

# Low flying in the Alps : Mountain Rescue

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## LOW FLYING IN THE ALPS. Mountain Rescue.

Herman Geiger, the world's most experienced mountain rescue pilot, is ready for another summer's flying among the glaciers of the Alps. The name of this Swiss airman has become a by-word in his own country for cool courage and his fame is beginning to spread abroad (reports Reuter from Sion, Switzerland).

Since 1952 Geiger has made nearly 3500 high mountain landings — as many as 60 in a single day — without an accident of any kind. He has saved dozens of lives and shortened the sufferings of many people injured or isolated in the wilderness of the Alps. His highest landing, at an altitude of 14,200ft., was in the Monte Rosa massif, between the Dufourspitze and the Nordend.

Geiger stands by with his Piper at Sion airport in the Rhone Valley, where he is a civil gliding and flying instructor and chief pilot of the Swiss Aerial Rescue Service, a small but expanding organisation who depend on gifts from private donors and a State subsidy. Within minutes of a call for help he is in the air, flying between the towering peaks of Canton Valais. With him he takes first aid supplies and ski-ing equipment — to return in case of a crash.

Those on the spot, companions of the victims or guides who have arrived on skis, will try to point out a landing place. Seldom is the landing place anything like flat. It is almost certain to be on the slope of a mountainside or glacier. Much depends on the condition of the snow, whether it is light or heavy, deep or shallow. Its unbroken whiteness blurs the vision of the pilot, concealing humps and holes. The wind at high altitude — not to speak of swirling cloud or mist — is often a terrifying hindrance.

Once down, and the casualty loaded aboard, Geiger faces the sometimes even more formidable task of getting airborne again. If his aircraft sinks deep in the snow men must push with all their strength against the wings to get it moving.

Geiger was born near Sion, and from childhood he was passionately fond of aeroplanes. While still an apprentice mechanic he built his own glider and took gliding lessons. Later he earned a pilot's licence and became an instructor. He began by dropping supplies to workers on hydro-electric projects, cut off from civilisation by avalanches, and to remote moun-

tain huts. His technique of supply-dropping at low level benefited not only isolated people but also starving herds of chamois, to which he dropped food.

At the same time he was working on the technique for landing in the snows. In spite of numerous last-minute attempts to dissuade him, and in spite of a vicious wind, he made his first high mountain landing with surprising ease.

Since then other pilots have begun to study his technique. Among them are senior officers of the Swiss Air Force, quick to realise the value of his experiments once success had been fully proved.

(Glasgow Herald.)

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