

MERIDIAN

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The Quarterly Publication of the Mountain Rescue Association

mra.org

Meet the Rescuer

The People of
MRA Teams

A full-page photograph of a person ice climbing a steep, dark rock face. The climber is wearing a blue jacket and is positioned on a vertical ice flow. The rock face is rugged and has some snow patches. The sky is clear and blue.

**Veterans in SAR and the
Military Roots in Rescue**

The Legacy of Tim Staples



MOUNTAIN
RESCUE
ASSOCIATION

Spring 2021

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ON THE COVER:

Robbi Mecus ice climbs a route called Positive Thinking on Poke-O-Moonshine cliff in the Adirondack Mountains in New York. (Emily Schwartz)

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President's Message

Undoubtedly, there will undoubtedly be quite a bit of reflection on 2020 and the large number of impacts of COVID-19. Although I don't tend to dwell too much on the past and prefer to look toward our future. I will say that there are three things that were highlighted in 2020 that we will carry forward into the years to come: Change, Innovation and Execution. Change is a constant in our lives and in our organization and teams. Innovation sounds new, though we have been innovating since the founding of the MRA. Execution, well suffice it to say this is what we do day in and day out. Change, Innovation and Execution doesn't stop in 2021, it is our springboard to meet the needs of our teams and rescuers for years to come.

We've heard it said that "change is constant" and "people hate change." Or from my firefighting days, "100 years of tradition unimpeded by progress." Regardless of the saying or where you land on the subject, we know that change can be uncomfortable, but essential for organizations to continue to

serve their purposes. Mountain Rescue teams have led the industry in many ways. We've changed our rigging systems to better suit new equipment, and we have retooled our education to meet the needs of our members and the public. We also need to remember to be mindful that our organization and team membership are changing as

An advertisement for Team Wendy helmets. It features two photographs of people wearing helmets: a man in a white helmet and sunglasses, and a woman in a red helmet. To the right of the photos is a large black area with white and yellow text. The text reads: "TEAM WENDY" with a yellow logo, "THE NEW STANDARD FOR SEARCH & RESCUE HELMETS", "M-216™ BACKCOUNTRY SKI SAR", "EXFIL® SAR TACTICAL", and "TEAMWENDY.COM | 216.738.2518".

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the next generation of mountaineers and rescuers join our ranks. I expect MRA teams and rescuers to lead and be inclusive in all aspects of what we do, from rigging and search to education and medical assistance.

Of course, change drives innovation. MRA teams have a history of being innovative from developing litter systems to engineering stronger and safer rigging systems. A recent example of innovation came with the development of the Third Thursday live virtual training developed by the MRA Education Committee (Charley Shimanski and Michael St. John). The team utilized a relatively new technology, Zoom, and developed live virtual training designed for MRA individuals. We will continue to find ways to make our systems, our rescues, our teams and ourselves better. So, unless you are still using gold rope for anything other than hanging stuff in the garage, you may consider yourself either a MRA innovator or a recipient of MRA innovation.

Innovation without execution is just a bunch of good ideas. The MRA officers' committee has been working to

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execute on the strategic direction outlined at the 2020 Winter Business Meeting, with a focus on External Marketing, Internal Marketing, Spring Conference and Financial Planning. The Third Thursday program and a new Welcome to the MRA letter are the initial fruits of the

internal marketing efforts. During the Spring Conference we will bring together focused themes and the Financial planning committee has investigated several different financial pathways with recommendations coming at the winter business meeting. We will continue to execute on this strategy just as you are continuing to execute on rescues.

MRA teams are well suited to adapt and overcome whatever scenario presents itself. We find ways drive change, create innovative solutions, and execute. In all aspects MRA teams continue to lead and provide world class backcountry technical rescue.

Doug McCall

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Unknown skiers. Rogers Pass, Glacier National Park, British Columbia.
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Left: Kerry Hanes; Center: Clifford Zone in VCSAR (Clifford Zone);
Right: Zachary Klein in AMRC (Zachary Klein)

STILL SERVING

THE ARMED FORCES ROOTS OF MODERN SAR, AND HOW VETERANS CONTINUE TO CONTRIBUTE

Steve Larese – Meridian Editor

The military has long played a crucial role in the development of modern search and rescue, and today many service men and woman contribute their experience to MRA SAR teams across the country. Many cite the same reasons they joined the armed forces—team camaraderie, sense of mission, outdoor adventure and helping in a meaningful—as what also drew them to volunteer on their SAR teams.

