



*Jim Pearce was on the Durango crew stranded near Coxo - 1957*

AERIAL PHOTO SHOWS SNOWBLOWN COXO SIDING WHERE 40 RAILROAD MEN ARE BEING RESCUED THURSDAY, A MILE FROM SUMMIT OF CUMBRES PASS IN SOUTHERN COLORADO

Denver Post Photo by ALBERT MOLDVAY

## Evacuation of Stranded Men Begins

### Weasels, Helicopter Combine in Rescue

By DAVE WEBER

Denver Post Special

CHAMA, N. M., Feb. 1. — Two army snow weasels and an army helicopter Thursday began a successful mass evacuation of 60 railroaders stranded since last weekend on snow-blocked Cumbres pass and rescuers expected to have them all safely back in Chama by nightfall.

Six men were brought down Thursday morning by snow-battling weasels from Coxo, where 40 had been stranded one mile from the 10,022-foot summit. Thursday afternoon a helicopter from Camp Hale landed at the summit and picked up one of 20 men snowbound there.

The first man off the top was E. W. Gilbert of Chama, a bulldozer operator who had fallen ill during the ordeal. The helicopter moved him to a hospital at Alamosa, officials of the Denver & Rio Grande Western railroad said.

The railroad said he had a "bad cold."

The first six brought in by the weasels to Chama were Marion Riffle of Durango, Al Lock of Alamosa, Eliseo Marquez and Salomon Lucero of Chama, Jaspas Chavez of Del Norte, Colo., and Manuel S. Pacheco of Arboles, Colo.

The first two are brakemen, the others section men on the freight-only Rio Grande narrow

gauge line linking Alamosa and Durango.

The weasels immediately returned to the mountains, each drawing three sleds, and it was expected the rest of the men at Coxo would be brought to Chama before sundown.

Maj. Austin F. Epsaro of Camp Hale, pilot of the helicopter, asked for permission to bring the men at the summit down by airlift and Thursday afternoon the railroad consented. The airlift began immediately in good weather.

Major Epsaro had dropped snowshoes so the summit men could stamp out a "heliport" in the 22-foot-deep snow on the pass. The whirlybird landed on this, but Epsaro said they were prepared to "hover" just over the summit while the men clambered aboard if the improvised heliport proved impractical.

The 60 men—40 at Coxo and 20 at Cumbres atop the pass—were stranded as the worst storms in Cumbres history dropped 22 feet of snow which drifted to depths of 45 feet along the Rio Grande railroad's narrow gauge freight line.

Railroad officials had said the men were warm, sheltered and well-fed. But Riffle, one of the

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