

Busy Weekend for the SC Wing

Written by Jay Lindler

Sunday, 29 April 2007 20:16 - Last Updated Tuesday, 15 May 2007 23:11

Friday, Saturday, and Sunday (April 27-29, 2007) were very eventful for the members of South Carolina Wing. Over the three day period, members attended a two-day training session, searched for a missing aircraft, and located three emergency beacons.

Beginning Friday afternoon, the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center directed the wing to begin searching for an aircraft that departed Hilton Head, SC in route to Ohio. Capt. Billy Geier, Incident Commander, began organizing the wing response. Aided by other members including Capt. Mike Albertson, Air Operations Branch Director, sorties were developed for searching the aircraft's probable flightpath. Within two hours of the general alert, five aircraft from across the wing had sortied to the search area. As daylight faded, aircraft completed their searches and returned to their respective bases for crew rest.

Throughout the night, mission staff continued to compile information in an attempt to narrow the search area. Lt. Col. Cindy Aulbach, Planning Section, pulled an all-nighter developing the mission briefing sheet. Additionally, 1st Lt. Guy Loughridge of the Colorado Wing began to process radar data from the Air Force in an attempt track the missing aircraft's progress.

Early Saturday morning, mission base staff assembled at Wing Headquarters with Capts. Geier and Albertson again in their respective roles and joined by 2nd Lt. Chuck Morris and 1st Lt Bill Yarborough in the planning section. Based on radar and other intelligence information, the primary search area was now focused on northern Georgia and southern North Carolina. Due to the advanced readiness of SC Wing, Georgia Wing granted SC Wing permission to search northern GA until their assets could be repositioned. 1st Lt. Ralph Driver and members of the Anderson squadron provided communications support to the aircraft that were across the line.

While SC Wing aircraft were searching northern GA, AFRCC reported multiple Emergency Location Transmitter signals across the SC Upstate. A NC Wing aircraft localized an ELT to Donaldson Center in Greenville, SC. A ground team led by Capt. Steven Andrews was dispatched to silence the ELT as it was interfering with the on-going search. A few hours later, another ELT was silenced by the Anderson Squadron in their home field.

Around midday, Lt. Loughridge had pin-pointed a possible location of the missing aircraft in northern GA using radar data. This along with the other data was forwarded by the SC mission

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team to GA who was now fully activated and able to further prosecute the search. The GA incident commander expressed his gratitude for the assistance provide by the SC Wing. The GA Wing located the aircraft a few hours later.

Also Saturday morning, more than a dozen students and instructors began a two-day training course at Wing HQ. Student attending the Cooperate Learning Course learned how squadrons support the missions of the wing and how wing supports the functions of the squadrons.

As the SC search response was standing down on Saturday afternoon, a crew launched from Columbia to complete the last section of a low-level route survey. The crew composed of Lt. Col. Bob Swisher, Maj. Jay Lindler, and Capt. Larry Turner searched the VR97 training routing in eastern GA looking for new towers and other structures that may endanger military pilots as they practice their low-level flying skills. Over previous several weeks, numerous crews from across the state spent dozens of hours flying "low and slow" to complete the survey requested by the Air Force.

In a case of no rest for the weary, AFRCC contacted Lt. Col. George Roberts late Saturday night and directed the wing to locate an ELT in the upstate. With many of the upstate squadrons exhausted the from the morning's search, a crew from Marion and Florence including Col. Hartsell Rogers, 2nd Lt. James Freeman, and 1st Lt David Tilley was dispatched. Early Sunday morning, Lt. Col. Roberts launched a UDF team consisting of Maj. Bobby Johnson and Capt. Lee Berry. They silenced the ELT in time to make church that morning.

While the tempo of the weekend was atypical, the response of the SC Wing was "business as usual". Col. Emerson Smith, Wing Commander, commended the all members for "a job well done in a professional and safe manner".