THE HISTORY OF SAR IN THE ARMED SERVICES

Soon after the creation of the United States, the importance of organized lifesaving organizations was recognized. The United States Coast Guard was created in 1790 as the Revenue Cutter Service for the purpose of organized rescues of crew and passengers from floundering ships.

As militaries evolved, so did search and rescue. Militaries worldwide had the structure, tactics, budgets and need for treating and transporting individuals to safety from deep in hostile environments.

It was during World War I that modern combat search and rescue (CSAR) began to take shape. Airplanes made it possible for individuals to venture far into hostile environments, necessitating rescues not previously seen during war or civilian life.

[Squadron-Commander Richard Bell-Davis](#) is credited with the first rescue using an aircraft in 1915. When the British squadron commander saw his wingman, Sub-Lieutenant Gilbert Formby Smylie, go down into a Bulgarian marsh, he landed his single-seater Nieuport 10 near the burning plane. Smylie had intentionally set fire to his plane, and used his pistol to explode a bomb so it wouldn't harm Bell-Davis. As enemy troops neared and began firing, Smylie crammed into the small cockpit with Bell-Davis. They both returned safely, and Davis was awarded the Victoria Cross for the rescue. This was the first of several air rescues during the Great War.

In 1943 during World War II, [Sgt. Richard S. Passey and Cpl. William G. MacKenzie](#) parachuted from search planes over Burma to reach and treat the wounded of a crashed



A Sikorsky HH-3E helicopter, nicknamed the "Jolly Green Giant." The helicopter was used in CSAR in Southeast Asia (USAF Photo)

C-46, meeting up with a ground team and hiking 20 miles through hostile and unmapped jungle to safety. In April 1944, the first helicopter search and rescue was made when [Lt. Carter Harman](#) flew his Sikorsky YR-4B behind enemy lines in Burma to rescue four wounded American and British crash survivors for which he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. These and other rescues set the stage for the creation of the first pararescue teams in 1946.

Shortly after the end of World War II in November 1945, the first civilian helicopter rescue was made when test pilot [Jimmy Viner and Army Air Force Captain Jackson Beighle](#) plucked two oil workers off of a sinking oil barge in raging seas with his Sikorsky R-5 and a new contraption called a hydraulic hoist.

French surgeon and army pilot General Officer [Valerie Andre](#) landed her UH-12 helicopter in combat zones during

the First Indochina War in the early 1950s to treat and rescue wounded French and Vietnamese soldiers, becoming the first woman to fly SAR missions. She flew 129 missions, and parachuted twice to perform surgery. The U.S. Army began using helicopters extensively for search and rescue missions during the Korean War as well.

It was the Vietnam War that saw the official creation of pararescuer "PJ" units, symbolized by [Green Feet](#) due to the shape their HH-3E helicopters would leave in the grass and rice paddies.

As civilian mountain rescue teams began to form in the 1950s and '60s to address search and rescue needs for the nation's growing love of outdoor adventure at home, militaries worldwide continued to lead the way in SAR technology and tactics as combat theaters changed. The U.S. Army 10th Mountain Division was one of the founding members of



A Sikorski R4-B Hoverfly helicopter, which was first used in 1944 (USAF Photo)

the Mountain Rescue Association that was created in 1959 along with the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Center, the National Park Service, the National Ski Patrol, the American Alpine Club, the Mountaineers, the Hood River Crag Rats, Portland Mountain Rescue Unit, the Corvallis Mountain Rescue, the Seattle Mountain Rescue Council, the Everett Mountain Rescue Unit, The Olympic Mountain Rescue, Tacoma Mountain Rescue Unit, Idaho Mountain Search and Rescue Unit and Altadena Mountain Rescue Unit.

CONTINUING TO SERVE

Zachary Kline served as a [pararescuer](#) from 2004 to 2008, seeing three tours in Afghanistan. He continues to train pararescuers at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, New Mexico, as a civilian government employee. Since 2011 he's been a member of the Albuquerque Mountain Rescue Council, and has served as the team's president.

"The camaraderie is pretty similar to what I experienced in the military," Kline says, "You get a bunch of people together and put them in high-stress situations where everyone has to trust everyone else. There's dedication to the mission, common goals and a sense of purpose that feels really familiar."

Kline says for him there's little difference between military and civilian missions.

"Trauma is trauma, and we would treat everybody, good guys and bad guys. We would also get called out for a lot of civilian rescues when I was based in Alaska.



Zachary Klein during his services as a USAF Pararescuer (Zachary Klein)

In the military, sometimes 'hostile environment' includes people shooting at you, but the mission is the same, stabilize people and get them out of a bad situation."

