

Lost Hiker

November 10, 2017
Dripping Springs, Temecula
2017-048

Written by Tony Hughes

It was almost 9:00 PM when the page went out, earlier than most that tend to come closer to 11:00 PM. I had originally called in that I wasn't going to be able to make it tonight, I had been awake since 5:00 AM and my girls had a bunch of activities that were still in progress. A second page went out that more people were needed. I shuffled some stuff around and rolled out a little after 9:30 PM.

We had limited information, other than someone was lost near the Dripping Springs campground East of Temecula. I started driving toward the campground. Kevin was also in route but a bit behind me. Both of us being in Orange County, it is unusual for us to be first on scene. However, due to various circumstances, it looked like that was exactly what was going to happen. We got word that Gary was going to swing by the shop to pick up a vehicle on his way from Palm Desert. Cam had just landed in San Diego and would also roll as soon as he got out of the airport.

I hadn't gotten very far down the road when Glenn called and re-routed me to Hemet-Ryan. We still had limited info but apparently Star 9 had spotted the subject based on a phone call he managed to get out to 911 before his phone died. We were going to do a hoist.

I got to the hangar where I quickly spoke to Jerry and Mike from the Sheriff's Aviation Unit. When I asked them what information we had, they said "Male - Lost" then laughed a bit. They did in fact have a little more info. During their flight over him earlier, it appears he was stuck by a cliff out in a wash. He was also a Marine from Pendleton and his Command was already calling to get details. We had no name, age, health, or other details. If he hadn't moved, we could fly right to him in about 10 minutes.

Kevin arrived a few minutes behind me. I was gearing up with some light tech gear, a screamer suit, a medical kit, water, and some snacks. Kevin an Army Ranger, was very amused when he found out the subject was a Marine and that Mike the pilot, was also a Marine. We got in Star 9 and we were ready to go. There was one small problem. The weather had cooled off and the windows in Star 9 were all fogged up. We had to idle on

the tarmac for a bit until the windows cleared up.

After a few minutes we were airborne. About 5 minutes later we were crossing Highway 79 and headed toward a small flashing light in the darkness on the mountainside. The door opened, I got hooked up, and down I went. The only flat area near the subject was a narrow trail. The surrounding terrain was steep and full of brush. I touched down up slope from the trail and continued to slide about 10 feet down to the trail, giving Star 9 a slight jolt when I slid off the embankment above the trail and bottomed out. The flight crew had anticipated this and were on top of it.

I disconnected and checked William, the subject, for any medical concerns. He was in good health, just a little cold and thirsty. Star 9 went to scope out a landing spot closer to the highway while I got William in the screamer suit and went over what was going to happen. I also got a few details on what had happened. He had set out to hike 26 miles that day and left at 10:30 AM. He had brought very little water, no warm gear, and only a few snacks. His headlamp was still working but his phone had died. He admitted he was unprepared and had underestimated the hike.

I hailed Star 9 on the radio and they were quickly over us once more to hoist us out of there. William went up first, followed by me. In no time we landed in a field across the highway from the campground. I escorted William out of the helicopter and across the field where we met the Deputy that was on scene. I reclaimed the screamer suit and helmet from William, left him with the Deputy, and I headed back to Star 9.

We flew back to Hemet Ryan and landed just before midnight. Overall the mission was textbook with no complications. This was my first hoist after being on the team for over 2 and ½ years. I will not forget it as I rescued a Veteran on Veteran's day while being flown by a Veteran with another Veteran waiting in the parking lot. Thank you to all Veterans!

RMRU Members Involved: Tony Hughes and Kevin Kearn.

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.