness for airmen—it fits snugly over each dog's back and buckles across his chest and under his tummy. If the pooches are to leap singly, the 24-foot chute is used, while twin jumps call for a 28-foot job, standard for dropping cargo.

Maggie and Jiggs were not enthusiastic guinea pigs. A Canadian-built Norseman monoplane was prepared for the launching of the Parapups. The suspicious Huskies were installed in a rear compartment with the static lines hooked up to their chutes.

There were no blinking lights to tell the dogs when to leap; they were not quite that well trained. A little muscular persuasion had to be used when the Norseman got up to 1,500 feet. Out the open door they tumbled. Tails were seen to curl tightly between their legs as they left the plane. The big chute blossomed above the furry pair and they hit the silk like veterans. Ground observers rushed to where the pair landed and found them none the worse for the experience.

The training program went ahead, and other Huskies at the kennel were indoctrinated. Completely G.I., they have service records, serial numbers, enlistment

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papers and shots against disease. Sentimentalists along the Alaskan Division even proposed that each dog be authorized to wear Parawings after five jumps.

As a matter of standard procedure for Parapupping operations flight surgeon prevents the dogs from the plane. Thus the surgeon is on the ground ready to receive the dogs, unharness them and prepare for business.

Captain William R. Jacobs of Lewiston, Idaho, is the dean of jumping flight surgeons on the Alaskan Division. Twenty-four of his jumps have been to bring relief to crash victims. For this work he was awarded the Air Medal. On one of his jumps, however, Captain Jacobs found a lost pilot dead in the wreckage of his plane, but his pet Eskimo Husky, Sacktime, who always flew with him, was alive and had guarded his master's body for five and a half days. Sacktime's tail was frozen in the ice, and Captain Jacobs had to chop it free. The Husky recovered, and is a highly respected member of the Fort Nelson dog department.

A great part in preparing the Parapup unit was played by Lieutenant David Irwin of Grand Rapids, Michigan, a veteran Husky handler. For ten years Lieutenant Irwin has been an expert in dog-team operations. In 1934 he and his dog team made a 2,000-mile trip across the snow-clad terrain from Aklavik, Canada, to the Baker Lake region. It was Lieutenant Irwin who can be thanked by Maggie and Jiggs for their being selected for the pioneer leap.

THE training of the Parapup Corps is complete, and the dogs are ready for their first mission. As you read this, they may be tumbling out of a C-47 to save the life of some stranded pilot.

The traditional St. Bernard of the Alps with his brandy cask must now concede a rival who hereafter will spectacularly float down from the skies carrying blood plasma, sulfa drugs and penicillin, and then hitch up to a sled and haul the victims to safety.

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