One difference, Kline says, is the level of intensity. Kline says that situations that can seem high-amperage for civilian team members can seem far less stressful to those who have served in the military.

"I think vets can turn the intensity on and off, depending on what's going on," he says. "I know for me, if people

and the scene are safe, I'm going to be chill just because I have a different standard of what is stressful than many civilians. The weather can be horrible and we're on the edge of a cliff at night, but as long as the team and the patient are safe and secured I know we're going to be just fine."

One skill Kline says he had to learn was how to communicate in a high-stress civilian situation.

"I had to learn to be patient," Kline says. "Maybe I could do something in a few seconds that would take someone without that level of training longer, but as long as things are safe I learned to let others do things and learn, to try to be a good teacher and not bark at people or just

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do everything. You're a part of the team whether it's in the military or SAR, and everyone shares and teaches to make the team better."

For Kerry Hanes, a rescue leader on AMRC, getting involved with civilian search and rescue was a way to continue what he valued through military service while learning something new. He served as a USAF special operations pilot from 1988 to 2008.

"For about half of my career, my expertise was landing small aircraft in places people wouldn't expect, and in the dark," he says. "For most of the other half, my expertise was air-to-air refueling of helicopters while low-level at night. I was responsible for execution of the mission, and for the safety of my crew, my formation, and my squadron."

Hanes joined his first SAR team shortly before retiring from the Air Force.

"Some of my USAF colleagues were surprised I chose a ground SAR team instead of Civil Air Patrol, because they knew me as someone who enjoyed flying a lot," he says. "I was interested in a new environment and learning new skills. Mountain rescue has filled an important role for me expanding my skillset."

While he says in his experience he was closer with his fellow service members, Hanes says appreciates the diversity of his SAR team and the unified commitment to helping people.

"I enjoy working at the tactical level with a small team focused on helping a subject," he says. "I enjoy the public service."

AMRC member Shasta Rouch Birkey served as a Navy Rescue Diver and Explosive Ordnance Disposal technician from 1996 to 2016.

She says she joined AMRC after leaving the Navy to stay engaged with "motivated people."

"Everyone in the military is a volunteer," she says. "Same with search and rescue. Everyone wants to be there to work as a team and help other people. I wanted to maintain that sense of camaraderie, and I really feel that on our team. In both cases it's all about bringing people back safely."

Rouch Birkey says she also enjoys maintaining the level of team training she experienced in the Navy.

"One of the things we'd do was rescue crews of downed helicopters in the water," she says. "We trained hard and moved quick. Helicopters sink fast. I enjoy keeping up with that level of training and learning, even if now it's rope work and land navigating in the desert and mountains."

Captain Colton Ducken is active duty in the U.S. Marine Corps, and joined Eugene Mountain Rescue in January 2020. Since 2011 he's served as a platoon leader and spent a year in Afghanistan as a military advisor to the Afghan National Army in Helmand Province. He's lived on bases in Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand and was assigned to Eugene, Oregon, in 2019 to serve on independent duty. Here, he leads a team of active-duty Marines who provide oversight of the local Marine reserve unit, and community outreach such as Toys for Tots. It was at a Toys for Tots event that he met members of the Eugene Mountain Rescue team who encouraged him to look into joining.

"After being stationed on massive military installations for the majority of my career, coming to Eugene for independent duty was a big transition of its own," he says. "Being on a SAR team has helped me adjust to living in a 'normal' area, make acquaintances, and give me the opportunity to be involved and give back to my community in ways that aren't common when living on military installations."

Ducken says SAR feels familiar to him while giving him a sense of community and being a part of his new state-side home. He says he appreciates both the similarities and differences he sees in both worlds.

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"Everything in SAR is volunteer," he says. "In the military you start as a volunteer and quickly transition to being the exact opposite of a volunteer. SAR is usually comprised of much older individuals, usually people with careers, families, or retirees. The Marine Corps, in particular, is comprised mostly of Marines in their early 20s. Nobody is trying to kill you on SAR missions, which is nice. Probably the most rewarding aspect is networking and meeting people from such diverse backgrounds."

Ducken says SAR has helped him transition back to the States. The team feels similar to the military while helping him readjust to interacting regularly with civilians.

"The thing I pay most attention to is toning down language or aggressive behavior," he says. "Aggressiveness is prized in the Marine Corps, in particular. Blunt language is the standard, due both to cultural norms and necessity for brevity in combat. I do my best to leave this kind of behavior at the door when working on a civilian team, where acting in an aggressive or blunt manner can understandably hurt group dynamics if people aren't used to it. Also, going from a position of leadership in the military to a SAR trainee can be humbling. However, I have enjoyed being the new guy."

