
NZLSAR News

Volume 4 Issue 1

February 1998

CONTENTS

Don't think you need to train?
Body found using enhanced skills
"Lost and Found" A poets tribute
Committee News
Life insurance

Display panels
Communications Pamphlet
Situation Vacant
SAR is a TLA

Don't think you need to train?

The value of training in what we call SAR Specific Skills has been proven in two recent searches in Canterbury.

The first search was for a young man who failed to return to his flat after setting out for an afternoon walk on the Port Hills. He was known to be a keen rock climber so after locating his car the plan was to thoroughly search the most likely areas where there were cliffs. The assumption that he was injured following a fall and the length of time since he left home indicated considerable urgency was necessary. The search plan gave each team a segment to "eliminate" as we wanted to avoid any possibility of having to go over the same ground twice. Progress when seen from the control end appeared dismally slow but the care the teams took to ensure the proverbial stone wasn't left unturned paid off with the discovery of the missing person who sadly had taken his own life.

Comment at the debrief - "two years ago you would have searched that area in about a half the time, you would probably have missed the

victim and we'd still be looking." The teams involved had spent a lot of time practicing close searching techniques, marking boundaries and turning around without missing any ground.

Then a woman disappeared after a domestic dispute. All evidence pointed to a drug overdose and when the car was located Police with dogs searched the immediate area without success. The volunteers received a call the next morning (rather late as it should have come the previous evening!) and using the sea as one boundary and a residential area as another, we split into two groups of twenty to comb the area on either side of the parking lot where her car was found. Again, the care taken to search paid off and an unconscious, but still alive, woman was soon in an ambulance and on the road to recovery (no pun intended). She was found within 100m of a well used walking track but completely hidden from passers by.

Dave Saunders
Adviser Canterbury District

DISPLAY PANELS. DISPLAY PANELS. DISPLAY PANELS. DISPLAY PANELS

A reminder that NZLSAR has two display panels available for SAR groups to use when showing their activities to the public. They have several photo's of SAR participants in action and small interpretation panels describing the proceedings. It all comes in a large "suitcase" which can be couriered around the country. On request I can also include some NZLSAR introductory leaflets, the Outdoor Communications pamphlet as well as a MSC leaflet giving the information on outlets for hiring a mountain radio. Ring the office if you wish to avail yourself of this service.

I am always on the lookout for more photos. These need to be sharp, be of a reasonable composition and tell a story . I would appreciate a loan of the negatives of any such photos.

John P Tristram NFO.

Body found using enhanced skills

Introduction

A 46 year old Waipawa man, very fit, into cycling, marathon running and some tramping experience had gone off on a four day solo trip in the Ruahine Ranges. The details of his planned route which he had left at home, revealed the proposed trip was, in the time allowed, ambitious. When he had not emerged by the late afternoon of the fifth day, SAR personnel were advised and a search was commenced early on the sixth day.

An analysis of the weather at the time suggested the missing person would have in all probability experienced bad weather on the first day of the trip. Heavy snow had fallen the day before and it was likely that high winds and snow would have been encountered late on the first day as he reached the open tops. Streams were up on the first day and continued to rise on the following days of the trip as rain mixed with snow melt.

The search which continued for four days, finally found the tramper's body below one of a series of waterfalls in a steep difficult gully. Variable weather conditions were experienced during the search. Very heavy rain on the afternoon of the fourth day resulted in one team being forced to stay in the hills until lunch time on the fifth day.

The search highlighted a number of important issues, including the importance of

appropriate air support, the advanced skills now being promoted by NZLSAR and attention to detail. The following points have been extracted from the Field Search Controllers report as they may be useful to other SAR personnel throughout the country:-

Helicopter details

Initially the Iroquois helicopter was grounded in Auckland due to bad weather and a local rescue helicopter was used to undertake a hut check and to position teams deep in the search area. Two, two man teams were used to leap frog huts on the hut check. This allowed each team the time required to undertake a full TCA inspection of each hut and gave the helicopter time to undertake an aerial inspection of the planned route in two directions.

On arrival the Iroquois helicopter flew a total of 32.6 hours and used 7600 litres of fuel. The cost to the Air Force was \$37,920 at \$1,200 per hour. The Iroquois helicopter was essential to the success of the operation. With a search area of 150 square kilometres, terrain that required winching on 30% of the taskings, long hours of operation and back up of an on board medic, it was considered that these requirements were beyond the safe operating capabilities of a local helicopter.

Two factors for success

The search was notable for an almost total lack of clues. This could be attributed to the

time of notification of the search which effectively put the teams five days behind the time when the trumper entered the field and weather conditions where the trumper would probably have been moving in reasonably deep soft snow which had subsequently melted and destroyed sign. This dearth of information continued throughout the search and was a factor that prevented the search being concentrated in any particular area.

