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All in a day's work for Swiss Air Rescue

"WE'LL help... we'll try everything... but don't ask me how." That was the immediate reaction of Plinio Pedrini, the man who was in charge of the operations desk at Swiss Air Rescue Guard headquarters in Zurich.

The call for help had come from the police at Yverdon in western Switzerland at 2.29 that afternoon.

Their description of the problem was incredible. A parachutist by the name of André Roux had been getting ready to make his very first jump over Yverdon airport. He had connected his rip-cord to the jump door of the Pilatus Porter plane according to proper procedure. He jumped from the plane. But his chute opened too fast for some reason, with the parachute cords getting tangled in the plane's tail wheel, leaving Roux trailing helplessly 25 feet

behind the Pilatus Porter.

Within seconds Zurich was in contact with the Swiss Air Rescue Guard station at Berne Airport. Frantic consultations started immediately in an effort to work out a rescue plan.

A rescue like this had never been done in the history of civil aviation. Ideas were tried out on paper and discarded.

The helicopter pilot Andreas Haefele took off with Adolf Rüfenacht, an experienced man on the helicopter rescue winch. As they made their way along the 25-minute air route from Berne to Yverdon, more ideas were discussed back and forth until a plan was finally decided upon.

They would need a third man

— in this case Pierre Jomini, a parachuting instructor from Lausanne.

They landed at Yverdon, picked up Jomini, and lifted off to join in flight the Pilatus Porter, which was circling overhead at 2,000 feet, with novice parachutist André Roux in tow.

The weather at Yverdon was bad, with ground haze and fog. As the rescue helicopter rose above the cloud layer, the crew spotted the Pilatus Porter with its helpless parachutist being dragged behind.

Winchman Rüfenacht attached the winch rope to Jomini as the pilot carefully approached the fixed-wing aircraft. The helicopter was now in position, flying in unison with the Porter,

but 50 feet above it.

The helicopter pilot was now flying blind as to what was happening with the parachutist below. Slowly Jomini was lowered down to Roux, as the winchman gave instructions to the pilot.

Jomini, who had never been on a mid-air rescue before, signalled that Roux was conscious and seemed OK. But then, the turbulence caused by the helicopter's rotor blades blew the rescuer away. Another try was made and the same thing happened.

Finally, the third time around, Jomini got hold of Roux, to whom he shouted the command: "I'm going to cut the parachute's ropes. Wait three seconds and open your emergency chute." Within a split second, the ropes were cut and André Roux started falling to earth.

Suddenly, a white spot appeared above him, then grew in size until it was clear the emergency parachute had opened. Haefele realised that at least that part of the mission had been accomplished.

He turned the helicopter away from the Pilatus Porter as Jomini was being hauled back into the helicopter. Haefele piloted the helicopter to where Roux looked like he'd come down. Seconds later, the helicopter crew saw the white parachute collapse on the ground. Roux had landed... right in the middle of a potato field.

The helicopter picked him up and flew him to the nearest hospital. He was in good shape except for a low body temperature caused by his exposure to the cold, high-altitude air.

The entire rescue manoeuvre had lasted only five minutes, but took the combined efforts and resources of an experienced team of the Swiss Air Rescue Guard, for which they have received the award of "Crew of the Year."

Back on the ground, pilot Andreas Haefele said there was nothing really dangerous about this particular rescue mission. He said the mountain rescues were still the toughest.

The only thing that bothered him, he said, is that when the Pilatus Porter landed, the pilot measured the fuel level and found that his aircraft could only have stayed in the air another 15 minutes.

New President starts his term

THE new Swiss President is the Justice Minister, Mr Kurt Furgler, and the Economics Minister, Mr Fritz Honegger, is the vice-President.

The seven members of the Swiss government, who come from four different political parties, take the presidency in turn, and during their one-year terms they continue to head their own ministries.

Every Cabinet minister who holds his post long enough will eventually become president, but first he must serve under all the others who have been in office longer than he.

The Swiss President is actually not first in the country's hierarchy. The president of the House of Representatives is technically the top man in the country since he presides over joint meetings of the two houses of Parliament which elect the Swiss President. Such joint meetings also elect the members of the government who

*Justice Minister
Mr Kurt Furgler
is the new Swiss
President*

usually remain in office until they say they want to resign.

Mr Furgler will be Swiss President for the second time. He was elected to the Cabinet in 1971 and served his first term in 1977.

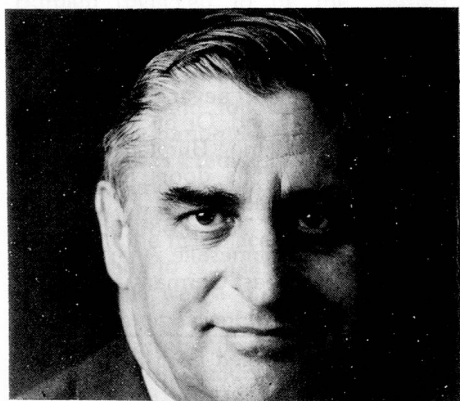
As President he officially represents Switzerland at home and abroad and he heads Cabinet meetings and prepares their agendas. In the event of a tie, the President's vote in the

Cabinet counts twice, and in an emergency, he can take special measures which he must then submit to the Cabinet.

Mr Furgler is a Christian Democrat from canton St. Gallen, and before becoming Cabinet minister he was a member of the House of Representatives and headed important parliamentary commissions. They included the military commission, the foreign affairs commission and the investigating commission in connection with the controversial purchase of Mirage jet fighter planes for the army.

Mr Furgler, a lawyer, has been Justice Minister since 1972 and one of the major issues he has been tackling ever since is a planned total revision of the Swiss Federal Constitution. Other important issues include the revision of family law, a new law on political asylum and the legal status of foreign residents.

Elsbeth Danzeisen



*Economics
Minister Mr
Fritz Honegger
becomes the
vice-President*