

On May 12, 1986 at approximately 9:00PM, I was informed by the Sheriff's Office desk officer that thirteen people which included several teenagers were overdue from a climb to the top of Mt. Hood. I notified SAR coordinator Deputy Kennell of the report and asked him to call the original informant, Mr. Clark Reynolds and then proceed to Timberline lodge to initiate the search for the climbers. I then called Deputy Krebs at home and informed him of the anticipated search. I asked him to contact Dep. Kennell and make arrangements with him to coordinate search efforts.

At about 10:30PM, Deputy Kennell called from Timberline Lodge and informed me that thirteen climbers from Oregon Episcopal School had left Timberline Lodge at 2:30AM on Monday morning, May 12, 1986. Part way up Mt. Hood, six students turned back as they were tired and too sick to continue. The remaining group consisting of a guide (Ralph Summers) two adults (Father Tom Goman and Marion Horwell) and twelve teenagers continued up Mt. Hood. They were scheduled to return by 6:00PM Monday evening. Deputy Kennel further related that weather conditions were getting increasingly worse. He reported strong winds, extreme fog and clouds causing a "white out" and low temperatures. Due to the adverse weather conditions, which according to the US Weather Service, would continue throughout the night, the decision was made to notify all available resources and commence searching for the lost climbers by daylight.

A command post was set up in the Timberline Lodge Ski Patrol Office. Deputies Kennell and Krebs were assigned to the command post to initiate the coordination of the search. Arrangements were made through Timberline Lodge to use a snow cat to take searchers to various locations on Mt. Hood. The U.S. Forest Service was contacted and permission was granted to enter the Wilderness area with mobilized equipment. Arrangements were then made with the Oregon State Aeronautics Division to close air space around Mt. Hood during the search. At 5:30AM, several members of the Portland Mtn. Rescue Unit (PMR) including their coordinators arrived at base operations. They installed a SAR base radio to communicate with the various search groups. By 6:00AM, their climbers were transported by snow cat to the 8600 foot level on Mt. Hood near the top of Palmer Snow Field. Weather conditions were too severe for helicopters from the 304th to land at Timberline Lodge. At about 9:45AM, Deputies Kennell and Krebs were notified that two members of the climbing party had walked off the mountain and were at Mt. Hood Meadows Lodge. Ralph Summers and Molly Shula were transported to the command post where they were interviewed by Deputy Krebs. It was learned that on Monday, the group of climbers started their descend down the mountain when it was decided that because of the weather conditions and the fatigue of the climbers, that all of them should dig a snow cave to protect them from the elements and spend the night. They had planned to start out at daylight regardless of weather conditions. Summers indicated that at daylight the next morning, he asked for volunteers to go with him to get help. Because of the poor conditions of the rest of the group, Molly Shula was the only one physically able to accompany Summers down the mountain. Summers took a compass reading, however over compensated and travelled too far south. He crossed White River Glacier and discovered that he was headed in the direction of Mt. Hood Meadows instead of Timberline Lodge. Neither Summers or Shula could pinpoint the location of the snow cave. During the following days, Summers was interviewed several times by Sheriff's personnel, PMR climbers, Forest Service personnel and members of the 304th in an attempt to correlate specific geographical locations that he could recognize or remember in relation to the snow cave.

A. Case Number 86-15981

B. Classification (SUPPLEMENTAL - PAGE 2)

CLACKAMAS COUNTY SHERIFF

Shortly after noon on Tuesday (May 13, 1986), the 304th was able to land at Timberline Lodge parking lot. Due to strong winds, they were unable to actively participate in the search from the air. By 2:00PM, the winds subsided and the clouds lifted enough for the 304th helicopters to begin an air search. Deputy Krebs requested that Summers go with the 304th in an attempt to obtain a more accurate location of the snow cave. Summers was unable to recognize familiar land locations and by 4:30PM, the helicopters were forced down by gusting winds and a "white out" condition.

At 6:00PM, Deputy Hattan and I arrived at the command post. I made arrangements with the management of Timberline Lodge to house all searchers and for them to provide food until the Red Cross arrived. Telephone lines were routed into the command area as well as a press room within the lodge. A briefing room was set up near the command post to brief all new climbers arriving to join the search teams. I assigned Deputy Krebs to act as a liaison with the parents and relatives of the missing climbers with instructions to keep them separated from the news media. Arrangements were made with Timberline Management to house and feed them during the search.