The factors that influenced the final outcome can be seen in two parts:-

- Continuing investigative and interviewing skills of base staff and
- Tenacious TCA skills by the search team that found the critical clue late on the first day of the search.

Discussions with the family early in the search indicated that the missing person was wearing a pair of near new Nike Boots. The manufacturers when contacted were most cooperative and faxed a copy of the sole to the Field HQ. This was copied on the fax and distributed to each of teams in the field. Subsequent discussions with the family established that while the boots were near new they had been purchased some three years previously. Another call was made to Nike, who faxed a hand drawn representation of the older boot sole pattern which was totally different to the first.

These were again copied and sent out to the teams. The distinctive heel pattern that had similarities with a dogs paw was a common factor that assisted teams. With this information it was still possible to follow a trail of the missing person despite the fact that the sign was over a week old and had been subjected to bad weather conditions.

The other factor, was as mentioned, the TCA skill of the search team and the refusal of the team leader to give up on the possible importance of a meagre clue. Late on the first day a single set of scrape marks were found on a clay pan off the side of the tops. Considering snow would have covered the area at the time, there was uncertainty as to its validity. In hindsight it was probably the only clue available that would have indicated

the location of the missing person and in fact it lead the teams to his location.

Unfortunately due to weather and other operational reasons it was not until the third day of the search that a concerted effort could be made in the area of the initial sign. Once down off the tops the line of supposed travel moved into leatherwood and some top sign was found. Leatherwood, both with the bark scrapped off a low branch and another actually broken were compared to a recent break to gauge the age of the break. One example was brought back by helicopter for inspection by FSHQ staff.

The sign brought the Team down from the tops, through the leatherwood, then to a steep sided creek with slips, pools and a series of waterfalls. The sign was infrequent and the team admitted they had great difficulty convincing themselves they were on the correct trail. Maintaining concentration for such a long time (ie. the better part of 2 days) was also difficult but dogged determination paid off in the long run.

Continuing down the creek there was a period of complete confusion when the team came across an area that looked like a herd of elephants had passed through. After discussion with base it was identified that another team had dropped into the creek two days earlier, had not spotted the missing person's sign and had checked up and down the creek for some distance before climbing out again. The limits of this visit were established and fortunately the foot sign was re-established beyond the trampling.

At this point with such a strong lead from the team and no real clues coming in from another team coming up the creek from the bottom, the helicopter was tasked to fly the creek and check out a series of big waterfalls between the two teams. With the helicopter full of spotters, a vague red mark was seen by a spotter sitting in the back side seat of the helicopter. After overflying the area several times further investigation showed the red patch to be the inner liner of the missing persons open pack. His body was along side but because of his dark clothing was not visible from the air.

If nothing else this operation has proved the value of Track and Clue Awareness training. Everyone in the teams, even if they have not received full training is now much more aware of the need to be alert for clues. It was track & clue awareness that resulted in the success of the search.

DoC Hut Fees

Concern has been expressed about the trend for people not to fill in hut log books, this situation having been brought about by DoC's requirement to pay hut fees. This factor is prolonging SAR operations and becoming an additional expense that is difficult to quantify. In this case the missing person didn't reach a hut on his planned route, but because it was not known whether or not he would fill in the logbooks, extra resources were required to continue the search in areas that would have

been given a lower priority in the past. If this had not been a factor the search may have been shortened by up to 25 percent.

Added dimensions

As an illustration as to how good and honest people can be mistaken, two reliable reports were received from people in his town that indicated the missing man had been seen on the day he was due out. One was from his work mates who had seen him riding his bike and the other was from a very reliable person who knew him and had spoken to him on that day. Both reports obviously proved to be quite mistaken.

John Lovatt Police SAR Coordinator
Hawkes Bay District

Graham Thorp Adviser Hawkes Bay District

The "**Radio Communications In The Great Outdoors**" pamphlet has now been printed in a cost sharing exercise with NZ Mountain Safety. Written by the Communications Subcommittee, it attempts to answer the perennial question of what communication device should I take into the hills. Copies for individuals or to hand out to the public are obtainable from the NZLSAR national office or your local MSC branch.

"Lost and Found" A poem to two great old guys

On the 20 September a function was held in Nelson to celebrate the work of two of the District's outstanding SAR participants namely Gordon Brett and Max Curtis and to make to them, a presentation of the NZLSAR Award. At the function this poem, written by the young nephew of one of them was read, and I feel is worth sharing. It is all the more significant with the passing away of Max shortly before Christmas.

