

Searching from (Tree) Top to (Canyon) Bottom

Date, Mission:

11 NOV, 04M2460A

Incident Commander: Maj. Jon Wordsworth and Lt. Col. Steve Asche

Briefing: A plastic surgeon flying from Bakersfield back to Santa Barbara is missing. A CAP aircrew flies out of Bakersfield, and a ground team is dispatched from Santa Barbara. An exhaustive route search begins, turning into a mile-wide grid search. The aircrew hears a very faint ELT, but the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center has received no satellite hits.

Find: Piper Saratoga PA-32R, located at 34 deg 41.7' N by 119 deg 38.7' W. The pilot hit the highest point of the highest elevation on his route, struck the tops of the trees, and flipped into a canyon below. Three on board. No survivors.

Citations: Keilholtz: "This could have turned into a needle in a haystack search. The crew did a great job of spotting debris in the bottom of a canyon. The Mission Observer spotted the damage to the trees at the top of the hill. That's what we teach in class, so that was an outstanding utilization of training."

Asche: "At the wrong time of the day, the crew might not have spotted it. One of the things we teach in IC training is that just because you didn't spot it in the morning doesn't mean you won't see it in the afternoon."

Ostrat: "The Bakersfield crew has been particularly responsive to the ES program in California. And because of that, they've been involved in significant missions with finds and saves. They're not sitting back and waiting for us to tell them where the target is."

And the ESSy Goes to...

Capt. Rob Custer, 1st Lt. Dave McCarthy, and 1st Lt. Shanna Williams, aircrew, Bakersfield Composite Squadron 121; Lt. Col. Anthony Upton, Capt. Ed Ruwe, and SM Pat Coady, ground team, Santa Barbara Squadron 131.

Continued on page 54 . . .

