



52-year-old with apparent heart attack

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Millard Canyon
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By Jim Fairchild

Alex John Alexander, age 52, was a member of the Basic Mountaineering Class (BMC) conducted annually by the San Geronio Chapter of the Sierra Club. The class was starting its overnight campout weekend, hiking up the trail toward 'The Sink', an unusual sunken valley north of the ridge running to Kitching Peak.

Hiking along at about the 5000' elevation there were about two groups, one somewhat ahead of the other. Alex was in the rear group, going slowly. He dropped unconscious. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation was begun because both his heart and lungs were not functioning. The group got back together, certain member went out for help. The Banning station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department was contacted by the informant. Capt. Ray Canova called Don Landells Aviation and the California Division of Forestry (CDF) station at Cabazon. (Don was returning from a Los Angeles charter and was contacted via radio.)

He landed at Cabazon and picked up Capt. Canova, the informant, two CDF firemen and their resuscitator. They attempted to fly in to the downed man. The combination of the informant not being able to direct them there, and dense clouds prevented this. They landed at the roadhead area, the CDF men then hiking in, upon arrival they found that Alex appeared to have vital signs going for him, but was still unconscious. RMRU was contacted when it was found that they weren't able to fly directly to the victim.

When RMRU arrived Don tried to fly Walt Walker and myself in to a ridge above to "Bomb" down to Alex's location, but clouds prevented even coming close. We landed below the roadhead, put on packs, mine was the RMRU oxygen system, and began to hike. In about 35 minutes we were there. It sure looked bad, the CDF oxygen had been consumed. I set up the regulator and Elder valve of our oxygen system and Walt started the oxygen. He gave 10 inflations while CPR continued, then checked the pupils - dilated and fixed. Walt said, "You can stop." Alex had been gone for some time. Everyone there who had tried so hard for so long to sustain life was disappointed, even a bit stunned that we quit so soon. Well, we don't blame them, but in the event that a massive heart failure (heart muscle or valve damage) knocks a person down in the wilderness, unconscious for more than a few minutes, his chances are slim. Besides, we would have had to wait for an ambulance crew to hike in with a portable chest-compression machine so we could transport in the litter and keep up CPR. Anyway, be assured that Alex was truly dead some time before our arrival.



Jim Falchid

With the Elder valve still in hand and moments after stopping the CPR, Walt Walker told the group that tried to keep Alex Alexander alive, that they had done everything possible. The white area in the upper left is part of a tarp that was stretched over the stricken hiker.

Shortly the rest of our crew arrived with the wheeled litter. We asked everyone to pack up and then began the sad return trip of about two miles with the body.

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.