Climbers from PMR continued to search throughout the night. With the assistance of the Russell's, snow cats were made available to transport teams of searchers to various levels and then pick them up at the duration of their search patterns. (One snow cat turned over and had to be uprighted. No damage or injuries were reported). Several teams of five (5) to six (6) climbers each were continually being rotated during the search. By 4:00AM Wednesday morning, the weather conditions improved enough for the 304th to initiate an air search. Seattle Mountain Rescue, Corvallis Mountain Rescue and the Washington State Search Dogs were called for assistance. Several other climbing groups throughout Oregon and Washington were put on a standby notice in the event the search was to continue through the weekend. I made arrangements through Timberline Lodge to house and feed the climbers that were to be arriving during the next two days. I then notified command staff at the Sheriff's Department of the scope of the search and requested more personnel to assist with the search.

At 6:00AM, the command post was notified by the 304th Parajumpers that they had found three "survivors". I told Deputy Krebs to inform the parents of the lost climbers that searchers had found three survivors, however their condition was not known at the time. After not hearing anything for approximately one-half hour, I requested that base radio determine the condition of the found climbers. They attempted to obtain the information for me but could not get any condition on the climbers from the 304th. Base radio operators told me that the PJ's from the 304th had told other search groups not to proceed to their location and it was assumed at that time that all climbers had been found. PMR coordinators at the command post could not obtain an exact location of the found climbers from the 304th. As a result, they started calling their climbers from the mountain. Approximately an hour and one-half later, a P.J. from the 304th contacted base radio and asked to speak with the lieutenant from the Sheriff's Department. I was asked to meet a helicopter at Government Camp to pick up some equipment. (I assumed that they wanted to talk with me about the condition of the climbers). Deputy Krebs and I left the command post and drove to a large parking lot at Government Camp. We waited for almost an hour (it was about 9:00AM) and then called the command post to determine where the 304th was. (At that time, I still thought that there were survivors.) I was told that the 304th had just left the search area enroute to our location.

A. Case Number 86-15981

CLACKAMAS COUNTY SHERIFF

B. Classification (SUPPLEMENTAL - PAGE 3)

A 304th helicopter landed a short distance from us at the parking lot. A PJ ran to us and told us that they had two "deltas" for us. I asked him what type of equipment he wanted to give me and he replied, "two bodies." His crew unloaded two bodies and placed them on the ground in front of us. I informed the PJ that I thought the climbers were alive and he reported that all three were dead. He then told me that they were enroute back up the mountain to pick up the third person. I told them to take the third person to the command post where a triage had been set up by Hoodland Fire paramedics through Deputy Hattan. All P.J.'s ran back to their helicopter and left. Deputy Krebs and I unloaded all SAR gear from the rear of the Toyota pick-up and left it in the parking lot. We then loaded the two bodies in the rear and drove to the Oregon State Police Headquarters in Government Camp. I immediately called the command post and informed Deputy Hattan of the incident and asked him why the bodies had been transported to Government Camp. He indicated that he was not aware of it and assumed that the found climbers would be taken to the command post where he was waiting with medical personnel.

Earlier in the morning, I had called C-Com and asked that they notify Deputy Medical Examiner Doug Pratt of the search and that his services may be needed. I asked that he be available to come to Mt. Hood as soon as he was called by me. After talking with Deputy Hattan, I attempted to call Pratt but was unable to reach him. I requested that C-Com continue to locate him and once reached, tell him that he was needed at OSP in Government Camp. I then called Hood River Sheriff Kelly and informed him of the three apparently deceased climbers. (He had already been contacted about the search and had briefed on the scope of the operation.) I told him that it was my understanding that the climbers had been found several yards in Hood River County and asked if he wanted to send his medical examiner to Government Camp to meet us. I told him that since we were already involved in the coordination of the search that we would continue to assume responsibility until the conclusion of the search. He indicated his approval and said that he would contact his M.E. and call me back. At that time, C-Com called me and related that Doug Pratt was not available, but that he had sent two people from a Portland based funeral home to pick up the bodies. Since they had no radio contact with C-Com, they could not be given our location. Sheriff Kelly called back to relate that their M.E. would not be available until after 12:00PM. I made the decision to transport the bodies to the State Medical Examiners Office in Portland. About fifteen minutes later, the funeral personnel arrived. I instructed them to put the two bodies into their van and take them to the State Medical Examiner's Office. Just then I received a telephone call from Dep. Hattan informing me that Dr. Long from Emanuel had requested that the bodies be delivered to him. Dep. Hattan further related that Emanuel Hospital was one of the Hospitals involved in the emergency incident plan to accept injured personnel. I requested that Life Flight meet the funeral personnel at our location to pick up the climbers. I also told Deputy Hattan to instruct the 304th to either fly the third party directly to an area hospital and not to bring anyone else to government camp. Deputy Krebs stayed with the funeral personnel and bodies until Life Flight left with them.

