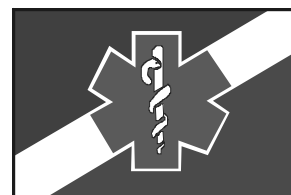


# THE RESCUER



April-June, 2001

Number 33

## I Was There

By Marty Kufus

*This is a condensed version of an article printed in the April 1999 edition of Soldier of Fortune Magazine. Author Marty Kufus is a member of the Wilson County (TX) Volunteer Emergency Response Team.*

In October of 1998, a massive storm in south-central Texas dumped more than 15 inches of rain in Bexar County alone. This created a killer flood that swept through the “Alamo City” along the San Antonio River and Salado and Olmos creeks. Twelve hours later, portions of Wilson County began to flood. Only four months earlier our rural county, like the rest of South Texas, had been gripped by a drought and the threat of wildfires. Unfortunately the old saying “when it rains, it pours” held true, and things were made doubly worse when we ended up having to rescue the rescuers.

It was 0230 on October 18. The Zodiac boat carried five volunteer firemen (including myself), all members of the Wilson County Volunteer Emergency Response Team. Rescue ropes, extra life vests and helmets covered the floor of the 10 person boat. I was braced against the big tube at the bow, holding my paddle upside down in the water to probe for hidden obstacles. In the water was oil, chemicals, raw sewage, trees,

household and farm debris, dead animals, large clumps of very angry fire ants, probably some rattlesnakes and copperheads, and who knows what else. However, the timing of the flood couldn't have been better. My parent organization, Floresville VFD, had sent me to a swiftwater rescue course in Texas taught by the California-based Rescue 3 International.

Ahead, on the other side of a flooded house and barn, two flashlights were being waved skyward. Two high-axle trucks of the La Vernia VFD were stranded. Perched atop them were 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant Fire Chief Billy Bob Bruner and 11 other firemen in life vests. Around midnight they had been sent out to check on some local folks who had ignored earlier warnings to evacuate and been caught by the flood. La Vernia's off-road trucks had handled high water before, but the water had deepened too quickly and they had become stuck.

The flooding Cibolo Creek seemed to be miles wide. “We see your light,” radioed Billy Bob. He and seven firemen were on “Kong”, the lead truck. A highly modified military-surplus 5-ton Kong had broken the current head-on – until it turned off Dry Hollow Road and exposed its side to the relentless water. The second truck, also military surplus but unmodified, had stalled and was pushed off the road even before the turn. A wide stretch of water separated them.

Kong sat against a submerged fence; water up to its headlights, but otherwise stable. Billy Bob and his firemen were OK for now.

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We decided to go to the other truck first. It didn't look very stable. By using a throw bag, a La Vernia fireman grabbed the rope and we tied up to the truck.

It wasn't that these guys weren't equipped for flood rescue. The truck carried an aluminum fishing boat with motor, a small inflatable boat, and a jet ski. The senior fireman wore a wet suit like mine; he'd had water rescue training too, but Murphy's Law was in effect.

The aluminum boat had a hole knocked in it. The jet ski could have probably towed the inflatable boat as long as it didn't snag on a submerged fence. But the machine wasn't going anywhere. "The ignition key is over on Kong," one fireman added.

"OK, here's the deal," said Edwin Baker, our team leader. "We can only take two of you this trip. We have to fight a bad current on the way back. I don't want to try it with a full load yet."

We made a medical decision. The two youngest firemen, a boy and a girl who looked about 18, would go first. Both were shivering under their life vests from cold and fright. The senior firemen and his partner would be fine. Both were dressed warmly, and if their truck started to roll they could cast off in their inflatable boat and go with the flow.

By daybreak we had made four more trips. We retrieved Billy Bob and the rest of his crew. We also took two young women and a small dog from a mobile home not far from Kong.

Wilson County's flood lasted two days. Law enforcement officers, dozens of volunteer firemen and EMTs, and country road crews worked nonstop. There were a few daylight rescues by helicopter. The normally tranquil Cibolo Creek broke its flood record; on the other side of Wilson County, the San Antonio River fell just short of its record. The creek and river never before had flooded simultaneously.

Some 350 homes and numerous farms, ranches, and small businesses were hit, but fortunately no one died in our county.


