

Ron Rosepink Search Mission Background Information With Planning and Search Team Qualifications and Immediate Needs

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Background

On Saturday, June 28, 2003, around 5:30 pm, Lieutenant Colonel Ron Rosepink was last observed under canopy paragliding above the treetops on Black Mountain, near Tehachapi California. Tehachapi is southeast of Bakersfield, approximately two hours north of Los Angeles. Ron had been flying F-16s out of Edwards AFB as a an Air Force reserve officer and flight test pilot. He worked on a B1-B program with Tybrin Corporation. Ron commuted to California from Colorado where he lived with his wife Debra and two of his three children. (His oldest son and newlywed wife moved to California.) After not hearing from Ron by Monday, Debra notified authorities and a massive search effort was initiated and conducted for two weeks. The Kern County Sheriff staff and search volunteers searched the Black Mountain area with horses, ATVs and on foot. Civil Air Patrol carried out aerial searches for a week using 54 aircraft, involving 200 personnel and flying 100 sorties. Space Imaging, in Thorton, Colorado provided near real time space-based digital photography of the area. Ron was not located.

Ironically, at 13 years old, Ron Rosepink joined Civil Air Patrol, earned qualification as an expert in search and rescue at the Hawk Mountain Ranger School in Pennsylvania, and was involved with the organization for the next 4 decades. He went the Air Force Academy, majored in Astronautical Engineering and was a national champion on the Wings of Blue parachute team. Following graduation from pilot training at the top of his class, he was one of the first lieutenants to fly the F-16 Viper. After several operational assignments in Utah and Korea, Ron was accepted to Air Force Test Pilot School. While flying as a test pilot, he continued parachuting and began learning the art of ballooning. Within two he years he had won first place in several specific events at the Albuquerque and Reno Balloon Races. Ron separated from the Air Force while maintaining flight status as a test pilot in the AF Reserve. As a civilian, he worked for Sybase and then for Space Access as an Operations Manager to design and test the Space Plane, AS-1. When not flying or designing things to fly, Ron continued testing the effects of gravity on humans: hang gliding, bungee jumping, ballooning and ultimately, paragliding. While an expert in many other areas, Ron was a novice paraglider.

Ron's disappearance has created a severe financial hardship on his wife and children. Without his income, the family is forced to sell their house and move into an apartment. Ron's daughter has left college in her sophomore year to alleviate the financial burden on the family. Since his body has not been located, his wife cannot collect life insurance proceeds. The family also needs closure on Ron's fate. After the search for Ron was called off in mid-July 2003, Ron's friends have continued to fly missions over the area in light aircraft and a helicopter without locating him. In September, a group of Civil Air Patrol expert rangers and others met in Pennsylvania to conduct a search for him over Christmas 2004. These volunteers are self-funded and are volunteering two weeks of their time to this effort. Ron's family and his mother will participate in the search effort and supporting search team members with food and logistics support. However, his family and many team members cannot afford to fly to California. Many who like to assist will not be able to participate without airlift or airline transportation.

Planning

The planning staff, many who will also conduct search, consisted of more than two dozen individuals. The qualifications within this group included 14 Civil Air Patrol Expert Rangers, several fighter pilots, a helicopter pilot, a flight test engineer, a general surgeon, two Master Medics, an Army combat medic, a Fellow of the American Planning Association, GIS and cartographic experts, a forensic meteorologist, a forensic anthropologist, a State Police forensic scientist, a police detective, two EcoChallenge team coaches, an Army Ranger, two expert skydivers, an experienced paraglider pilot, and an administration and finance officer. The teams' combined search and rescue expertise exceeds 325 years, with the average team member experience at 18 years. Rescue honors received by the members of this group include multiple Civil Air Patrol "find" and "life saving" awards, dozens of crash site investigations, and the Air Force Safety Award annual award. Most members had served as search and rescue team commanders and taught emergency services within Civil Air Patrol, and are certified in Incident Command System procedures. They team is experienced in technical rock climbing and rappelling. Many are NRA instructors, some having attended military survival schools, and one authored the Civil Air Patrol Land Search and Rescue Manual.

Search Team

Half of this planning team will participate in the search effort. They will be assisted by multiple EcoChallenge teams, a Colorado wilderness guide, and local emergency services volunteers. California Wing Civil Air Patrol will provide communications and ground operations support. The team will have access to several light aircraft and a Bell Jet Ranger helicopter throughout the search. Search teams will be equipped with GPS receivers, and GMRS radios provided by EcoChallenge sponsors and local Emergency Services Organizations. Space Imaging, Inc, has provided remote sensing support in the form 1 meter resolution digital imagery of the search area. The Kern County Sheriff's Department, the Incident Command Center for the initial search, is serving a critical role of providing background search information and local support as needed. Ron's former Squadron Commander and present Commander of the Edwards Flight Test Center, Major General Doug Pearson, has offered to provide support to the team within his capabilities. We have requested support from a number of organizations in order to provide the resources for this self-funded effort and to insure mission success.

Immediate Needs

- 1. Airline Transportation** in the form of frequent flyer miles, standby passes, or airline employee "buddy passes" from Pennsylvania, Florida, and Colorado to California. The search is planned for a period ranging from 22 December to 3 January; however, team members will arrive and depart in order to meet standby criteria.
- 2. Lodging and Meals Funding Assistance.** The teams will be housed in a hotel in Tehachapi and will conduct dawn to dusk operations in the field. Although the hotel proprietor has steeply discounted the room rates and members are sharing rooms, the lodging and meal costs will average \$50 per person per day. For 20 people, the cost is \$10,000.
- 3. Prayers.** This should be first. If you know what this means, no explanation is needed.