As Deputy Krebs and I were about to leave Government camp to Timberline Lodge, Capt. Grolbert and Lt. Stillman arrived. I briefed them on the scope of the search and was informed that additional personnel would be arriving to assist.

A. Case Number 86-15981

B. Classification (SUPPLEMENTAL - PAGE 4)

CLACKAMAS COUNTY SHERIFF


Because of the large amount of newspaper and television media, it was decided to set up a special area away from the main lodge where the media could obtain up to date information. The management at Timberline Lodge opened a large area in the downstairs section of the Day Lodge. It was manned by Deputy Russ Williams and eventually Lt. Vicars after he arrived later in the day. Extra telephone lines were made available into this area.

Ground searchers continued to search for the snow cave throughout the day. Members of the 304th conducted ariel searches from the 7000 foot level to the 10,000 foot level. The Washington State Dog Search teams began searching from the 8900 foot level down the mountain towards White River Glacier. Foot prints made from what appeared to be an adult and a set of smaller foot prints were found leading down the mountain. These were found near the 7200 foot level. The prints were followed up the mountain however, because of the high winds, most of them were covered with drifting snow making it impossible to follow them. It was estimated by the searchers, that winds were causing drifts up to three feet in many places. Because of melting snow and ice, and the snow drifts, the landscape was constantly changing. Three roped climbers fell through an ice bridge into a cravass and had to be rescued by other members of their climbing team. They were not injured. Ground searches continued throughout the night.

The search continued on Wednesday by both the 304th and ground searchers. A glove believed at the time to belong to one of the lost climbers was found at the 8000 foot area. Although the area was searched extensively, it was believed that the winds had blown the glove from another location. During the day, as many as sixty searchers were on the mountain at one time. Arrangements were made through the Department of Emergency Services to activate the rescue units that had been placed on standby. They were to report to the command post and briefing area by 9:00AM on Thursday.

As the result of high winds and cloud coverage, and fatigue suffered by ground search teams, the search was suspended until the next morning. Throughout the night, Sheriff's Department coordinators, and the coordinators from the various rescue teams including the 304th, met to determine what areas should be searched. Because of flight restrictions by the pilots, the first available helicopter the next morning would be at 7:00AM. The second helicopter was scheduled to leave the triage area at 9:00AM. Arrangements were made with Timberlines snow cat operator (John Young) to transport the Washington State Dog team and other climbers during the night to the 8900 foot level to await daylight. They left the command post area around 3:00AM on Thursday. Summers was asked to join the 304th in a helicopter as soon as they were authorized to fly (weather permitting). All ground search personnel were scheduled to leave at daylight.

Searchers continued to search from the 8900 foot level down the mountain on and near White River Glacier. At about 4:30PM, the searchers reported that the snow cave had been found near the 8400 foot level. It was reported that two of the occupants of the cave were alive and the remaining climbers were unconscious. Deputy Hattan alerted medical personnel at the triage area at the parking lot of Timberline Lodge. By 6:30PM, all lost climbers had been transported to the triage area and flown to local hospitals. All reserve search and rescue were called and notified that they were not needed. Deputy Krebs and I remained at Timberline Lodge until the next morning. Arrangements were made for us to drive the Washington State Search dogs to the 304th Headquarters at 9:00AM on Friday for their trip back to Seattle. Final details including gathering lost property and obtaining billing information from the lodge was obtained.


Gene W. Hanners, Lt.