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# Swiss Air Rescue

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## Creation and Development

The Swiss Air-Rescue Service (SRFW) was founded by the late Dr. med. Rudolf Bucher on 27th April 1952 as not very well defined part of the Swiss Life Savings Association (SLRG). Since at that time, the technical conditions for landing aircraft in high mountains could not yet be complied with, a large number of rescue parachutists were trained to begin with.

In the winter of 1952/53, the SRFW carried out the first rescue acts in alpine territory. When, in February 1953, the Netherlands suffered badly from heavy floods, the Swiss Red Cross approached the SRFW and asked for immediate help in the catastrophe. This first international helicopter rescue operation was followed a year later (during the avalanche catastrophe in Vorarlberg) by the second rescue and recovery undertaking of its kind abroad. In July 1956, when two American passenger aircrafts collided above the Grand Canon

and crashed 1000 metres in the inaccessible valley below, active members of the SRFW were called to assist. With the aid of a cable apparatus the bodies and belongings of over one hundred passengers could be retrieved.

The development of efficient helicopters and the construction of metal skis which could be retracted hydraulically, changed the original picture of air rescue in a short time.

The pioneering achievements by the Engadine citizen Fredy Wissel and the Valais pilot Hermann Geiger paved the way for rescue and recovery in accidents on glaciers by means of a field plane.

In March 1960, the then technical head of the SRFW, Dr. med. h.c. Fritz Bühler, its President today, undertook the reorganisation and with it the complete detachment from the Swiss Life Savings Association. At the same time, an organisation was built up according to topographical and meteorological



Life-saving in high mountains, loading aboard an Alouette III helicopter by means of a net.

conditions, a body which embraced the whole of Switzerland. A little later, decentralisation of all rescue materials was carried out to airports and fields at Zurich/Kloten, Millis, Samedan, Magadino, Zermatt, Sion, Berne, Colombier, Geneva, Interlaken and Basle.

Since 1960, pilots of the SRFW have been taking part in catastrophe rescue operations; when the barrage collapsed at Longarone/Italy (1963), when the glacier broke off at Mattmark (1965), during the terrible floods in Florence (1966), in avalanches in the Cantons of Grisons, Glarus, Uri, Schwyz and Berne in January 1968, as well as in the flooded territory of Piemonte in November the same year.

Soon after the flood catastrophe at Malpasset/Austria was made known and the collapse of the barrage at Fréjus in France in 1959, the SRFW offered its assistance, which, however, was gratefully declined. The swift, unselfish readiness to act brought great recognition and much goodwill for our country in particular on the part of France.

Repatriation of a wounded Swiss abroad by a «Lear» Jet-ambulance. Cruising speed: 780 km/h.



## The Swiss Air Rescue Service also helps abroad when accidents and acute illnesses warrant it

Repatriation flights are one of the main tasks of the SRFW; they have the purpose of taking home people who had an accident or fell ill whilst abroad.

The medical and psychological value of such flights can hardly be evaluated, and only those really know how to appreciate it who themselves have fallen ill abroad or have had an accident and been for weeks in a hospital abroad, waiting until they were well enough to be transported by rail, car or commercial aircraft. If an injured person or someone who falls ill does not understand the local language or knows it only badly, or if he is sent to some small hospital somewhere, he is well advised to call the alarm service of the Swiss Air Rescue Service; it is manned day and night. As soon as the SRFW is called to give assistance, the management of the rescue operation asks for exact details of the patient's condition from the doctor in charge. By this, it becomes clear whether the patient has to be taken back home

by special ambulance aircraft (with or without pressurized cabin) of the SRFW or by passenger aircraft. It is not generally known yet that practically every patient or injured person can be transported by air. The aircraft of the SRFW are equipped with the latest medical apparatus. According to need, the patient is looked after expertly during the flight either by a doctor supplied by the SRFW, a flight assistant or a nurse. The transport

to and from hospital is also organised by the SRFW.

