

## NINE FEARED DEAD

FROM THE COAST GUARD CREW:

**Lt. Cmdr. Che J. Barnes, 35,**

Capay, aircraft commander

**Lt. Adam W. Bryant, 28,**

Crewe, Va., co-pilot  
**Chief Petty Officer John F. Seidman, 43,**

Carmichael, flight engineer

**Petty Officer 2nd Class Carl P. Grigonis, 35,**

Mayfield Heights, Ohio, navigator

**Petty Officer 2nd Class Monica L. Beacham, 29,**

Decaturville, Tenn., radio operator

**Petty Officer 2nd Class Jason S. Moletzsky, 26,**

Norristown, Pa., air crew

**Petty Officer 3rd Class Danny R. Kreder II, 22,**

Elm Mott, Texas, drop master

FROM THE MARINE CORPS CREW:

**Maj. Samuel Leigh, 35,** Kennebec, Maine

**1st Lt. Thomas Claiborne, 26,**

Parker, Colo.



Barnes



Bryant



Seidman



Grigonis



Beacham



Moletzsky



Kreder

## AS FEARS GROW, FAMILY, FRIENDS RECALL THOSE DRIVEN TO BE FLIERS

By CYNTHIA HUBERT, RYAN LILLIS AND ANNA TONG

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They hailed from towns and suburbs across America - small places like Elm Mott, Texas, and Decaturville, Tenn.

Last week, their passion for aviation and serving others took them into the night sky above the Pacific Ocean. Off the Southern California coast, their fates tragically collided.

All nine crew members involved in a disastrous crash off the San Diego coast Thursday night between a Coast Guard aircraft and a Marine Corps helicopter remain lost at sea.

Seven people from McClellan Airport went down in a Coast Guard C-130 Hercules plane on a mission to find a boater lost near Catalina Island. Two others were inside a Marine Corps helicopter on a training mission out of Camp Pendleton.

A massive search continued Saturday, but by Saturday night optimism was fading for family members and friends of the fliers.

"You do hold out hope," said John Moletzsky, whose son, Petty Officer Jason Moletzsky, was aboard the Coast Guard craft. "But being an old aviator myself, it's hard."

John Moletzsky said officials indicated to the family that the search would be called off this morning.

Coast Guard officials on Saturday would not confirm the search would end today.

"We were father and son, but I also lost  
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# Guard: 'He did it ... with gusto'

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my best friend," Moletzsky said.

Growing up in far-flung places from California to Maine, Jason Moletzsky and the other crew members dreamed of becoming aviators, friends and relatives said.

"Jason told me when he was a freshman in high school that he was going to join the Coast Guard," his father said.

After a neighbor in the Philadelphia suburb of Norristown took him up in a small plane, "he was hooked."

Moletzsky, 26, transferred to California this summer from Florida. He joined a team that, among other things, searches for lost boaters.

He "talked constantly" of his adventures, his father said.

"He had great enthusiasm for what he did," his father said. "It was natural for him to help other people. He did it well, and with gusto."

Known to family members and close friends as Jake or Yoda, Jason Moletzsky moved to Sacramento with his girlfriend and his dog. He was looking forward to snowboarding in Lake Tahoe, said his sister Rebecca.

"He's my little brother, but he is my rock and my hero," she said through tears. "He is wise, respectful, smart and compassionate."

Jason Moletzsky typically sent his mother and two sisters "outrageous tropical arrangements" on birthdays, she said. Recently he threatened to wear the cap of his beloved Philadelphia Phillies to work.

He was planning to return to Pennsylvania for Thanksgiving, she said.

The plane that carried Moletzsky is considered one of the military's safest. In fact, the pilot, 35-year-old Lt. Cmdr. Che Barnes, told a friend he switched from helicopters because of the C-130 Hercules' workhorse reputation.

"The C-130 is kind of a tank," said Cory Lovell, who knew Barnes through the Northern California Aerobatic Club.

Lovell described Barnes as quietly competent and serious about his life's work.

"First and foremost, he really knew



how to fly," said Tom Myers, another friend. "He was not one of those hardcore people about competition. He did it for recreation. Like a lot of really good pilots, he was ... calm and trustworthy, not prone to cowboy actions."

Another of the plane's crew members, Chief Petty Officer John Seidman, was so fit and strong that "he would hug the stuffing right out of you," said his sister-in-law, Nicola Weigandt of Carmichael.

Weigandt called Seidman "an absolutely wonderful human being" with a sharp sense of humor, "the kind of guy you love to have in your home. I felt very grateful to even know him."

Jennifer Weigandt Seidman told the Associated Press that she holds out hope that her husband has managed to survive.

"I don't want to let my mind go to thinking the worst," she said from the couple's home in Carmichael. "John knows what he's doing, and he's fit and he's very smart."

"They're saying that they're still looking."

The Seidmans married in 2001 and Seidman, 43, is stepfather to her three children, aged 10, 12 and 13, she said.

Friends of Maj. Samuel Leigh called him a consummate professional, a dedicated Marine who often talked about the

thrill of flying helicopters.

"He's a good Marine, a good pilot and would pretty much do anything for his friends," said Stephen Mount, a former roommate of Leigh's.

Leigh spent his childhood in the small burg of Kennebec, Maine.

Lt. Adam W. Bryant also was raised in a blip of a town, Crews, Va., population 2,378.

"He's a country boy," said his mother, Nina Bryant.

Her son was a three-sport high school athlete and wound up joining the Coast Guard "for an education," she said.

Petty Officer Danny Kreder, of Elm Mott, Texas, said on his Facebook page he "got out of Dodge" after finishing school, and joined the Coast Guard.

"Moved a lot in the last few years," he wrote. "When my time's up, who knows if I'll go back home."

"There's a lot bigger world out there than Texas. Maybe I'll go see the rest of the world!"

The Coast Guard said it planned to search through the night for Kreder and the other missing crew members.

"Our policy is to search as long as hope exists," said Coast Guard Petty Officer Henry Dunphy, speaking from the San Diego Coast Guard station.

He said Coast Guard personnel were beginning to tire after nearly two full days of searching around a field of debris from both aircraft floating in quick currents 50 miles off the coast of San Diego.

"Especially in a service as small as the Coast Guard, the people all know each other," Dunphy said. "It's like losing a family member."

Late Saturday, at least some relatives of the crew were clinging to the fading possibility their loved ones would be found alive.

"Miracles do happen," Nina Bryant said.

Call The Bee's Cynthia Hubert, (916) 321-1082. Bee staff writer Robert Divilva and researcher Jason Coughran contributed to this report.