



Humboldt Sheriff's
Office
826 Fourth Street
Eureka, CA. 95501
(707) 445-7251

HUMBOLDT CO SHERIFF INCLUSIVE CASE REPORT

Case Number
201702111

Date: 10/02/2017

Page: 1 of: 4

Incident Case Number 201702111 IR Title ULTRA-LIGHT PLANE CRASH
Date/Time Occurred 05/04/2017 10:57:02 AM IR Date/Time 05/04/2017 07:06:50 PM
Name/Business Name _____ Incident Location B:N FORK OF EEL RIVER, MCCANN, CA
Case Clearance _____ Case Clearance Date _____

Offense

Offense Code DI CSA COMMITTED Location LAKE/WATERWAY
Description DEATH INVESTIGATION

Person

Person Type _____
Name Type LEGAL Last WHITLOW First REX Middle ALLEN
Address Type _____ Address EAST MCCANN RD Apartment _____

Person Type INVOLVED PERSON
Name Type LEGAL Last WHITLOW First TRACY Middle MAIRE

Hair Color _____ Eye Color _____ Driver License _____ State _____

Narrative/Summary

Narrative - IR On 05/04/2017 at approximately 1127 HRS, I (Sergeant K. Ireland) was notified by HCSO Dispatch via text message of an Ultra-Light plane crash that had occurred in the area of McCann near Redcrest. The crash occurred in the water of the North Fork of the Eel River. I was also advised that the pilot of the aircraft, Rex Whitlow, had not been located at the crash site.

I was conducting a reconnaissance flight with the California National Guard upon receiving this notification and was unable to respond. I notified HCSO dispatch of my response upon my return to the Eureka/Arcata Airport in McKinleyville. I copied radio traffic that Lieutenant Fridley was responding to the HCSO Boat Shed in order to respond to the scene with a boat. I met with Lt. Fridley at the boat shed and responded with him. Lt. Fridley and I met with Diana Toten with Southern Humboldt Technical Rescue (SHTR) at the Dyerville Bar. I learned that CAL Fire and the United States Coastguard (USCG) were in the area attempting to locate Rex Whitlow. Lt. Fridley launched the boat and transported the SHTR to the search site.

The Ultra-Light aircraft was caught up on the shore line and had been brought on to shore by unknown subjects prior to my arrival, N 40°20.578/ W 123°51.532. Visibility in the water was no more than six inches and the water current was moving swiftly. There were several boats in the water being piloted by family and



Humboldt Sheriff's
Office
826 Fourth Street
Eureka, CA. 95501
(707) 445-7251

HUMBOLDT CO SHERIFF INCLUSIVE CASE REPORT

Case Number
201702111

Date: 10/02/2017

Page: 2 of: 4

friends of Rex Whitlow that were assisting in the search. At approximately 1800 HRS, Lt. Fridley suspended the search.

I returned to the scene of the crash with Deputy C. Moore and SHTR on 05/05/2017 and continued our search efforts, see Deputy Moore's supplemental for additional. I met with (IP) Tracy Whitlow and requested additional information regarding the crash. Tracy stated that Rex had flown that morning, but family and friends had heard what sounded like engine trouble coming from the aircraft while it was in flight. Based on the direction of the sound, the family believed that Rex was attempting to land back at the airstrip located on their property next to the Eel River. Tracy stated that when family members saw the aircraft in the river it was floating in the water upside down and following the swift water downstream. Tracy then pointed out where she believed the aircraft to have crashed. Tracy stated that Rex was wearing a black helmet, a black leather jacket, blue jeans with black leather chaps over them and brown lace up boots during his flight.

I returned to the HCSO boat and notified Deputy Moore of this possible crash location, N 40°19.878/ W 123°50.623. We added this location to our search area and began searching from the possible crash location to the where the aircraft was pulled ashore. I suspended our search at approximately 1530 HRS due to mechanical issues with the HCSO jet boat.

See Deputy Moore's supplemental reports regarding continued search efforts.

On 05/14/2017 at approximately 1412 HRS, I was contacted by Deputy Moore by phone and was told that the body of Rex Whitlow had been located by friends of the family and that a boat was anchored where the body was located in the river. I responded with Deputy Moore and deployed a boat at the High Rock bar. We were met by Deputy Van Buskirk and Diana Toten from SHTR. We met with the civilian boat that was standing by. I observed a body laying supine in a shallow area of the Eel River located at N 40°20.754/ W 123°53.250. This location was approximately 2.5 miles straight line of site from the possible location of the crash. The body was located on an exposed gravel bar in the river and had not come to the shoreline. The river depth had dropped at least two feet since the time of the crash. I was not able to observe the body up close due to river conditions. I did observe the clothing on the descendant which appeared to match the clothing description I obtained from Tracy Whitlow. Deputy Van Buskirk and D. Toten took possession of the body. The body was secured to the boat and transported back to Big Rock. Family members were able to positively identify the body to be that of Rex Whitlow. Deputy Van Buskirk took possession of Rex and transported him to the Coroner Division.

