



Riverside County Joint SAR Mock Mission

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Garner Valley
2016-T04**

Written by Kevin Kearn

On Saturday Riverside County conducted its first Joint SAR exercise in years. The training scenario consisted of a fictitiously downed aircraft in the mountains around Garner Valley with four dead, injured, and lost personnel that needed to be rescued and recovered. Over 40 personnel participated in the event. The Riverside Sheriff's Department deployed its Sheriff's Emergency Response Team (SERT) Command Post, one RSO Aviation helicopter (Star-9), three volunteer search teams including RMRU, Desert Search and Rescue (DSAR), and two Canine Search Teams, and support from RSO's Citizen Volunteers (Anza).

The exercise began at Lake Hemet Sheriff's Sub-Station where the Command Post was set up. Teams met there at 7:00 AM under sunny skies that would cloud up soon with a fast approaching storm. Temps were in the 50s when RSO SERT OIC, LT Perdue, gave the entire group safety and mission briefs on a scenario Glenn Henderson had primarily puppet-mastered for the county. Both Glen and Gwenda Yates managed the exercise transparently in the background, with some help from DSAR's President, Sharon Ollenburger.



Base Camp
Photo by Unknown.

Experienced RMRU members Kirk Cloyd and Lew Kingman, along with “injured-reserve-list” Judy Spowart, helped man the SERT Command Post. The remainder of RMRU was split into two teams – which became Teams 1 and 2 for the operation. RMRU’s teams quickly distributed radios and gear and immediately broke out their Emergency Locator Transmitter (ELT) direction finding equipment. After reporting detection of the downed aircraft’s ELT signal along two azimuths, RMRU’s CP personnel sent the teams, each truck mounted, to two different locations along Highway 74 in order to get better readings and triangulate a location more accurately. While RMRU attempted to get new azimuths from the ground, Star-9 launched, quickly got an aerial hit on the transponder, and sited the first missing victim, “Paul Doe,” in the vicinity of Little Thomas Mountain.



**Cameron and Ray with ELT
Photo by Eric Holden.**

DSAR drove their truck up the mountain road and came upon, “Sheri Doe”, the second victim, at a location less than 200yds south of the mountain top. Eric Holden current, qualified Wilderness First Responder, deployed by ground with the Canine Teams (dogs Inge and Journey). The first victim, Paul, was expired and the dog teams searched the area to try to pick up scent of any other victims. DSAR’s first team was then lowered in to Sheri’s location and began looking for additional signs of tracks from the other two victims still unaccounted for.

Gary Farris and I were then lifted in and lowered onto the road on Star-9’s second turn. We took charge of Sheri, who was uninjured, and hoisted her out in a Screamer Suit. Running low on fuel with worsening weather, Star-9 went off station and departed after dropping Sheri off at the CP. Gary and I then linked up with Eric.



**Kevin Lowered and Putting Screamer Suit on Sheri Doe
Photo by Dave Poe (DSAR).**

Communications with the CP were difficult but Ray Weden took on the mission to function as a go between, with our diesel equipment, between the elements in the field and the CP by Lake Hemet. His actions greatly enhanced command and control of the operation. Tony Hughes and Cameron Dickinson also moved our second truck, and repositioned critical technical equipment we'd need shortly.

Eric, Gary, and I used our direction finding equipment to home in on the crash site which was approximately 300' east of the road while DSAR attempted to retrace Sheri's tracks in hopes of possibly detecting additional signs of other victims who may have left the crash site. One canine team (Journey) followed us.

Eric, Gary, and I came up on the crash site to find the "wreckage" (ELT transponder) and a third victim, "Teddy Bear," who was also expired. As we began to search the area around the wreckage, DSAR heard the shout from the fourth victim, "Andrew Doe," and located him, conscious with a simulated broken leg, at the foot of a 25' cliff about 150" from the crash site.

After Eric and I got to him, I submitted a report to Ray with our location and request for a stokes litter and gear to perform a high angle technical rescue. Eric treated Andrew with DSAR assisting him while I checked out the top of the cliff to organize the fall lines and anchors for the raise. In a short time, Gary and two DSAR personnel, John Eddy and Mr. Paull, arrived at the cliff with equipment. Soon after that, Tony and Cameron also arrived.

Our 5-man RMRU crew, all proficient at high angle rescue, incorporated the two DSAR personnel into the operation. I was Ops Lead, Tony was Safety Officer, Eric was the Litter Attendant, Cam was in charge of the red line/MPD with Jacob Paull of DSAR, and Gary was the in charge of the blue line/MPD with help from John Eddy of DSAR. Together we quickly got the safety line set up followed by the anchors and dual lines all while making extra sure to keep everyone safe. Eric, with help from DSAR's Kevin Wahlstrom, Mike Smith, Joe McCuen, and Jason Roberson, got Andrew safely packaged up in the litter. With Eric hooked up, we quickly hoisted both of them. The DSAR personnel integrated well on the line teams with Cam and Gary close by to supervise.



**Eric rased up with Andrew Doe by Joint (RMRU/DSAR) team above
Photo by Dave Poe (DSAR).**

After Eric skillfully maneuvered the litter over an obstructing knob, Tony and I helped pull the litter up and back behind the safety line. At this point, with impending bad weather bearing down on all of us, the exercise ended and we broke the system down and recovered the equipment before rain could soak our ropes/webbing. More DSAR personnel arrived to assist and we were extra cautious to keep everyone safe during this final part of the field exercise.

Upon everyone's return to the Command Post, LT Perdue led an after action review with the entire group. After capturing lessons learned, there was wide consensus that it was an excellent, useful exercise and that Riverside County would try to do it again in six months. Great job by all involved and especially Glenn Henderson for planning and coordinating so much on behalf of RMRU.

RMRU Members Involved: Kirk Cloyd, Cameron Dickinson, Gary Farris, Glenn Henderson, Eric Holden, Tony Hughes, Kevin Kearn, Lew Kingman, Judy Spowart, Ray Weden, and Gwenda Yates.

Other Units Involved: RSO SERT, RSO Aviation, DSAR, Riverside County Search Dog Team, Citizen Volunteers (Anza).