

## Paratrooper Rescue in the words of Firefighter Scott Santhuff . . .

The call came into my personal cell phone at 1334 from Captain Jon Winkelman of McLane Fire and Life Rescue, stating he received a call for a tree rescue with Fort Lewis. A paratrooper was stuck 150' in a tree after jumping from a plane at 1000. Thurston County Dispatch was looking for a team to perform the rescue. They had already contacted Yelm Fire District and Pierce County and could not find a rescue team. Winkelman had been contacted by Thurston County Dispatch looking for a team and knew that if he could contact some of the members of the new Thurston County Special Operations Rescue Team (SORT), we could perform the task.

While on the phone with Jon we came up with a quick game plan for where to meet and the equipment we would need. I was on duty at Lacey on Truck 31 with Dustin Hulbrock and Mike Perry. We responded with the Ladder Truck in the direction of the rescue. We had not been given a location of the paratrooper yet, but a representative from the Army was waiting for us at 12300 Military Road at 1406. This was also where we met Chief Steve North, Casey Sobol and Rescue 91 from McLane Fire and Rescue. From there we were escorted to the scene.



The closest road was approximately 1/8 mile from the paratrooper so equipment had to be carried to the scene. We grabbed harnesses, two 300' ropes, two tree rescue kits, loaded them into a Stokes Basket (stretcher) and walked to the scene.

At 1436 we arrived at the base of the tree. The stranded paratrooper was at the very top of the tree which appeared to be well over 100 feet. From the ground we could not see the paratrooper, and only knew his location from where his parachute was blowing in the wind off the top of the tree. We could communicate with him from the ground. He was not injured and had moved close to the trunk and secured himself with a small piece of webbing to the tree. He was safe.

Chief North assumed Incident Command and assigned Casey Sobol as the Rescue Group Supervisor. Jon Winkelman and I were assigned as Rescuers and Coby Farnham was assigned Safety. As we sized up the tree, there was only one way to get him down. That was to climb with spurs up the tree and clear the dead limbs to a point when we could limb climb. We decided that a solo rescue technique (SRT) would be the best option because it is timely. We added the gear we needed to our harnesses and started the climb.

When I reached the first limb at approximately 40 feet, I had quickly realized that the 10mm rope flip line was not moving easily and using a hand saw was going to take a quite a bit of time. This was however the best option to get to him since the limb spacing was poor. At approximately 60 feet up I stopped and waited for Jon to ascend the tree. He positioned himself directly under me and we climbed

the tree together dropping limbs to the ground as we went. At about five feet below the paratrooper Jon and I thought it would be safe to start limb climbing. We used our flip line and a split tail set up to move up the limbs quickly. Once we reached the paratrooper it was time to start rigging for the rescue.



Jon positioned himself on the back side of the tree to act as a safety officer and assist with rigging. I secured myself behind the paratrooper in the tree and quickly looped his military rescue belt with my flip line. He stated he was not injured but his back was pretty sore from his 60 lb rucksack and back up parachute hanging from his chest. He also had an automatic weapon hanging off his left shoulder and connected into his parachute harness. To make access easier we cleared a couple limbs with the hand saw. The equipment on his chest had to be lowered to the ground first to give us access to attach our patient harness. A quick friction wrap around an overhead branch gave Jon the needed friction to lower the equipment. I worked on positioning the patient harness on him and secured it right over his parachute harness. I then rigged the Petzl Treesbee above his head as an anchor strap and clipped the Petzl ID

into it. The 300 foot PMI 12.5 rope was then routed through his parachute harness and under his backup parachute and attached to his Yates patient harness. The Petzl ID was rigged, the safety lines were removed and he was lowered to the ground. Winkelman climbed around the tree and was lowered on the same system. Once they were safely to the ground, I removed the Treesbee and moved down to the last few limbs below me to re-rig the Treesbee. I changed over one of my flip lines to a split tail set up on the 300' rope and lowered myself down.



The victim and rescuers made it down to the ground safely without injuries.

I suppose this rescue is exactly why firefighters do what we do. Some open a book of knowledge when they have to and find pages written on how to perform certain tasks. Some folks strive to write more pages, while others are fine with the short story. After this adventure, I had a freshly written chapter on tree rescues in my book.

NOTE: Without the recent FEMA grant funds for the Thurston County Special Operations Rescue Team (SORT) this rescue would not have been possible.