No further action taken.

Officer - IR

Report Date 05/04/2017

Supervisor Review

Review Date 06/05/2017

Distribution



Humboldt Sheriff's
Office
826 Fourth Street
Eureka, CA 95501
(707) 445-7251

HUMBOLDT CO SHERIFF INCLUSIVE CASE REPORT

Case Number
201702111

Date: 10/02/2017

Page: 3 of: 4

Narrative - Supplemental 1 On Saturday, May 13, 2017 I was assigned to assist in the search for missing pilot Rex Whitlow on the north fork of the Eel River near McCann. I met with Deputy Phil Daastol at the Humboldt County Boat Shed at about 0700 hours. We loaded the Sheriff's Office Jet boat and responded to the Dyerville overlook to meet with other searchers.

Upon our arrival, we met with Peggy Thomas of the Del Norte Sheriff's Search and Rescue Posse and her canine partners. A plan was established where I would launch the Sheriff's boat at High Rock on the mainstem Eel River and motor up to the crash site near McCann (40 20.078 / 123 50.734). I would pick up Peggy and one of her canine who is a certified cadaver canine through CARDA. Once I picked up Peggy and her canine we placed Peggy and the canine on the bow of the boat and motored to the crash site. We then drifted down stream to the location the small ultra-light plane was recovered (40 20.597 / 123 51.517). With no alert from the canine we continued down river to (40 20.428 / 123 52.161). As we drifted by a rock face between (40 20.565 / 123 51.733) and (40 20.500 / 123 51.831) Peggy explained the canine was showing interest in the location as a possible location of the body.

We motored back to the crash site and collected Peggy's other canine. We drifted back down to the area between (40 20.565 / 123 51.733) and (40 20.500 / 123 51.831) and Peggy told me this canine had a positive alert for the body being in the area. We marked the area with flagging along the bank of the river. I drove Peggy and her canine back to her vehicle and met with other search members. We went back to the area the canines had alerted and set a dive member into the water. After a short time the diver came to the surface and said he was unable to search as the visibility in the water was about ten to twelve inches and the current was too strong for him to be effective. We motored back to the crash site and met with other search members. A plan was established where search members would drag large grappling hooks through the water in an attempt to pull the body up or dislodge the body.

I operated the Sheriff's Boat while Southern Humboldt Technical Rescue Member Diana Totten and Deputy Daastol operated the grappling hooks. We drifted with the current between (40 20.565 / 123 51.733) and (40 20.500 / 123 51.831) pulling the hooks along the bottom of the river. We started along the north end of the river and worked our way back and forth with the current (running east to west) towards the south side of the river bank and then back to the north side of the bank. We made eighteen drifts through this area with no results. Other search members with up to four grappling hooks were doing the same thing.

With being unable to locate the body the search was postponed due to poor river conditions at about 1700 hours.

Clear with report.



Humboldt Sheriff's
Office
826 Fourth Street
Eureka, CA 95501
(707) 445-7251

HUMBOLDT CO SHERIFF INCLUSIVE CASE REPORT

Case Number
201702111

Date: 10/02/2017

Page: 4 of: 4

Officer - Supplemental

Report Date 05/15/2017

Supervisor Review

Review Date 05/22/2017

Distribution

Narrative - Supplemental 2 On Sunday, May 14, 2017 I was contacted by the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office Dispatch regarding a body being located in the water of the north fork of the Eel River. I contacted Sgt Kerry Ireland and advised him to meet me at the Sheriff's Office Boatshed. I responded to the boatshed and retrieved the Sheriff's Office jet boat. I believed the body in the water was possibly that of Rex Whitlow who had crashed into the north fork of the Eel River just north of McCann.

Upon Sgt Ireland's arrival we doubled up and responded to the Redcrest Grange where we meet with Humboldt County Deputy Coroner Charlie VanBuskirk. We then drove to the mainstem Eel River at High Rock and launched the Sheriff's Boat (40 22.829 / 123 55.281). Southern Humboldt Technical Rescue member Diana Totten met us and we all loaded into the boat. I drove us upriver to (40 20.744 / 123 53.245) where we meet with family members of Rex Whitlow who pointed out the body on the river. The body had come to rest in a shallow riffle off of the river. The body was collected by Coroner VanBuskirk and loaded onto a stokes litter on the stern of the boat. I then transported us back to our vehicles and once I pulled the boat from the waterway we transferred the body into the Coroners vehicle.

Refer to Deputy Coroner Vanbuskirk's supplemental report for further details.

Clear with report

Officer - Supplemental

Report Date 05/15/2017

Supervisor Review 1

Review Date 05/22/2017

Distribution