Volunteer fire departments, including La Vernia's, evacuated a number of civilians from harm's way. The ERT's Zodiac boat crews, operating in Wilson and neighboring Guadalupe County, altogether brought in 24 people and two dogs.

### "Two years Later"

We have had plenty of time to analyze our rescue operation: what we did right, what we should have done, and what could have gone wrong. What we did right is fairly obvious here, so I will focus on what we should have done.

Our countywide volunteer ERT had been formed early in 1998. We acquired the Zodiac boat only a few months before the big flood and had only taken it out on a lake and practiced flipping it without the motor attached. Flipping it with the motor attached is much harder. The 15-horsepower motor we used was loaned to us during the flood. It really was too small; the ERT later purchased a 25-horsepower motor, which probably is the minimum acceptable size for inland rescues.

In October 1998 the greatest personal threat to our boat crew would have been the fence lines if we had capsized the boat. Lurking a foot or two below the water's surface, each fence would have offered the opportunity for a foot or leg entrapment in the current. This is something to consider if your operation takes you across farm or ranch land, where multi-stranded fences (including barbed wire) are common.

Lastly, keep an eye on the additional personnel who arrive at your flood. Not knowing any better, firefighters who aren't swiftwater trained might show up wearing "bunker gear." Their heavy fire boots, pants, jacket and helmet will pull them under if they fall in the water. Politely but firmly tell these well-meaning people to remove their fire gear and put on PFDs and appropriate footwear or leave the scene. Civilian or non-rescue trained boaters might also show up wanting to help with evacuation. These free-lancers could end up as victims if their fishing boat hits a rough spot or hidden obstacle. 

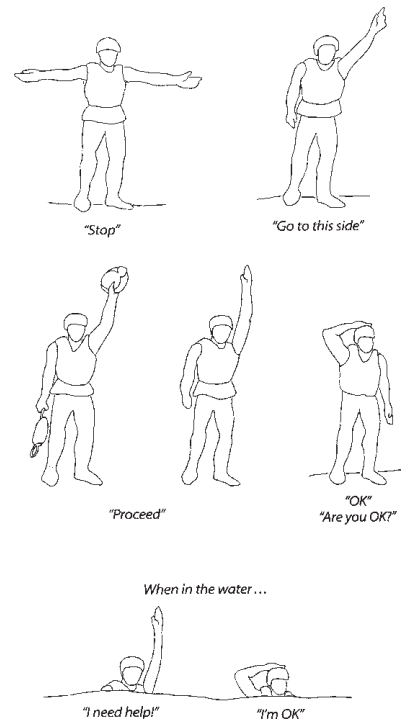
**Training Tip**

**Hand Signals**  
By Slim Ray

There's been some confusion of late about hand signals for rescuers and river runners. Specifically, do the signals used by the American Canoe Association (ACA) and Rescue 3 conflict? The answer is no.

But wait! River runners have for years used a raised hand or paddle as a signal that is clear to proceed downstream. Rescue 3 uses a raised hand to signal, "I need help!" Isn't that a conflict?

Not really. The ACA signal is given while standing on shore (or from a boat) to people upstream. The Rescue 3 signal is given by people swimming in the water – either the OK or hand up for help. Once you see how they're used you won't confuse them. If you see someone floating by in the river with big eyeballs and their hand up, it's very unlikely that they are signaling "all clear."



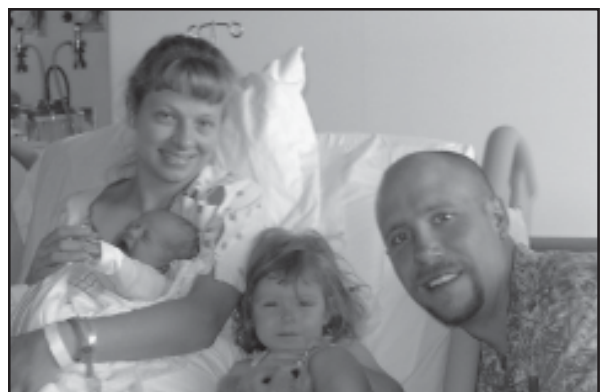
*Illustration from Slim Ray's book, Swiftwater Rescue and may not be reproduced without his permission*

**Congratulations!!!**

Rescue 3 International wishes to congratulate **Warren County, VA Swiftwater Rescue Team** and **Orange EMS and Rescue Squad – Technical Rescue Team, Carrboro, NC** who were among the National Semifinalists in the SuperCrew Salutes Competition. Both teams are Rescue 3 SRT trained and were recognized for superior rescue training, outstanding commitment to the community, and demonstrating technical excellence in rescue.