Todd C. King of Colorado's Alpine Rescue Team served in the U.S. Air Force as a Survive, Evade, Resist, Escape (SERE) instructor from 1989 to 1993. His skills in teaching people how to survive alone in a hostile environment and navigate to safety perfectly meshed with civilian search

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and rescue work. His training covered survival in every climate.

"You never know how warm 28 degrees is until you pop the door on a snow cave and it's -75F outside," he says, remembering a winter training exercise in Alaska above the Arctic circle.

King joined ART in 2016 after running his business for 28 years after the Air Force. He says he missed the "mission-oriented" environment.

"There's a sense of belonging, he says. "Learning new skills, playing with new toys. A high esprit de corps and a feeling of doing some good in the world. Nothing beats finding someone that's lost or pulling someone out of a bad situation."

King says there are several general ways his SERE skills transfer to any civilian SAR work.

“Understanding the psychological aspects of isolating events. Understanding our subjects better and understanding what they go through when dealing with even a relatively short isolating event such as 8 to 10 hours.”

- “Situational awareness. Paying attention to yourself, your teammates, the terrain, weather, and routes in and out of an area.”
- “Better, more efficient, more casual communications. People tend to over complicate communications or try to make it overly structured. Take 10 or 20 seconds to think about what you're going to say. Get my attention. Tell me what I need to know. Stop talking.”
- “A more structured training regimen. Tell me, show me, make me do it until I get it right. Give me a clear path to advancement and a structured, consistent check-off routine.”



Clifford Zone as a Marine (Clifford Zone)

Clifford Zone, captain of Ventura County Search & Rescue Team 1, served in the Marines during the First Gulf War as a CH-53 helicopter crew chief. He says he feels at home in the field.

“If we’re not wet, cold, exhausted and complaining, we’re not happy,” he says. “Same for search and rescue as the Marines. No one gets lost on a beautiful, sunny day.”

Zone was interested in joining the Ventura County Sheriff’s Reserve when he learned about the department’s search and rescue team in 2015. The outdoor, life-saving missions and team structure instantly appealed to him.

“We have a lot of vets on our team, including an officer in the British army,” he says. “We also have a lot of really talented civilian mountain men and women, too. So you have crew cuts, ponytails and bushy beards all together, and it all works to make a great team. The diversity of skills and experience makes us a strong team, and the mission is the same for everyone: Keep the person alive for transport.”

However, Zone says, communication between veterans seems to be more streamlined.

“Our Quick Response Team is all vets,” he says. “And we can just show up and without a word everyone knows what their role is, what gear to grab, what needs to be done. It’s just becomes second nature to work immediately together like that even if you’ve never met the person before, because of military training.”

Zone says he believes a lot of vets may feel lost after transitioning from the military to civilian life.

“People miss team and mission,” he says. “Things can feel really loosey-goosey after getting out of the service. My two cents is joining a SAR team or something like it can be really good vets, and the community continues to benefit from their skills and service. Having a meaningful mission is in every vet’s DNA.”



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Training, Trust and Altruism – The Legacy of Tim Staples

Justin Wheaton – Meridian Editor

On December 14th, 2019 the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department and the West Valley Search and Rescue Team lost a tenured team member. Tim Staples was part of a mission to find a missing hiker on the north side of Mount Baldy in the San Gabriel mountains of Southern California. Staples was on an assignment that had him and a team member searching a steep valley that was glazed over by snow and ice. Staples fell down an ice chute and was not able to self-arrest. The body of the man he had been searching for, 52-year-old Sreenivas 'Sree' Mokkalapati, was found on June 19, 2020.

By day, Tim Staples was a husband, father, and elementary school teacher. He had devoted much of his time over the past 6 years to the West Valley SAR team. Already an active responder to missions, Tim was also progressing into more leadership and instructor roles.

"Tim was a great teacher. He was always nurturing and understanding, and could convey information without getting frustrated". We looked forward to him progressing into more leadership roles," said Bob Gattas, a senior member and longtime training officer with WVSAR.

Many other team members echoed this quality and enjoyed Tim's patience in teaching rope and alpine SAR skills. This trait that Tim so clearly possessed seems to transcend the team since his passing.

"Don't take this the wrong way, but I'll tell you what [...] we are a hell of a lot nicer to each other now," said WVSAR member Margo Machen. "Our training would often consist of us bickering about this or that. We seem to have more patience and understanding with each other, and where we each are in the learning process."

