



# The Rescue Season: The Heroic Story of Parajumpers on the Edge of the World

*Bob Drury*

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It is late May in Alaska, the height of the climbing season in the world's most treacherous mountain range. Three Englishmen are clawing their way up the sheer West Rib of Denali, the highest mountain in North America. During a break in the weather, they attempt a mad dash for the summit 4,000 feet above them. Twelve miles away, clinging to a vertical wall of ice, two experienced American climbers also see the break in the clouds as their chance to reach the summit of Thunder Mountain, the third highest in the Alaska Range. But, as every mountain guide preaches, good weather is the most dangerous: it always goes bad when you least expect it. And what neither climbing party knows is that two weather fronts are about to collide above their heads to create one of the most hellacious storms Alaska has ever seen. Within twelve hours the three Englishmen are trapped at 19,000 feet on Denali in whiteout conditions, hypoxic and dehydrated, their radio frozen, while one of the Americans has narrowly escaped death in a fall and is now pinned to a narrow ledge, depending on his wounded partner to reach the help that will save his life. With this, the mountain foot-patrols and flight crews of the U.S. Air Force's 210th Pararescue Squadron are mobilized and "The Rescue Season" begins. Because of their low profile, the Air Force's parajumpers, or PJs, are the Special Forces you've never heard of. Now their remarkable achievements are revealed for the first time in Bob Drury's thrilling account of one season in the life of Alaska's 210th Pararescue Squadron, the only PJ team in the world devoted to civilian rescues. The lives of countless men and women -- mountaineers trapped on the immense 20,320-foot Denali massif, fishermen adrift in the chaos of the Bering Strait, lost hunters wandering the endless tundra, and even Navy SEALs freezing to death on a glacier the size of Rhode Island -- are the responsibility of this uncommonly trained, close-knit unit of thirty citizen-soldiers. A spot on the 210th is a coveted assignment, for PJs, like civilians, appreciate the lure of Alaska, a territory that defies overstatement. But they are also fluent with its risks. In 1991, veteran PJ Mike Wayt helped lower a trapped Korean mountaineer down one of Denali's sheer slopes above 14,000 feet. The climber lost both hands to frostbite; Mike Wayt nearly died, unintentionally setting a new standard for heroism for the squad. Now they must find five stranded climbers in the midst of a storm that threatens everyone on the mountain. "The Rescue Season" is a true tale of the perilous beauty of nature and the rousing community of men who live in the grandest heroic tradition: they risk themselves in unimaginable ways on behalf of strangers.

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