



## 49 year old sportswriter from Chicago missing in Rockies

**August 12, 1988**  
**Silver Plume, Colorado**  
**1988-019**

It was mid-morning Wednesday when I received a call from my good friend Tim Cochrane, of Vail, Colorado. He is a member of the Vail Mountain Rescue Team and is also a state mission coordinator for the Colorado Search and Rescue Board. It was in his capacity of CSRB coordinator that he was calling. Tim described that a 49 year old sportswriter from Chicago was missing and that the Alpine Rescue Team was requesting assistance. He asked me to find out how many SAR people from California would be available for the search. He said that Scott Air Force Base (Rescue Coordination Center for North America) was working on finding air transportation for Thursday.

The California Region of the Mountain Rescue Association has a region-wide call-out procedure that is run by the Sierra Madre Search and Rescue Team. I contacted Sierra Madre and they started the callout. By mid-afternoon I was advised by Sierra Madre that 42 CRMRA members would be available. I called Tim and told him the count and he related that so far no aircraft were available for Thursday.

After numerous telephone calls back and forth, between Tim and I, the good news came Thursday afternoon that a Colorado Air National Guard plane would be available for Friday morning. The teams sending members were advised that they should be at Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino at 0600.

The men and women from the CRMRA teams were early arriving Friday morning at Norton. You guessed it, not so fast, the usual government paper work had to be filled out and as the spokesperson for the CRMRA I had to sign a form that I guaranteed our group would not hijack the airplane. I never did figure out where we would want to go, besides Hawaii, and that would mean we weren't packed for the beach. It was mid-morning when the C130 airplane showed up and by that time the troops were more than eager to get going. We were airlifted to Denver and bused to the small town of Silver Plume (altitude 9150') on the eastern slope of the Rockies.

During the briefing we learned that Alpine and nine Colorado MRA teams, along with another seven CSRB teams had been searching for four days. It was also sadly reported that a CAP pilot was killed and his observer critically injured in the crash of their search plane the day before we arrived. During our stay in Colorado we were housed in the Clear Creek County building located in Georgetown and wonderfully fed by the Salvation Army out of their portable kitchen vehicle. The Alpine Rescue Team was putting the Incident Command System to good use in managing such a large group. RMRU member, Bob Sairs, and I were assigned to Plans and stayed up well past midnight working with the group that was planning search assignments for Saturday.



Members of the California Region of the Mountain Rescue Association, including eight RMRU members, after arriving at Buckley Field in Denver to assist the Rocky Mountain Region.

Saturday morning dawned clear and warm for August in the Rockies. After an early morning breakfast the teams were given their assignments. Some of the teams were assigned to a steep slope of dense Aspen trees. They fanned out in a long line and using compass bearings, radios and plain old shouting worked their way up slope. Upon reaching the ridge line they continued over the top and down the other side. On the way down a member of the San Diego team slipped and injured a hand, putting her out of action. When the different teams completed their assignments they were airlifted off the mountain by large H46 Army helicopters. These same helicopters had earlier airlifted other teams into the backcountry for assignments to cover areas on the north side of the valley. One of the San Dimas teams, who had been flown in, were covering their assignment when one of the team members was stricken with a significant case of Altitude Mountain Sickness. This malady can happen to anyone and it can be debilitating. The host team, Alpine, was ready for just such an occurrence. They quickly fielded a team who climbed up, administered oxygen and an IV. This was followed by an evacuation by litter down a scree slope. With lots of rest and descending to a lower altitude the sick man was none the worse for wear.

On Sunday morning the teams were back out in the field covering more Aspen slopes and steep rocky ledges. The entire week of searching had not produced one single clue and to date the man is still missing. Monday morning we were served breakfast, climbed aboard the buses and headed down the hill for Denver. We loaded up all our gear and climbed aboard another C130 for the flight back to Norton in San Bernardino. Even though the mission was not successful in locating the missing man,

it did prove to be an excellent exercise in moving a large group of MRA personnel to a distant location. It could well be the next time we could save many lives if called upon to do so.

The following groups from the California Region participated: Altadena Mountain Rescue Team, China Lake Mountain Rescue Group, Los Padres Search and Rescue Team, Malibu Mountain Rescue Team, Montrose Search and Rescue Team, San Diego Mountain Rescue Team, San Dimas Mountain Rescue Team and RMRU. Members from RMRU who participated were: Cliff Benton, Rob Gardner, Dona Halcrow, Bernie McIlvoy, Rick Pohlars, Bob Sairs, Kevin Walker and Walt Walker.

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.