West Valley has always been disciplined and has upheld training as a cornerstone of their establishment. In the wake of Staple's passing, the group has taken a new attitude towards its skills and exercises.

"We are more focused now. Everyone seems to be taking training very seriously," said WVSAR member Ed Nemeth. West Valley has added one additional rope training a month, to focus on basics, according to one West Valley member who wished to remain anonymous. "The



trainings started this year with the intention of reviewing basic skills we need to know. Some of these skills are so basic we had just been expected to know them. The Thursday night training is an opportunity to be taught some of these skills."

That member went on to express the same observations other team members had in regards to their attitudes towards each other. "At training we are asked, what are you doing to keep Tim's legacy alive? What I have noticed is that my teammates are friendlier towards each other, more helpful towards each other, and more encouraging towards each other. For example, I have noticed that although I am leaving our rope training learning what I need to improve, I am going home with less pain and misery than I [used to]. The team is still told where they need to improve, but it is being done in a friendlier and kinder manner. And we are provided encouragement on some of the things we do right during training."

San Bernardino County as a whole has implemented a few additional trainings as well, such as an annual Winter Workshop. The area is consistently getting less and less winter weather, but can still produce alpine terrain capable of serious consequences. It can be difficult for volunteers

to find time to practice alpine skills to proficiency without travelling to find snow. The Winter Workshop will be a time for volunteers to practice these perishable skills in the early winter months, in an effort to better prepare themselves for winter missions.

Another thing built up in the team could be one of the most valuable assets of all: trust. Ed Nemeth summed up these conversations best. "I think the trust concept comes down to getting to better know your fellow team members. It takes time and effort to learn about an individual including their strengths and weaknesses, be it their technical competence, experience, or emotional stability." No one interviewed believed issues in trust played a role in Staples's death, but in the wake of his passing, there has been an increased priority of the team's relationships with one another.

"Trainings cannot fully duplicate what I think is a very important element, and that is the environmental and emotional stressors experienced during a rescue response situation. We need to know how our teammates will conduct

themselves during a very stressful situation. Will they remain calm and thoughtful, will they recognize a potentially dangerous situation that I may not, are they able to offer advice and assistance when I need it. No one is perfect, but under-

standing how your teammate may respond when the chips are down goes a long way to ameliorating the trust issue," said Nemeth.

An element present in every team member was altruism. The West Valley SAR Team understands what it means to be selfless, and Tim's sacrifice has galvanized this. When a member said he was asked "what are you doing to keep Tim's legacy alive?", the answer becomes clear. West Valley is channeling Tim's nurturing and understanding attitude into their trainings, building bonds and relationships to instill trust in one another, and continuing to do what they do best – selflessly giving of their time and talent So That Others May Live.

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Robbi Mecus on a search and rescue mission. (Kevin Mackenzie)

MEET THE RESCUER - ROBBI MECUS

Lynda Wacht - Meridian Contributor

Editor's Note: 'Meet the Rescuer' is a quarterly story that is written by the MRA committee on Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. The focus is to highlight the members of mountain rescue teams across the U.S, as well as the mission of the MRA to be a welcoming and inclusive body of first responders.

This quarter, the MRA JEDI committee is honored to feature Robbi Mecus, a Field Ranger with the New York State Forest Rangers. The NYS Forest Rangers is an ex-officio government agency with the MRA. It is the primary responder for search and rescue in the wild areas of New York State, as well as being the subject matter experts for the entire state for such missions as searches for Alzheimer's subjects in urban areas and lost hunters.

Robbi is an incident commander and a planning sections chief. When an in-district mission comes in, she collects the initial information, determines the urgency and strategy, then implements the tactics in the field. For out-of-district, she can play one of several roles, including Operations Chief, Plan Chief or Incident Commander.

Robbi's position is unique in mountain rescue as she is paid for "playing" in the mountains. She sees that as an advantage in that she has the opportunity to train volunteer teams, although she cannot be a member. "And when I have volunteers, I am aware of the fact that they are giving of their time, making sure I give the lousy jobs to the paid team members," she says.

Robbi has been a field ranger for 22 years, beginning in 1999. Like many, she went to community college while

trying to decide what she wanted to do when she grew up. Growing up in New York, she did not have much exposure to the great outdoors until college. There she met friends with whom she began hiking and backpacking.

On one fateful hike, she had the conversation that gave her life direction. She learned from the forest ranger she met on the trail that there were careers which allowed one to spend one's time outside and not chained to a desk. From that conversation, she began her search for a school that offered the degree required to become a forest ranger.