The Swiss Air Rescue Service flies to all countries in Europe, right to the Near East and North Africa, provided political conditions allow it. These flights to and from Switzerland are free of charge to supporters of the SRFW. Landing invariably takes place on the airfield nearest the hospital. As official aid organisation of the Swiss Red Cross, the SRFW enjoys special privileges everywhere. On previous application, it may use many foreign military airports abroad and even fly over prohibited areas. Everywhere one is anxious to sup-

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### Tasks of the Swiss Air Rescue Service

#### *Rescue take-offs*

in mountaineering accidents in summer and winter: avalanche accidents, skiing accidents outside *pistes* under supervision or *pistes* if there are bad accidents; accidents at work on building sites in the mountains; air and traffic accidents; by swift recovery of casualties, suitable first aid (life-saving assistance on the spot), immediate transport of doctors and specialists (anaesthetists), careful and quick transport of the injured to hospitals, immediate supplying of SAC avalanche dogs, time-saving transport of rescue teams, immediate landing of rescue specialists (divers, welders, explosives experts etc.).

#### *Provisioning flights*

for villages and valleys isolated from the environment or for alpine pastures and mountain huts which are difficult to get at.

#### *Flying ambulance service*

for the mountain population, in emergencies or for the transport of doctors.

#### *Evacuation flights*

in an unexpected early start of winter weather, in avalanche and other dangers.

#### *Transfer flights*

of emergency patients after accidents or acute sickness from small hospitals to larger medical centres; transfer of new-born babies to special neonatological centres.

#### *Repatriation flights*

to take accident cases or badly sick patients to or from all countries in Europe and North Africa, also to and from the Near East.

#### *Catastrophe aid*

in avalanches, landslides, earthquakes, floods and major accidents in inaccessible districts at home or abroad.

#### *Further tasks*

- artificial release of avalanches
- fighting forest fires
- traffic control and accident service at mass events (in conjunction with the police and other relevant organisations)
- since January 1970 organising and execution of transports for transplant surgery (organs, donors and recipients)

Lifting of a wounded person and his rescuer by means of a winch. (Photo Engesser)



port the crews of SRFW aircrafts in their activities.

In the interest of patients or their families, the Swiss Air Rescue Service invariably tries to find the best possible economic solution and to keep the cost as low as feasible. The SRFW charges only the actual flying time and the passenger insurance. Thanks to spe-

cial donations, it is possible to carry the total cost of aircraft, administration, on-call services, material, insurance of aircraft, training of active members etc.

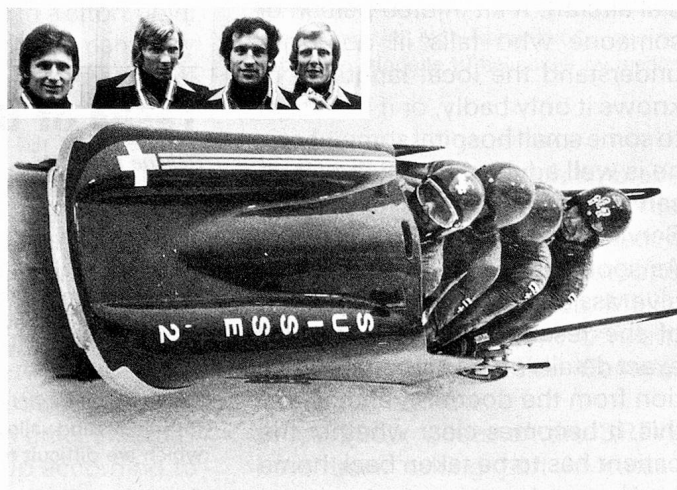
Everyone can become a supporter by paying Fr. 20.— per person and *per annum* or Fr. 50.— per family (parents with children up to the age of 16). The reductions for suppor-

ters can amount to Fr. 10 000.— per person and *per annum* for a medically necessary rescue, search, transfer or repatriation flight. Further information may be had from the Secretariat of the SRFW, Dufourstr. 43, 8008 Zurich. Telephone 01 47 22 30. Postal cheque account: 80-637 Zurich.

## Olympic Games – Innsbruck 1976



Extraordinary result in the giant slalom: Heini Hemmi and Ernst Good won the gold and silver medals.  
Hemmi, winner of olympic medal, in action. (Photos Keystone)



Four-man bobsleigh racing: distinguished silver medal for the Swiss team. From left to right: Erich Schaerer, Ueli Baechli, Ruedi Marti and Josef Benz.



◀ Bernhard Russi, a well-deserved second place in downhill racing.

Franz Krienbuehl, Games veteran. An example of perseverance and merit, though his efforts were not crowned by any medal. ▶  
His age: 47 years.

