SEARCH FOR MISSING PLANE – DECEMBER 4-5, 2013

--COLIN SESEK

We were called on December 3 to assist the local SAR resources in Valley County with their search for a light plane that went missing two days earlier. We assembled at 0430 the next morning to drive to the Johnson Creek Airstrip, planning to arrive at around 0900. We met at the Compound and carooled to the site. Once we turned off at Cascade and headed toward Yellow Pine, cell phone reception and the temperature dropped to zero.

We made it to the Johnson Creek Airstrip a little after 0900. Luckily, the shop on the airstrip had been converted into the incident command center and it was warm. We met with the sheriff and Civil Air Patrol resources for planning. Our task was to search the high probability areas in the mountains near the airstrip.

We took logging roads on ATVs or snowcats until the roads became blocked; the deputy would chainsaw the trees and we would clear them from the road. We did this for a while until a Blackhawk came over us and appeared to be interested in an area slightly off the trail; we decided to check out the area and headed up the side of the mountain. We did not find anything, but since it was toward the direction we needed to go anyway, we kept walking. Our team divided, with one group searching high on the ridge and the other a little lower on the mountain. A fire had burned through the area recently, which made the terrain and searching challenging.
We searched for the remainder of the day until the sun started to set, then met back at the incident command center and headed into Yellow Pine. The Alpine Lodge had donated cabins for us to sleep in and “Sunday” [no last name given] at the Silver Dollar restaurant provided a perfect post-search dinner of spaghetti and prime rib soup. After that we headed to our cabins, which were much better accommodations than we expect on missions.

The next morning, we had another fantastic meal at the restaurant and headed back to the Johnson Creek Airstrip. The sheriff had received guidance from the aviation dispatch center in Salt Lake City, which provided us with a map with a projected flight path. They had divided the search area into three high probability ridges. Five more IMSARU members arrived this morning and were assigned their own search area. My team was taken to the top of one of the ridges via snowcat and we searched toward the airstrip. The elevation of our starting point was around 8,000 feet and there was 2-3 feet of snow, so we were on snowshoes. We searched all day, traversing over multiple high mountain lakes and much deadfall. After cresting the top of the mountain, we descended toward a forest service road where we were picked up and taken back to the airstrip. On both days we were blessed with great weather and local support.

IMSARU members who searched on both days included Mike Johnson, Gail Long, Owen Miller, Alisa Rettschlag, Gregg Rettschlag, Colin Sesek, Tom Wheless and Jimmie Yorgensen. Those who searched on either Wednesday or Thursday were Chris Brookman, Francisco Castellon, Mark Gerasimus, Jake Gillis, Tim Henning, Dan Herring, Steve Hunt, Mike Mancuso, Brandon Mart, Ann Moser with K9 Watson, Chad Nelson, Mitch Pelham, Dodi Sallee, Jamie Simpson with K9 Yoki and Ken Swickard. Rod Knopp handled in-town coordination.

[Editor’s Note: When winter weather moved in, the search had to be shut down. Family and friends organized additional search later. The wreckage of the plane was located on December 10.]

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

Cradlepoint, Inc., (George Mulhern, CEO) has donated an industrial-grade router for use in our Command Trailer.

MWI Veterinary Supply and VetOne donated two boxes of vet wrap to our K-9 team when our dogs and handlers were working the paw-shredding search at Craters of the Moon. This is a belated but heartfelt thanks for helping us take care of our valuable animal partners.
On the morning of January 13, State Communications relayed a request from Valley County Sheriff’s Office that we send certified cadaver K9 teams the following morning to search the area where the wreckage of a private plane had been located on the ground on January 10. This plane was reported missing on December 1, 2013, with five people on-board. IMSARU had assisted Valley County Search and Rescue on the search for this plane on December 4 and 5. There had been snow on the ground when the plane went missing and more had fallen since, reaching a depth of several feet. The crash site was near the top of a ridge, with very little of the plane visible above the snow.