Congratulations to SRT Instructor Vince Moffitt and his wife Miki on the arrival of their new son. Asa James Moffitt was born June 1, 2001 at a healthy 8 lbs 1 oz. He joins two excited older sisters. We're happy to report that everyone is healthy and doing wonderfully. 🐾



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## Looking Back at the Midwest Flooding of 2001

As we look back at the recent flooding conditions in the Midwest, it is amazing to see the variety of newspaper articles and locations they represent. We will begin this review with a brief explanation of the climactic causes of this Spring's events.

*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel-April 2001*

The flood of 2001 was spawned by a unique confluence of circumstances: heavy snowfall this winter, a cold snap in late March followed by unseasonably warm weather, and heavy rainfall in the first week of April.

"Three, four weeks ago we thought we'd have flooding, but that it would only be a slight inconvenience," said an emergency service official.

But low temperatures in March slowed down the melting of snow. Then suddenly temperatures rose into the 60s while downpours dumped 2 to 3 inches at a time, not just in western Wisconsin but also in eastern and central Minnesota...

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### **Minnesota, Wisconsin Watch Flood-Strained Dikes**

*CNN April 17, 2001*

St. Paul, Minnesota--As the Mississippi River nears record levels, officials say the length of time it stays high could be critical in how much flood damage results.

They said residents and officials are just waiting for nature to take its course. "Everybody seems to be as ready as possible," they reported.

The situation is similar along the Mississippi south into Illinois and Iowa. Flooding has spread river water over low-lying fields, but so far higher areas and population centers protected by dikes and levees are remaining relatively dry.

On Abel-Essman Island, just north of Guttenberg,

Iowa, about 200 of the island's 300 residents have left in anticipation of flooding this weekend, resident Richard Burroughs told CNN.

However, Burroughs, his wife and others plan to stay.

"This is a way of life that we've chosen," he said. "Normally it's beautiful. It's God's country, and once in a while the mighty Mississippi flexes its muscles and it's not so great. But we'll clean up and we'll prevail."

Navigation on the Mississippi has been banned from Minneapolis to Muscatine, Iowa, about 25 miles down river from Davenport.

Wisconsin Governor Scott McCallum has been keeping close tabs on the situation. McCallum declared a state of emergency in nine southwestern Wisconsin counties, freeing additional state resources to help with flood relief efforts.

"The river is two to three miles wide in some areas," said La Crosse County Emergency management coordinator, Al Spaulding, "but most of the flooding has been in lightly populated areas, so far."

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### **Davenport Awaits Flood Crest with Inches to Spare**

*Davenport, Iowa*

*CNN April 24, 2001*

The only major town on the upper Mississippi without a permanent floodwall is Davenport. The flood was expected to crest late Tuesday just short of both a record and the height of the makeshift levee that was the only barrier between the swollen river and downtown.

The sandbags piled alongside the river would withstand a river level at 23 feet--inches above the 1993 high water mark of 22.63 feet and the expected crest of 22.5 feet.

“My concern is the dike,” said Steve Zuidema, owner of Davenport’s Front Street Brewery. “If the dike goes, there’s nothing we can do about saving the building.” On the other side of the dike that was keeping the water away from Zuidema’s brew pub, some of his fellow business owners had already lost the battle.

And while the city struggled and hoped, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) director Joe Allbaugh criticized the city for failing to build a permanent wall to keep out the flood-prone river. FEMA pays for much of the cost of helping flood victims.

City officials, led by Mayor Phil Yerington, reject the idea in favor of the \$100 million in tourism money they say an unobstructed view of the river brings in. Casino and riverside festivals bring visitors to the city.

“I don’t think we’re in a position of letting that go,” Yerington told the Associated Press.

*Davenport, IA, May 4, 2001 — Davenport’s River Street lived up to its name when the Mississippi River flowed over its banks and flooded the city’s downtown riverfront.*



*Photo By David Teska/FEMA News Photo*

But at least some of Yerington’s constituency may be ready to forgo the view after the city’s second major flood in less than 10 years. An informal poll on the Quad City Times Web site was running 4 to 1 in favor of a floodwall.