When she started her career as a forest ranger, Robbi had not yet transitioned, which she feels made it easier to enter the field. "There were no barriers to access for me," she explains. "At the time, there were two women out of 140 rangers, and zero LGBT. Today, there are 17 women and one LGBT who is out anyway. So there are more today, but still not many."

Not having transitioned, though, also increased her exposure to the transphobia and homophobia that existed in the agency. The seclusion of trails and trailheads allows all of us to be a little more ourselves. People outside "the norm" take advantage of this seclusion to experiment with the lifestyle they seek. "After such missions, they were the butt of endless amounts of jokes," Robbi says. The experience reinforced her fear of not being accepted.

Because she became a ranger in order to be paid for being outdoors, it's only natural Robbi has outdoor passions, the main being rock climbing. It was one of the

driving factors in wanting to be in search and rescue. She explains there is not a lot of crossover between technical and recreational climbing, and this has allowed her the opportunity to learn even more climbing skills.

In addition to climbing all over New York State, Robbi has spent time climbing in the Andes, Denali National Park, the Himalayas and Patagonia, which she calls her happy place. "The landscape is surreal. It's the end of the world. The people and food are amazing. It is especially amazing if you love to dance."

Robbi has been on two missions that she considers most impactful to her life.

The first was in the first or second year of her career involving a search for an elderly woman with Alzheimers. Robbi was laying out the search blocks for the grid search when she found their subject in the wetlands. It was her vulnerability that struck Robbi. "The look on her face--she was completely dependent on me," she says.

It is a feeling and an impact that has stayed with her.

The second was a search for two men climbing in the Catskills who became lost in a blizzard. They had been out for three nights near a summit in hurricane force winds--the kind of mission of rescuer nightmares. "It was the hardest night of my career. It was scary. You didn't want to be the rescuer that went down. Changing layers, staying hydrated--all the things that are easy to overlook in the heat of the moment."

Robbi had been performing linear sweeps for close to fifteen hours when the two men were found. One had died but the other was close, holed up in a snow cave, his friend's body just outside. The rangers set up camp and worked to bring the survivor back from severe hypothermia, constantly aware of the friend's body which lay just outside their camp. They spent the night with the survivor before they could evacuate him, a mission effort that lasted more than 30 hours.

"I was wrecked emotionally and physically for days. I wish we could have found them twelve hours earlier. But we saved him."

JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) became more important to Robbi after she came out



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because she had no representation or access to help as a trans and outdoor person. She allows that a lot of her reaction was in her head, but she felt unwelcome and held back. Law enforcement in general and rangers in particular are starkly white, male, straight and cisgendered.

"It just takes one affirming person, one moment, to know that there are others who welcome you. I want to pay that forward."

For mountain rescue, Robbi feels the idea of JEDI is important for the same reasons it's important for the rest of society: It's the right thing to do. "We should not need a reason to be compassionate." She adds that diversity brings a fresh perspective to problems which leads to diverse and creative solutions.

She gives this example. In New York State, there is a strong Korean hiking community. They move differently; they hike for different reasons; they are looking for different experiences. Having that perspective on their team allows for that perspective, that cultural connection. "The

service industry should accurately reflect the community we represent."

"Diversity is not the goal, it's the tool. Inclusion is the goal. It is important to make people feel important and welcome. Diversity allows a team to be more efficient, more compassionate and overall a better team."

Robbi offers this small change that the mountain rescue community can adapt to work towards becoming a more diverse, and therefore more inclusive community: Let go of the notion that if more diverse people wanted to be a part of our community, they would ask. Make an effort to reach out and actively show them that we want them. "The good news is that no one is going to say 'We don't want *those* people'. But we need to take the next step to actively recruiting the queer, the disabled, because they have not seen themselves in mountain rescue in any capacity."

She sums it up: "If you haven't lived it, you don't know if it's possible."



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SPRING BUSINESS

MRA ELECTIONS ARE COMING SOON

At the upcoming June MRA meeting, two offices will be open: Secretary/Treasurer and one of the Member-at-Large positions. If you're interested in running for either of these offices, or if you know someone who would do a good job as an MRA officer, please contact either Nomination@MRA.org or your region chair. To be eligible to run for office, the candidate must be an active member of a Regular, Associate, or Ex-Officio member team. A term in office is two years, and all offices are limited to two terms.