Our team left Boise at 0540 hours, drove to base camp near Johnson Creek, and transferred to a tracked vehicle supplied by Troy EMS (Troy, Idaho). We traveled the last mile or so on snow-shoes and skis. Upon arrival at the crash site, the dogs quickly indicated priority areas, which we flagged. McCall firefighters and Valley County deputies arrived shortly thereafter via Idaho National Guard Blackhawk and began to excavate at the flagged areas. Because the wreckage was covered in 3-4 feet of snow, the dogs were able to pinpoint areas for them to dig, making the recovery quicker and more efficient. Our teams departed to base camp at about 1640 on that same helicopter. (Ask us about hot-loading into a Blackhawk with several feet of snow on the ground).

IMSARU team members were Francisco Castellon, Ann Moser with K9 Watson, Gregg Rettschlag, and Jamie Simpson with K9 Yoki.

**WHAT DID WE DO IN 2013?**

--STATISTICS COMPILED BY ROD KNOPP, IMSARU COORDINATOR

As a member unit of the Mountain Rescue Association, we are asked to submit summary statistics every year. Below is a selection of those statistics, using the MRA categories:

| Missions, including stand-bys | 23 | Person-hours spent on missions | 3,136 |
| Missions outside our primary service area [other counties in Idaho] | 7 |
| Training events | 155 | Person-hours spent on training | 7,192 |
| [The training includes both whole-unit and specialty teams such as Technical, K-9, Mantracking and Mountain Bike] |
| Public education presentations | 25 | Person-hours spent on public education | 128 |

Idaho Mountain Search and Rescue Unit, Inc. is all unpaid volunteers, with most members also working fulltime jobs to support themselves and their families. We never charge the people we are called to help. In addition to the SAR activities listed above, we donate uncounted hours of time and skills to maintain vehicles and equipment, maintain our property, handle organizational paper work and communications, participate in public relations events, and raise money to support all of the above. (Yes, the 2014 Corn Booth is only 5-1/2 months away…!)
Shortly after 1700 hours, we received a page that Boise County was requesting our help to evacuate an individual with a back injury from the Whispering Pines Yurt. Eleven members responded to the Gold Fork parking lot, where we met Jerry and Jennifer Newland (former IMSARU members who are now heavily involved with East Boise County EMS). The report was that an adult male had injured his back in a sledding accident (with a sled, not a snowmobile); members of the party had managed to get him back to the yurt and one had skied out to call for help.

On the map, this yurt is quite near parking lot at Highway 21; due to terrain, the trail to the yurt is a long loop around. We sent a quick-response team of three in via the shorter but tougher direct route. The second team was two snowmobiles supplied by Justin Ahlin, driven by Justin and Bill, and carrying Jerry as EBCAD EMS official, along the longer but safer trail. The third team of IMSARU members escorted the reporting party back to the yurt through the dark.

The first team reached the subject while the others were still on the trail. They reported that the subject had suffered from cold while the rest of his party was getting him back to the yurt, and that he was in a lot of pain. Efforts to obtain air transport were unsuccessful because of lack of visibility down in the valley, so Jennifer arranged for an ALS ambulance to meet the crew in the Gold Fork lot. IMSARU members used our hypothermia bag (which has various openings to allow access for medical checks) to keep the subject warm during transport, put him in our snow sled behind Justin’s snowmobile, and evacuated him to the parking lot and waiting ALS crew.

Later report from the family said that the subject had multiple damaged vertebrae, that prognosis is good but recuperation will be slow.

IMSARU members responding were Justin Ahlin, Ron Christensen, Don Fridrich, Dan Herr- ring, Mike Johnson, Bill Lindenau, Gail Long, Brian Mitchell, Mitch Pelham, Gregg Rettschlag and Everett Wood. In-town coordination was handled by Rod Knopp and Charlotte Gunn.

**THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!**

We have received much-appreciated cash donations from the following:

**Hewlett-Packard** matches employee donations to charity via YourCause and Network for Good. Employees **Barbara Poston** and **Kurt Ostwinkle** have made regular donations over many years and **Terry Jensen** joined them this past fall.

**Rick Incelli**, in the name of his daughter and son-in-law, Angela Incelli and Miles Soppe, as a Christmas present to them.

