

'Snafu Snatchers,' to Fliers in Distress, Are Angels From Heaven

BY SAM KINCH.

HEADQUARTERS, 13TH EMERGENCY RESCUE GROUP, THE PHILIPPINES, June 12 (Delayed). They call themselves "Snafu Snatchers," and well they might, for every airplane crew they snatch from the sea is fouled up.

But the crew men don't mind being classified as "situation normal, all fouled up."

In fact, when they need the snatchers and they show up (which they nearly always do) the fliers in distress call the Emergency Rescue boys Angels from Heaven.

The Snafu Snatchers fly the worst weather, in fact, all kinds of weather. They fly hundreds of miles to look for a tiny dot bobbing on the ocean. And they land on the roughest seas, sometimes under the fire of enemy guns, and pick up survivors of planes forced down at sea.

Saves 540 Fliers.

The 2nd Emergency Rescue Squadron alone has saved from death at sea 540 fliers. During one period of 400 days, they pulled out 300 men. Their record is thought to be twice that of any other squadron.

The commanding officer of the 2nd, Maj. Gerard F. Wientjes of San Antonio, has rescued more than 50 himself. He was the pilot on one of the 2nd's most daring feats—the landing of a big Catalina flying boat in waves six feet high.

He and his crew loaded the crew of a Liberator bomber aboard after saving one man from drowning, and then had to taxi the boat five hours before they could find water smooth enough for a takeoff.

But they got back with their human salvage.

Always Available.

That's why pilots and crew men love the snatchers. They patrol wide areas and nearly always are available by radio from a plane in distress.

And, in addition to the constant patrol, planes are kept at three bases for dispatch.

Commanding officer of the 13th Group is Col. Wallace S. Ford, 2636 Forest Park, Fort Worth, who takes time off from administrative duties to make many of the recent missions himself.

His executive officer is Lt. Col. Joseph H. Batjer of Houston; and in the headquarters is 1st Lt. Robert C. Washburne, Beaumont.

Assisting Wientjes in the 2nd Squadron are the following Texans:

Capt. Harry C. Remington, Dallas; 1st Lt. Joyce R. Aly, Houston; 2nd Lts. William E. Thornton, Dallas; Lyle R. Walker Jr., El Paso, and David A. Witz, Denison; Flight Officer Earl G. Fugett, Houston.

T. Sgts. Travis A. Brimer, McKinney; Durward S. Stewart, Mount Pleasant, and Mark and LeRoy Rose, brothers, of Corpus Christi.

S. Sgts. Coy D. Ham, Tyler; Rob-



RATES ARE REASONABLE—Tech. Sgt. Durward Stewart of Mount Pleasant, an instrument technician with the 2nd Emergency Rescue Squadron, keeps constant check on the flying boats with which his group picks up airmen forced down at sea. The Snafu Snatchers have a published schedule of rescue rates, but usually wind up furnishing hot coffee and a bunk to the men they pull from the sea.

ert J. Pope, Buckholts, and Willie Sirman, Corsicana.

Sgts. Billie H. Johansen, San Antonio; Jay F. Sims, Sherman; Billie T. Milligan, Gary, and Martin F. Coplin, Schertz.

Corps. James M. Hardison, Childress, and Floyd M. Mueck, Electra.

In 15th ERBS.

In the 15th Emergency Rescue Boat Squadron, which lends surface help to the air rescue service, are these Texans:

T. Sgt. Carl S. Pruitt, 1413 Maddox, Fort Worth; Sgts. Clarence W. Brandt, San Antonio; James A. Hillhouse, League City; Jack R. Strauss, San Antonio, and Charles H. Thomas, El Paso.

Corp. Marvin A. Wheat, Temple; Pfc. Ernesto T. Calzada, Brownsville; E. J. Copley, South Houston, and Luther Foster, Nederland, and Pfc. Roy L. Rankins, Dallas.

One of the technicians who keep the big flying boats ready to go out day or night is Stewart, whose wife, and mother, Mrs. Annie Stewart, live in Mount Pleasant.

Stewart formerly was a vocational agriculture teacher in Missouri City, near Houston. In the Army since 1942, he has been overseas 14 months and now is an instrument technician on one of the 2nd's island bases.