MRA AWARDS

The MRA awards committee is soliciting nominations for awards to be presented at the 2021 spring MRA meeting. Categories, which include the following, can be awarded to individuals or to a team:

1. Conspicuous bravery or heroism, above and beyond the normal demands of duty, performed displaying extreme courage while consciously facing imminent peril. Shall not have violated reasonable safety standards.
2. Lifesaving award. Actions that resulted in the preservation of a life that otherwise would almost certainly have been lost.
3. Death or injury in the course of duty
4. Outstanding mountain safety education program(s)
5. Outstanding contribution of an outside agency to Mountain SAR
6. Outstanding contribution of a unit or person
7. Distinguished service, special recognition
8. Tasteful "tongue-in-cheek" categories
9. The Kayley Bell Lifetime Service Award. Intended for an MRA volunteer who has demonstrated extraordinary service to the MRA through their dedication to the organization.
10. Individual years of service. Twenty years or more in five-year increments. Exceptions for retiring members with greater than 20 years of service who may be recognized for their actual years served.

If you would like to nominate a team or a team member for one of these awards, please contact Awards@MRA.org

March's Third Thursday

Next Event:

Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS)- Drones'; Increasing SAR Response Capability

Thursday March 18, 2021

6:00 p.m. PST, 7:00 p.m. MST, 8:00 p.m. CST, 9:00 p.m. EST

Registration details will be sent the week of the event.

Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), also known as 'Drones' are becoming a useful tool for SAR response when managed appropriately. The ability to leverage this emerging technology with longer battery life and loiter times as well as utilizing the newer optics and infrared capability as well as other sensor platforms can detect lost subjects with growing efficiency. Also, cost can be dramatically lower than traditional other air assets such as helicopters. Safety with deconflicting air space remains paramount, but with appropriate training and organization, this can be done safely. This presentation will discuss concepts of operation and planning to utilize UAS safely in SAR response.



By: Will Smith

Save the date for MORE!

MRA Significant Mission Debrief

Thursday April 15, 2021

6:00 p.m. PST, 7:00 p.m. MST, 8:00 p.m. CST, 9:00 p.m. EST

Not if, but when! Mountain Mass Casualty Incidents

Thursday May 20, 2021

6:00 p.m. PST, 7:00 p.m. MST, 8:00 p.m. CST, 9:00 p.m. EST



Photo by Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2020

What a year, eh? While 2020 was certainly a wild one, there were certainly some memorable stories published in Meridian in the past year. Here are some tidbits to read through if you missed out on the last few issues.

COPING WITH COVID

Meredith Martin - Meridian Editor

COVID-19 was one of the few constants in 2020, and it was always a constant risk and hassle. Published in the Winter 2020 edition of Meridian, SAR teams from across the US talked about changes to training, equipment, and an almost universal boost in callout volume as people hit the trails, many of them unprepared. As we turn a new page in the pandemic in 2021, take a moment to see how rescuers pushed ahead in the uncertainty of COVID-19's early hold in the U.S.

STAYING POSITIVE ON A SEVEN-DAY SEARCH

Lois Grossman, Meridian Editor

The longer a search runs, the harder it can become to stay positive and hope for a good outcome. This story from the Summer 2020 edition of Meridian follows a search team looking for a California man who went missing for days, and also shows how he survived in the wild.

DOUBLE RESCUES ON MEMORIAL DAY

Rick Lindfors - Meridian Lead Editor

Whiteout conditions, a hypothermic snowboarder, avalanches and blackened toenails were just a few things encountered by members of Portland Mountain Rescue and the Hood River Crag Rats as they worked on two rescues within 24 hours over memorial day weekend. This Winter 2020 story goes into the wild conditions encountered by the rescue teams, and how the teams worked together against adverse conditions to save their subjects.

Mountain Rescue Association Quarterly MRA Significant Mission Debrief Third Thursday



Thursday March 18, 2021

6:00 p.m. PST, 7:00 p.m. MST, 8:00 p.m. CST, 9:00 p.m. EST

Registration details will be sent the week of the event.

MRA member teams respond to some of the most challenging search and rescue missions in the country, with each team having different approaches to solving these challenging incidents. From coast to coast, teams operate in different environments and there is a lot we can learn from each other.

The goal of Third Thursday Significant Mission Debrief is for teams to present their response to a challenging SAR mission and share their challenges, solutions, what went right and learning points.

Criteria for a review would include SAR missions with a high level of complexity, extended lifesaving missions, missions where innovative techniques were utilized or missions involving an Incident Within the Incident (IWI). Presentations would be done in Power Point or



Facilitated by
Mike St. John

Keynote and be limited to twenty minutes. Presentations should be HIPAA compliant. To offer the best sharing environment, presentations will not be recorded and will not be shared beyond the time of presentation due to the sensitive nature of some debriefs. In order to foster a constructive environment for sharing, discussion after will be limited clarifying questions and armchair quarterbacking will not be allowed.