Confused and disoriented
some call it lost.
The gloom and
the uncertainty
of maybe never being found.
You wrack your brain
to think of
the skills instilled in you
for a situation such as this
if it ever occurred to you.
You try and remember
but it's so damn cold
your brains are numb.
But gradually you remember
what Gordon and Max
drummed into you

on all those bushcraft
courses.
I build a bivvy
now I'm sheltered.
It'll give me time to think.
To recall some more survival skills..
To give me a better chance
to stay alive till help arrives
now preoccupies my mind.
The wind comes up
the rain comes down.
What was that
I thought I heard
way off in the distance?
A rescuers voice carries through
to me.

Shouting my name.
It can't be true.
As I yell back
more voices I hear.
They're getting closer.
Now they are really near
I'm stripped and re-dressed
in nice warm clothes.
I'm plied with chocolate
and put in a sleeping bag.
I lay on a stretcher
sipping warm tea
as they ready me for

a long trip out.
I think how lucky I am
that this was only an exercise
executed with military precision
by two dedicated men.
Thank you Max and Gordon
to providing me with life
and survival skills that
I will always be grateful for.

Darren Brown

Situation Vacant. Situation Vacant. Situation Vacant. Situation Vacant.

Wanted - A Chairman for the NZLSAR Communications Subcommittee (CSC) is required.

Key Tasks:-

- Chairing the CSC meetings.
- Prepare for the NZLSAR Committee approval, an annual budget for the running of the CSC.
- Prepare for the NZLSAR Committee approval, an annual budget for the purchase of the national SAR communications equipment requirements.
- Informing the NZLSAR Committee of technical advances that have an application for SAR.
- Focusing the CSC to achieve the goals set by the NZLSAR Committee.
- Attending NZLSAR Committee meetings.

Personal Specification:-

- Had current active experience in SAR during the previous five years at a level of or equivalent to the level of SAR Adviser or Field Controller (Constitutional requirement Rule 4e).
- Strong Chairmanship skills
- Communication systems knowledge desirable but not essential

Applications in writing with CV by 27 February 1998 to PO Box 12081. Enquires direct to Graham Thorp 06-843-4238 evenings

Committee News

Over the weekend 8/9 November a combined meeting was held between Committee members and Chairmen and Secretaries from the six Regions. The formal Committee meeting with its usual business was held on the Saturday and then on Sunday the problems and relationship between NZLSAR and the Regions was covered.

The Saturday agenda covered:-

- The Policy of ID Cards being issued only to Advisers who have attended a Standards Workshop was approved.
- The implications of an accident to a SAR volunteer with personal insurance and

public liability. An article is to be written for the News (see below).

- NZLSAR News is now on the web site.
- The application for funding for CBR research on "lost person behaviour" is to be resubmitted to the Lotteries Grants Board.
- The Business Plan and work to the value of \$135,000 was discussed and approved.
- The resignation of Mike Sheridan as Chairman of the Communications Subcommittee was accepted and thanks were given for the work he has done with this group.

- The Aviation, Communications, Specialist, Training and Underground Subcommittee reports were considered, as were the reports from the six Regional Representatives.
- The NFO provided a written report on his meetings while overseas.
- NZLSAR Awards were approved for Ron Bocock of Canterbury and Derick Mathews of Wanganui. The Committee expressed gratitude for the contribution these two recently retired Advisers had given to SAR in their respective communities.

The Sunday agenda included:-

- The NZLSAR structure was explained and on the premise that the organisation should be driven from the “bottom up”, the question was asked whether the relationship between Local, District, Regional Committees and the National Committee was working. From the discussion it was felt that while a couple of localities were not entirely effective (mainly for geographical reasons), most others had accrued worthwhile advantages with the introduction of the NZLSAR Regional system. Some alterations are to be drafted to the Constitution to reflect the changes to the Police boundaries.
- A “Regional round up” was given with a ten minute overview from each Regions participants.
- The Business Plan was again touched on for those absent the day before. Some

time was spent explaining the GST requirements for our organisation.

- The NZLSAR funding philosophy was discussed, which is to provide new training of a type and presentation that the organisation believes will benefit the recipients and consequently those they search for or rescue.
- The need for strict financial accountability and the processes needed to ensure this were covered.
- The Communications Subcommittee made a presentation that included details of the budget for equipment replacement that has been submitted to the Police.
- Payment for SAR was touched on and it was agreed the volunteer system was working well. Payment for loss of wages by self employed individuals is to be investigated.

The costs of bringing the Regional Committee officers together for the weekend were felt to be well worthwhile and several attendees have subsequently contacted me with positive comments.

John P Tristram
National Field Officer

SAR is a TLA

Attending a recent SAR seminar I became aware of the prevalence of TLAs in SAR (You don't know what a TLA is? Read on).