**Capitol Gypsies Good Sams**

**Carolee Eslinger**  **Janet Boss**  **Betty Robertson**  **Mark Rasmus**
Saturday morning started with a caravan of vehicles leaving the Compound at 8:00 a.m. Twenty-five unit members left the gray clouds and fog of the valley inversion and drove into bright sunshine, blue skies and moderate temperatures just past Mores Creek Summit.

Upon arrival we separated into three groups that would rotate through three training stations. Our leaders were Gregg Rettschlag, Brad Acker and Jeff Ball, who each ran a station. These stations put members through avalanche shoveling techniques, avalanche probing including individual and probe lines, and avalanche beacon training. For some members this was a time to freshen and renew skills learned and practiced in the past, while for others it was a first-time exposure to these avalanche rescue disciplines.

Jeff worked us through techniques of shoveling to a subject, and ultimately how to evacuate from the snow a buried avalanche victim. We learned to determine the proper distance from a subject to begin shoveling, and how to work with partners in a V-formation to remove snow to most efficiently free the victim. In a situation where shoveling is required, it is certainly a case of “the more hands to help, the better,” since nearly 1.5 tons of snow could potentially be moved in reaching a buried subject.

Gregg led us through probing activities. This started with the exercise of becoming comfortable and familiar with the act of opening our probes as quickly and efficiently as possible, since time is of the essence in reaching a victim. Each person worked an individual probe in attempts to locate a buried “subject.” We learned different methods of grid probing and also the use of a spiral formation to probe from and around the expected location of the subject. The members then worked as teams in an organized probe search using a guidon line, which includes members working the probes, a member at each end of the guidon line who would advance it to the next mark, and a leader who would front the probe line and call out instructions.

Brad trained us on the use of avalanche beacons. One of the key components in this element is being able to test the range and working function of beacons by each member of a group before they even head out into the field for any activity in avalanche country. Beacons were buried in the field and would be turned on by remote control so that each member could search and locate a “victim.” After searches for individual beacons were completed, we then went into a scenario of using our beacons to locate subjects when multiple beacons were buried under the snow.

Upon conclusion of the above exercises, we were given two mock avalanche rescue scenarios. The first involved a quick-response team of six members who encountered a member of a ski group; this person was frantic and reporting that four members of his group were hit by an avalanche. As the response team started to advance on the scene, they did not identify as quickly as they should have that this “frantic” reporting party had his avalanche beacon on “send”; this cost some precious moments of response time. Once the RP was in the care of a member and his beacon turned off, the response team went to the areas of buried beacon signals and where physical evidence was visible. The response team did find the four avalanche “victims” in approximately fourteen minutes, which is nearing the end of the general fifteen-minute window of higher survivability when buried in an avalanche. The team also learned that it should have responded more quickly to the visible glove on the avalanche scene, as it was actually tied to the “arm” of our mock subject.
The second scenario also involved a quick-response team of six members. In this case, the reporting party was a couple of skiers who did not witness the avalanche but only knew that a party of unknown number had been in front of them and then an avalanche hit. It was also unknown how many, if any, of those hit by the avalanche had beacons. The quick-response team moved onto the avalanche field and fairly quickly found two “avalanche victims” that did have beacons. The search then continued for any other missing victims, focusing on physical signs and clues on the snowfield. At this point, remaining members of the group showed up in a support role to assist the quick-response team. One member took a lead role and went to work establishing a probe search using a guidon line at the toe of the avalanche. One of the quick-response team members established a second probe line in an area where there was sign and a high probability that a victim could be buried; this probe line moved up the hill but did so without a guidon line. All the remaining “avalanche victims” were found in approximately twenty-five minutes.

IMSARU members participating included Brad Acker, Jeff Ball, Bob Blurton, Chris Brookman, Ron Christensen, Paul Connell, Nikki Contreras, Kammie Cuneo, Mike Johnson, Phil Lewis, Sage Lee, Gail Long, Ted Marx, Brian Mitchell, Mitchell Pelham, Tom Rand, Gregg Rettschlag, Colin Sesek, Jen Sheldon, Layne Simmons, Jamie Simpson, Craig Swan, Ken Swickard, Christina Thurston and Greg Weber.

[Editor’s Note: This field training was preceded by multiple evening classroom sessions.]

