

HEADQUARTERS
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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(Van Nuys, California) -- On Sunday evening, 14 March 2004, the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center (AFRCC) at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, credited a Civil Air Patrol aircrew and the Riverside Sheriff's Department with saving the life of a downed pilot who was located with the help of an emergency signal.

Approximately 300 times a year, the California Wing of the Civil Air Patrol is called out by the AFRCC and the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services to locate the source of emergency signals detected by a system of satellites administered in the United States by NOAA. While the overwhelming numbers of these activations are false alarms from aircraft or boat emergency beacons, every signal is treated as a real emergency. However, there are so many false alarms nationwide that typically search forces are not tasked to locate the signals until they have been broadcasting for hours unless the signal is one specifically designed for quick satellite alerting or if there is a report of a missing aircraft in an area where a satellite has detected an emergency signal.

On Sunday afternoon, NOAA alerted the AFRCC to an emergency signal in the El Centro area. Captain Allen Graff, an incident commander for the California Wing, tasked Captain Frank Tullo and Lt Colonel Roy Hofheinz of the Wing's Palm Springs Squadron to locate the signal. Another Wing aircraft transiting through Imperial County at the same time reported an emergency signal coming from Brawley Airport about 10 miles north of El Centro. The Palm Springs aircrew verified that report, landed at Brawley, and located the non-distress signal in a parked aircraft.

At 5:22 PM as the Palm Springs aircrew flew home, they heard another emergency signal which they located to the Desert Resorts Regional Airport area at Thermal. After checking the aircraft and structures on the ground there, they determined the signal was coming from an area northwest of the airport grounds. After locating a downed aircraft in the desert a few miles away, the Civil Air Patrol coordinated with the FAA, AFRCC, and the Riverside Sheriff's Department to lead in Sheriff's personnel to the aircraft.

Sheriff's personnel arrived at the aircraft and found footprints and a bloody trail leading to the pilot who was trying to walk out of the area.

Civil Air Patrol, the official Air Force auxiliary, is a nonprofit organization with almost 62,000 members nationwide. It performs 95% of continental inland search and rescue missions as tasked by the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center. Volunteers also perform homeland security, disaster relief and counterdrug missions at the request of federal, state and local agencies. The members take a leading role in aerospace education and serve as mentors to the almost 27,000 young people currently participating in CAP cadet programs. CAP has been performing missions for more than 60 years.

For more information about the California Wing of the Civil Air Patrol, see www.cawg.cap.gov.