To submit a presentation please E-mail a synopsis and PDF presentation of your slide deck of your review to mike@marinsar.org. Presentations should be limited to approximately twenty minutes and 10 minutes of Q and A.



Photo by National Cancer Institute on Unsplash

Epinephrine, Glucagon, and Naloxone

Chris Van Tilburg, MD

Not all of us are advanced medical practitioners, so does that mean we shouldn't be prepared to? Many states have made it easier for laypeople to provide life-saving medications. Depending on the state, this can apply: epinephrine, glucagon and naloxone. MRA teams should consider carrying and using these medications that can save lives.

Many states have passed laws that allow administration of epinephrine for a severe allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. Bee stings, certain foods like nuts and other particles can cause severe allergic reactions which can be life threatening if not treated expediently. In the backcountry, we often don't have hours to wait for a helicopter or for paramedics. By carrying epinephrine, even as a first aid team can save lives. Epinephrine can stop some or all the effects of anaphylaxis and first responders can carry and use it, once properly trained.

Millions of Americans have diabetes, a condition causing them to need oral medications or injection of insulin to lower their blood sugar. Sometimes insulin works too well and drives a person's blood sugar down so low that they become unconscious. The brain needs of glucose to work, and when it doesn't have enough, it tries to save energy by slowing down. If someone with low blood sugar is conscious, treatment is straight forward: They can eat or drink something with sugar to raise their blood glucose. But an unconscious patient with diabetes can't eat or drink. That is why most diabetics carry or have at home a medicine called glucagon. Glucagon works by releasing

glucose stores in the body into the blood stream, raising blood glucose.. This medicine was initially only available as an injectable kit but can also now be administered as a sprayed nasal powder. Alternatively, some providers will apply oral glucose gel inside the mouth, along the gum line to facilitate a return of normal blood sugar. Glucagon is another life-saving medicine that can be given by a layperson who has training and thus can potentially save a life.

The opioid crisis is something emergency physicians, EMTs, and firefighters see regularly. Sometimes an opioid overdose is accidental. Sometimes it is purposeful. Either way, it can end in death in a rather short time if the effects aren't reversed. With many recreational abusers heading into the backcountry, this has become an issue in SAR work. An overdose of an opioid usually causes patients to stop breathing. Naloxone, also known as Narcan, is an opioid antagonist, meaning it can displace the opioid from its receptor, reversing the opioid effect. This can take an almost non-breathing, unconscious patient to a talkative almost immediately.

All three of these drugs can be life-saving and have recently been approved in many states to be administered by lay people and first responders. The laws vary among states but usually require the person administering the medication to take training on recognizing need for the drug, how to store, carry and appropriately administer the medication, to call for further medical help, and to report its use. These drugs can save lives, so discuss within your team and with your medical director.

Letter from the Editor



opportunity to get your shots.

As I wrote in my Winter 2020 editorial, 2020 is a year that many of us won't remember fondly. I will lament not being able to see the Oregon Duck women play in the NCAA title game (they were a surefire pick) but I'll still be able to celebrate how SAR teams found a way to adapt and continue to serve their territories. While I don't make many predictions of the future, I am sure that COVID-19 will still be a factor in the operating environment for much of 2021. Many state and local restrictions will remain in place in some way or another. As the stresses of the pandemic continue, we can be sure that the outdoors will be the place where much of the public will seek solace and recreation. As we reported in the Winter 2020 Meridian edition, many people going outside will be novices, and may not be prepared for the conditions they encounter.

COVID fatigue is certainly present in communities across the country. I certainly get it – we're not meant to be cooped up constantly and to be honest, Zoom calls aren't much fun, though I was able to zest things up with a Top Gun background in recent meetings. There will probably come a day when we're having drinks with coworkers we don't recognize because we've only seen them with masks on, therefore only knowing them by their eyes to their foreheads.

With COVID-19 set to be an operational risk even with the rollout of vaccines, I encourage you to keep your wits about you, and continue to perform your duties with the care and discipline we've come to know through the year 2020. The year 2021 won't wave any magic wands in our direction, but the tide will slowly turn in our favor.

Keep the faith and stay frosty.

Rick Lindfors
Meridian Lead Editor
Eugene Mountain Rescue
Pacific Northwest Search Dogs



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