TENTATIVE IMSARU TRAINING SCHEDULE FOR 2014
--GREGG RETTSCHLAG, TRAINING DIRECTOR

NOTE: Here is the preliminary schedule for SAR training each month. (The regular training dates are the second Tuesday of each month plus field training on the following weekend.) This schedule is not fixed, due to possible mission conflicts or other issues that may arise.

February – Snow shelters, plus snow travel and snow survival
March – Map and compass
April – GPS (Schedule for field training may have to shift to accommodate Robie Creek.)
May – IMSARU Olympics  (In lieu of mock mission, you will get a chance to demonstrate/learn mission-ready skills.)
June – Bivouac outing (field). May add something else to the mix for the classroom session.
July – Search techniques, leadership
August – N/A due to Corn Booth. (May still shoot for some simple field work that month.)
September – Helicopter operations
October – Patient packaging and litter handling
November – Open. Will evaluate putting a new subject here, or possibly revisit previous training.

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2013 CHRISTMAS PARTY
--CHARLOTTE GUNN

Many thanks to the Idaho Fish and Game Department for letting us use the conference room in their building on Walnut Street! It was a comfortable place for the approximately 80 attendees, with an in-town address on a snowy night, plenty of parking, a kitchen area where the tables could be loaded with all that potluck food, and a roomful of decorated tables for eating. And eat we did; the only problem was being unable to sample everything.

A special treat was a short video supplied by the Idaho Public Television crew that had filmed various IMSARU activities throughout the year with the plan of creating a film to use in their programming. They had put together some clips from several different occasions.

After the meal and film, officers presented awards to the following members:

Training Director Mike Johnson presented MRA patches to newer members who have completed their probationary period: Moises Chavez, Don Fridrich, Dan Herring, Steve Hunt, Dale Hyatt Jr., Siw Lea, Gail Long, Anthony Mascola, Dell McNees, Brian Mitchell, Chad Nelson, Liesel Nelson, Tom Rand, Dodi Sallee, Jen Skeldon and Greg Weber. President Jimmie Yorgensen presented SAR history books to four newer members who have jumped into SAR with both feet: Don Fridrich, Gail Long, Dell McNees and Mitch Pelham. He also presented an engraved clock to Everett and Rose Wood as recognition of all of the time and work they have dedicated to IMSARU over many years.

Jimmie presented vests embroidered with the MRA logo to: Dan Scovel for his work in training, tracking (Journeyman level), administrative wisdom, and mission participation as both searcher and O.L. Kris Scovel for her calm and encouraging participation in training, tracking (also Journeyman level), coordination with the Robie Creek committee and mission administration. Jamie Simpson for her competence and professionalism in handling her K9 Yoki and her dedication in responding to almost every mission. Tom Wheless for all the background work he does to help keep our equipment ready to go when needed, his response to missions and his organization of whatever needs to be done.

Jimmie also presented plaques to: Mike Johnson, in recognition of the outstanding job he did as Training Director, spending uncounted hours setting up well-organized classroom presentations and scouting areas for challenging field training...as well as adding details for realism and/or enjoyment. John Ferguson, who set up and manages our website, did the research necessary for our new callout system, and answers all our dumb questions about computer technology.

On the wall in our meeting room are two large flat rocks with nameplates of those who have received “The Rock” for distinguished service to the unit over a major period of time. This year it was renamed “The George Gunn Distinguished Service Award,” a third large rock will be hung as soon as it is physically ready, and the smaller individual “Rock” awards were presented to two members: Ann Moser has been the heart and driving force of our K9 team for several years, with her giant Schnauzers Watson (certified in area search and cadaver) and Cricket (certified in cadaver) and her hard-working professional approach to this volunteer work. She responds to almost all our missions and inspires all who work with her. Owen Miller has been Technical Director for three years and has kept the technical training at a high level for personal skills, team skills and equipment. In addition, when he is in town Owen responds to all kinds of mission calls, ready to navigate, search, organize or do whatever needed to be done.
Avalanche Training

Airplane Search Team

More Avalanche Training

Airplane Search Side-hill

Gold Fork Yurt
Rescue Team