I spent a weekend recently with Ross Gordon from EML on a TCA course. I learnt about LKP and POD, IPP and PLS not to mention POA and POS! I'm looking forward, in a few weeks time to a MSO course run by Ross.

On a recent SAR operation, I was based in the FHQ with the PLO, PSC and the AFC. We had with us the NOK who told us the DOB as well as the ETD and ETA of the missing person. They also gave us some

valuable insight to the LPB. We put the SOP into action, which included using the SDU and which gave us the DOT. This was valuable as the missing person was not carrying a ELB. Mindful of the OSH and HSE, we tasked the what used to be FMC teams, who were equipped with VHF, UHF and GPS. At some stage the ACR teams, using a SRT searched a nearby gorge. The PDC arrived for a briefing. When the subject was found, OFA training was put to good use - luckily he wasn't DOA. A debrief was held which included a CSA.

Later in the month (was it MAY? editor) I was called to the RCC and worked with people from the CAA, MOT and MSA. By the way our next training is DVI.

Glossary.

ACR Alpine Cliff Rescue
AFC Assistant Field Controller
CAA Civil Aviation Authority
CSA Causal Sequence Analysis
DOA Dead On Arrival
DOB Date Of Birth
DOT Direction Of Travel
DVI Disaster Victim Identification
ELB Emergency Locator Beacon
EML Emergency Management Limited
ETD Estimated Time Of Departure
ETA Estimated Time Of Arrival
FAQ Frequently Asked Questions
FHQ Field Head Quarters
FMC Federated Mountain Clubs
GPS Global Positioning By Satellite
HSE Health and Safety In Employment
IPP Initial Planning Point
LKP Last Known Point
LPB Lost Person Behaviour
LUT Local User Terminal
MAP A piece of paper with a lot of lines?

If you can translate and explain all these TLA's consider yourself a SUPER ADVISER. If you picked half of them, there's hope for you (with some training). If your score was 5

PS: TLA is a "Three Letter Acronym".

MOT Ministry Of Transport
MSO Managing Search Operations
MSA Maritime Safety Authority
NOK Next Of Kin
OFA Outdoor First Aid
OSH Occupational Safety and Health
PDC Police District Commander
PLO Police Liaison Officer
PLS Point Last Seen
POA Probability Of Area
POD Probability Of Detection
POS Probability Of Success
PSC Police Search Controller
RCC Rescue Coordination Centre
SAR Soft And Reliable?
SDU Search Dog Unit
SOP Standard Operating Procedure
SRT Single Rope Technique
TCA Track and Clue Awareness
UHF Ultra High Frequency
VHF Very High Frequency
Y2K Year two thousand

or less;- have you thought about taking up pentanque instead of SAR?

John Walsh Adviser Auckland

LIFE INSURANCE

Once again concerns have been expressed as to whether life insurance companies will make payment where a volunteer is killed during an unscheduled aircraft flight or other accident while on a search and rescue operation. The National Committee, through the Police, wrote to the Investment Savings and Assurance Association of New Zealand for clarification

The reply points out that an application for life assurance may merely ask whether the applicant participates in hazardous or dangerous activities. The letter says that whether or not the life insurance company would expect a life insured to have disclosed his or her search and rescue activities at the

time of taking out a policy would depend very much on the extent of those activities. If the life insured was going on operations on a frequent or regular basis the company may expect that to be disclosed at the outset, but if the life insured was not doing anything at the time the policy was written and subsequently became involved no disclosure would be required. The letter concludes with this statement: "In most cases a claim would be paid in the event of death whilst involved in search and rescue activities. There may be some instances however where involvement of the life insured in search and rescue should have been disclosed in the application and an additional premium or exclusion applied"

The deduction from this is that if at the time of taking out life insurance a person is involved in search and rescue then they would be wise to declare that activity, as failure to do so may give the insurance company the opportunity to decline the insurance at a later time when the insured is not about to argue. It is preferable to establish whether the company will pay at the outset rather than at a later date when a claim is being made. There is then the

opportunity to negotiate or to place the insurance elsewhere if the company decides to load a premium because of the activity. It should be born in mind that the company may load the policy because of the activities of the insured which lead to the involvement in search and rescue in the first place.

Roger Barrowclough
Adviser Otago District

Editors Comments

To **Dave, John, Graham, Darren, John** and **Roger** a big thank your for your articles. To those who proof read and check the spelling or grammar, thank you also.

Copy for the **April News** is most welcome and the close-off date is **Friday 27 March**. Articles on gear, SAR training or operations are most welcome. Please either mail as neatly hand-written, printed hard copy or on a disc to **NZLSAR, PO Box 12081, Thorndon, Wellington**. Alternatively email it to **tristram.nzlsar@xtra.co.nz** .

Regards **John P Tristram** National Field Officer