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**President Sends FEMA Director to Visit Midwest Flood Areas**

*Associated Press* Washington - President Bush sent his emergency-management director to visit the Quad Cities of Iowa and Illinois.

Joe Allbaugh, the Federal Emergency Management Agency Chief, told reporters after meeting with Bush that on his trip, he would discuss with elected officials the problem of continual federal bailouts for flood victims.

“The question is: How many times does the American taxpayer have to step in and take care of this flooding, which could be easily prevented by building levees and dikes?” Allbaugh asked.



*Photo by Anita Westervelt/FEMA News Photo*

*Davenport, IA, May 5, 2001 — Flooding from the Mississippi River surrounds John O’Donnell Stadium in Davenport’s downtown greenspace, while flood-fighting efforts successfully protect the ball field.*

“There is a point of no return,” he said. “I don’t know whether it’s two strikes you’re out, three strikes you’re out, but obviously, with these homes and properties that are continually flooded, it is not fair to the American taxpayer, to ask time in and time out to pay for rebuilding.”

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**Rescue 3’s comments:**


After reading these articles on the Midwest Flooding followed by FEMA’s comments, it makes you stop and think. It looks as if there is a price to pay for living in “God’s Country”, but if it happens to be in a flood plain, the Federal Government (FEMA) may reach a point when they would no longer be willing to assist in the rebuilding process.

To support that premise, on Wednesday, May 30, 2001, we received a summary of the proposed 2002

FEMA Budget. Some of the budget recommendations include:

- Termination of the Project Impact disaster preparedness campaign, which they state has not been effective, saving \$25 million.
- Phases out unneeded fire grant programs, saving \$100 million.

If these proposed cuts are made, it would suggest an even greater need for local and state agencies to re-evaluate their current preparedness and prevention programs.

When the next natural disaster strikes, it could be up to you and your neighbors to deal with it, including clean-up and recovery! 

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## Class Journals

by Terry McShane, SRT Instructor-Trainer

*May 4-6, 2001 Salida CO.* -- I knew this was going to be an unusual course when I pulled up to the downtown Salida Fire Station and had to lock my truck's hubs and put the transfer case into four wheel drive just to get into the parking lot. I was pushing snow with my truck's bumper!


The location where we were going to do the classroom portion of the scheduled SRT-1 course had been appropriated from the county's incident command post. The firefighters that were supposed to take the SRT course that day looked like they had been rode hard and put away wet; they had answered 40 calls that night -- mostly roof collapses and shoveling the exhaust ducts of elderly residences furnaces. We pushed the course back one day.

Saturday morning I awoke to a Colorado-style, white out blizzard. The National Weather Service recorded 50 inches of snow in Salida in 2 ½ days. I don't think it was a lick over 48 inches! We went ahead with the class. In the final analysis only one student wrote in their evaluation that we should have postponed the course.

*May 11-16, 2001 Jackson, WY.* --During the second day of an SRT-1 course we were about six miles up the Grey's River, a beautiful class 3-4 river north of Alpine, WY. While practicing "live bait" rescues with the class I noticed a small dog on river left. This seemed odd considering the only road access was on river right and the nearest house on river left was about 16 miles away. After watching the dog for about 10 minutes it became apparent the dog was lost and had been out in the wilds for a while. I swam over to river left and the dog looked really glad to see a person; even a dripping wet, gore-tex drysuit clad, helmeted swiftwater rescue instructor. I signaled the class (who were now much more interested in what was going on with the dog than doing "live bait" evolutions!) to send over a throwbag line, which they did. I clipped the end of the line into my PFD's quick release tether and while cradling the dog on my chest pendulumed back over to river right.

After drying the pooch off and giving it some doggy treats (we had several dog owners in the class) one of the students mentioned that they had seen several "lost dog" posters in several nearby towns and this dog fit the description. One student's wife who had been observing the class offered to drive back to town and call the number on the poster.

Long story short -- the dog fit the description and the woman who owned the dog was so excited after being called that she was unable to drive and had to be picked up and driven out to where we were. It was her dog! It had been lost for 8 days and traveled 16 miles over very rough, mountainous terrain to where it was found. I've seldom seen someone as grateful and happy to be reunited with their pet. There was also a reward for the dog. After refusing it three times I finally accepted it when the owner insisted that it would make her feel better if I took the check. This whole episode left the class feeling like we had touched another person in a positive way.

