

Plane with 6 people crashed

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Box Springs Mtns
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By Steve Zappe

I was talking long distance to a friend Wednesday night at 11:00 and she casually asked me how the SAR business had been lately. I had no sooner said that things were pretty slow when the operator cut in and said I had an emergency call from RMRU, call coordinator Jerry Muratet. The business was about to pick up ... literally.

I had been reflecting during the week on the fact that my celebration of Holy Week and Easter for the last two years had been marred by tragedies. Two years ago we recovered the charred remains of six people from a charter plane wreck on Good Friday, and my meditation

that evening on Christ's death was intensified by my exposure to the harsh realities of death earlier in the day. Last year the body of a young man was pulled from the icy waters of Tahquitz Creek on Easter Sunday morning, and I experienced little of the joy which should be felt on this festival of life when the father found out that his son was dead ... Yes, I had been reflecting, and I had wondered if life would return to normal this year and I could celebrate a joyous Easter. The answer appeared to be "no" after Jerry told me we had a plane crash on Box Springs Mountain, located in Riverside between the UCR campus and the International Raceway.

Several families and their friends had flown in two planes from Lake Havasu to Orange County to spend the day at Disneyland, but on the return trip that evening one of the planes landed in Riverside rather than take the risk of flying through the fog and low cloud cover beyond the city. The other pilot took the risk and ended up not only taking



Jim Fairchild

The deputy coroner and RMRU members work at the grim task of removing the bodies from the wreckage.

his life but the lives of his five passengers - a total of one man, two women, a teenage boy and two young children. The impact was at full speed, folding the wings back, dragging the engine under the fuselage and ripping open the cockpit. It didn't burn, but then it really didn't matter - the six people were killed instantaneously.

The first RMRU members on the scene were Jim Fairchild and Rick Pohlers, and their hopes were temporarily raised when they heard voices on the mountain frantically yell "Hurry, we need help!" The voices were actually coming from two teenagers who had hiked up the mountain without flashlights and panicked when they stumbled upon the eerie scene of wreckage and victims partly obscured by the fog. The next several hours were spent waiting for the coroner, hiking him up to the crash site, and deciding to delay the body recovery until morning. I opted to drive the five miles home and sleep in my bed rather than hang around.

We rendezvoused at 7 a.m. back at the base of the mountain and due to mix-ups had to wait until nearly 9:30 before our chopper pilots, Pete and Jim from Western Helicopters in Rialto, arrived in their Hughes 500's - one was for us and the other was for the television reporters. We were then shuttled up the hill to the crash site where we proceeded to place the remains into body bags and fly them out slung under the bird in a cargo net.

And that was it ... no happy endings, no unexpected turn of good luck, no reuniting of loved ones. It was the type of mission w sometimes find ourselves ask this why I'm a member of RI And the answer is usually hard to rationalize if you're a mountaineer a prefer to search for lost hikers or rescue stranded climbers, but t e answer must be positive. It obviously isn't the main reason for anyone I know on the team, but the work has to be done. Maybe next year my Easter will be better.



Jim Fairchild

While Western Helicopter pilot Pete Gillies held the Hughes 500C in a hover, RMRU members attached the sling to the cargo net that contained bodies.

RMRU is a volunteer search and rescue team that covers Riverside County and assists other teams with search and rescue efforts in other counties. Each member purchases their own equipment and takes time off work, without compensation, to participate in search and rescue missions. Team equipment is purchased from contributions from the community. We are a non-profit organization and are funded by [donations](#) from people like you.