

Antarctica—Pararescue Teams, Atomic Power Title 199

That the Navy practised what it preached was demonstrated to me one week after my arrival, when I watched a team of nine US Navy parachutists showing their skill by jumping from a Hercules flying at a height of 900 m near Williams Field. As the bright orange parachutes drifted down against the pale blue Antarctic sky, I had to shield my eyes against the blinding brilliance of the ice and the snow—covered Mount Erebus in the background. This is the only active volcano in the Antarctic, and a small white cloud at its summit hinted at the volcano's internal activity.

As the parachutists landed, Dr F. Fry, the 30-year old commander of the team sped forward in his tracked ambulance to pick them up. I had talked to him earlier and he explained to me that weekly practice jumps were normal during the then prevailing 'warm' season. In case of a crash of a Hercules plane, the procedure was to try and land another Hercules as nearby as possible. This was often practicable because the terrain was predominantly flat ice in the Antarctic. If not, a Helicopter would be loaded into the rescue Hercules, flown to suitable terrain as near as possible, and the rescue team would jump from the helicopter, if it could not land near the crash.

All members of the team were fully trained in first aid, ice survival and crevasse rescue. Dr Fry spoke to me about the most recent helicopter crash which I reported the day I arrived, when speed had become vital, as all survival clothing had been burned in the ensuing magnesium fire. As a result the survivors were doing well in McMurdo's own hospital and had not to be evacuated to Christchurch. My story about the practice jumps I had witnessed was headlined in my newspaper "US Paras prepare for Antarctic Rescue" and was 33 CC long on 10 December 1969. I also made a sketch.

In the hostile environment of the Antarctic, duplication is an essential safeguard. For this, and economic reasons, a small pressurised-water atomic reactor, using 93% enriched uranium, was installed at McMurdo in 1962. I went to see it and Lt. Commander Reynolds told me that it had, with 85% reliability, provided electric power and had also distilled seawater to provide fresh water, always in short supply even for personal hygiene.

Like everyone else, I was allowed one shower a week, consisting of wetting, turning off water, soaping and washing down. The cost of installing the reactor had proved very high, as all components had to be no larger than $2.4 \times 2.4 \times 9.15$ m to fit into the cargo planes. Of its 10 Mwe output, only 2 Mw were used for electricity and 8 Mw worked the air-cooled condensers. It had been twice refuelled, at a cost of \$ 1 million for each new core in 1964 and in 1967. Spent fuel had been cooled down in underground caves, before being shipped back to the USA. [See also Title 88]