The post script to the story is that when I finally took a look at the check later that day -- it was for \$500! Lesson learned -- "Practice random acts of kindness, and senseless acts of beauty." 

## Tech Tips

# Cleaning and Lubricating Your Carabiners

*This tip was adapted with permission from the Omega Pacific newsletter.*

### How do I correct sticky carabiner gates?

Recently Omega Pacific has fielded several questions regarding sticky gates on some of their carabiners. Upon examination they discovered that each of the biners had one thing in common; they had been lubricated with *White Lightning*, a paraffin-based lube that is popular in bike stores and is now beginning to show up in mountain shops.

*White Lightning* (or any other paraffin-based lube) operates by coating the device with a thin layer of waxy material. This helps to reduce the amount of dirt and grime it will pick up. This sounds fine, but, while it may work great for bike chains, it is not good for carabiners. With bike chains, there is enough power in the mechanism (the pedal stroke of the



cyclist) to break through the waxy goo with each turn. However, with a carabiner, there simply isn't that kind of spring tension to reliably return the gate to the notch as that waxy buildup occurs. And, it should be noted that, despite the claims that paraffin-based lubes don't attract dirt, Omega Pacific removed a lot of debris from the works of these suspicious biners.

All lubricants pick up dirt and grime to one degree or another.

If anyone is experiencing sticky gates caused by paraffin-based lube, Omega Pacific recommends that they do the following: boil them in water to melt the paraffin and then liberally spray WD-40 on them to dissolve and remove any residual

lubricant, dirt or grime. Then, give them a good scrub with an old toothbrush at the hinges. After that, shoot them with a little silicone spray lubricant. They should work great after that. 🏠



## Rescue 3 Teaches Courses in Nepal

In late January and February of this year Paul O'Sullivan, the center director of Canolfan Tryweryn and Rescue 3 Instructor in the United Kingdom, along with Jon Gorman, Rescue 3 Instructor, traveled to Nepal to offer SRT1 courses.

Paul and Jon taught three Swiftwater Rescue Technician courses for the Nepalese Association of Rafting Agents. The courses were based at Surkete Beach on the Sun Khosi. By the end of the trip, 49 guides from about 15 different companies had been certified to Swiftwater Rescue Technician Level 1.

The courses were well received and we congratulate Paul and Jon for their success in Nepal, a new market for Rescue 3. Thank you, Paul and Jon, for all of your

hard work and efforts to ensure proper training and safety all over the world.

### Other International News:

- Abel Vargas, Rescue 3 Instructor from Costa Rica, is currently teaching courses in Bogota, Columbia.

- Eve Eichenberger, Rescue 3 Instructor from Switzerland, is currently working on translating the Swiftwater Rescue Technician 1 manual into German. The translated manual should be available by the end of this year.

Look for more information on these international markets in future newsletters. 🏠

## RESCUE 3 INTERNATIONAL

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### Surfin' the Web



- The National Academies are non-profit organizations which provide a public service by working outside the framework of government to ensure independent advice on matters of science, technology, and medicine. Visit their website at <http://nationalacademies.org/topnews/>
- Here is an interesting site out of Australia. It covers a wide variety of rescue related subjects and has news articles, quizzes, discussions groups, and more. The address is <http://www.techrescue.org/>.

## Calendar

- June 28 - July 1, 2001. *CISM Conference 2001*, Las Vegas, NV. The 3rd Annual Critical Incident Stress Management Training Conference. Phone (702) 809-4509.
- July 24 - July 26. *America's Fire Expo*, Miami Beach, FL. A new conference and expo by NFPA. Phone (617) 984-7315.
- August 27-30, 2001. *Holistic Disaster Recovery*, Boulder, CO. This is a new training course by the Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center. It is for decision makers and managers working at the local level and will show them how a community can learn how to sustain themselves during the recovery period following a natural disaster. Visit their web site for more information. [www.colorado.edu/hazards/index.html](http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/index.html) or Phone (303) 492-2149.
- Sept 10-14, 2001. *SR/DR '01* College Station, TX. Phone (715) 547-3340.