

Paul DeLong gave the Mission Message

Presentation to Ogden First United Methodist Church - Nov 18, 2018.



Rev Kim and Nancy Dubinisk^{ASKED} me to discuss the value of search dogs in bringing back those who have gone missing. I am a member of a Non-Profit organization named Great Basin K-9 Search and Rescue. Our mission is to search for missing people in the intermountain West who have become lost or injured and bring them back to their families.

However before I Talk about Great Basin's searches I want to present a larger non profit recovery organization called History Flight. HF accepts donations to pay for programs to recover the 84,000 missing Service members from America's wars of the 20th Century. The HF searchers employ trained k-9s to locate the graves of MIAs in the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia, and Europe. When the dogs locate a grave, ground penetrating radar is used to verify remains are there, how many there are and the exact location so they can recover the servicemen without disturbing others. History Flight is concentrating most of their resources on the Atole of Tarawa where a short fierce battle killed 1100 marines and 5000 Japanese. HF Forensic anthropologists excavated over 120 Marine individuals on Tarawa and recovered more than 43 intact missing marines including Medal of Honor recipient Alexander Bonnyman and numerous partial individuals.

The techniques used on Tarawa have provided methodologies for recovering missing U.S. from our nations engagements. Search dogs are an integral part of the process.

History Flight is concentrating their efforts in Tarawa however there have been recoveries in Europe as well. Sonja Johansson, a retired FBI agent and a member of Great Basin K-9, and her Dutch Shepard Recker have assisted in two recoveries: one in Northern France and another in Germany.

- 2 Lt, Charles Carlson was shot down in his P-47 fighter on December 23, 1944 and crashed near Buschhoven Germany. History Flight's investigation in 2016 found material evidence, aircraft wreckage and possible human remains at the site. Search dog Recker confirmed the remains are human. Lab analysis and circumstantial evidence were used to confirm they are Lt Carlson's.

I'll now discuss some of Great Basin K-9's searches. Our most publicized search occurred two years ago 40 miles East of Portland OR in the Columbia River Gorge. Annie Schmidt, 21 yr old daughter of Jon (leader of the Piano Guys) and Michelle Schmidt went missing on October 16. Her mother flew to Oregon for a Mother-Daughter camping trip but Annie was not at her apartment.

Annie's roommate was concerned because she thought Michelle and Annie had already gone on the trip. Over the next few weeks SAR teams in the area and hundreds of volunteer searchers looked for Annie near Munra point above the Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River. It was one of Annie's favorite places to hike. Her car was found in the trailhead parking lot near the river.

The Sherriff called off the search and didn't believe Annie would be found. The Schmidt's called Tri States K-9 SAR who Great Basin is affiliated with and asked if we could search with trained search Dogs.

We put together 8 SAR dog teams: 3 from Wyoming, 1 from Idaho and 4 from Utah. Joe Jennings and his golden retriever Gunny and Taylor and I flew to Portland. The evening we arrived we met with the other teams and a trained search leader and planned the action for the next day.

Knowing that Annie liked to hike high on the peaks overlooking the river, we concentrated on searching areas below the slopes where she may have fallen. The search area is very damp with ferns and berry bushes on steep scree covered slopes. It was a slow, difficult search however Gunny alerted on scent at the base of a very steep slope in late afternoon. Swirling wind prevented Gunny from pinpointing the source.

The dog handlers met again that evening to plan for the next day. We concentrated on the point Gunny had alerted. The wind was not swirling in the morning and the team assigned to search the topographic line where Gunny had alerted found Annie. The medical examiner ruled she slipped accidentally off the slick trail and died on impact.

The Schmidt's were very thankful the K-9 teams found Annie quickly and applauded us for coming prepared to search in very difficult terrain. We attended Annie's Service and were later recognized by the Utah Senate and Governor Hurbert.

Update: 2018

Taylor and I participated in six searches in 2018. Two were water searches: One in Idaho for a young man who drowned in the Teton River while attempting to swim across and a second for two married men who were victims of a boating accident, down 90 ft. in the Big Horn Canyon Reservoir in Montana. Taylor alerted on and located the victims on both water searches. We also searched for missing persons in four cases. Two victims were located by foot teams, one by Helicopter, and one has not been found.

Some folks question why I do this type of volunteer work. First: we all love our K-9s and enjoy training them and together. Second: the appreciation we receive from relatives and authorities makes me feel good that in some way Taylor and I are doing God's work to bring closure to in most cases a tragedy.