

TUESDAY
November 3, 2009



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MID-AIR COLLISION

With search over, focus turns to cause of crash



Capay Valley resident Che Barnes was piloting the Coast Guard C-130 aircraft which disappeared last week.

Associated Press



Darin Perro/Associated Press

A U.S. Coast Guardsman boards a MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter at the San Diego Coast Guard Station in San Diego. The U.S. Coast Guard and Navy have changed the focus of their mission from searching to trying to recover the bodies of those missing in a mid-air collision.

'Black box' recorder, debris sought

By The Associated Press
and The Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Investigators met Monday to look into the cause of a crash involving a Coast Guard plane and a Marine helicopter that killed nine people, as the search for bodies and wreckage continued off the Southern California coast.

Helicopters, Navy and Coast Guard

vessels continued their weekend search of more than 600 square miles of the Pacific, but there was scant hope of finding any survivors and the mission was now characterized as one of recovery, Coast Guard officials said.

In addition to debris, Coast Guard Lt. Josh Nelson said searchers would watch for the "black box" cockpit recorders carried by the aircraft. They might supply information about the

final moments before the Coast Guard C-130 and the Marine Corps AH-1W Super Cobra helicopter collided Thursday evening.

After the crash, debris was found about 50 miles off of San Diego.

Waters in the search area were 2,400 feet deep, Nelson said, and he declined to estimate the chances of recovering anything more.

See SEARCH on page A3

SEARCH

Continued from Page A1

"We've searched the entire area for 3 1/2 days so far and didn't find anything," he said.

Among the missing — and now presumed dead — is Lt. Cmdr Che Barnes, 35, of Capay, who was piloting the Coast Guard C-130 plane off the coast of San Diego when it went down. The C-130 was based in Sacramento.

Barnes is presumed dead, along with six other Coast Guard members on board the plane and two Marines piloting a helicopter. The chopper and plane crashed Thursday evening.

Members of the Barnes/Barsotti family were at the family home on their Capay farm on Sunday night, telling stories about Che and remembering the many good things about him.

Freeman Barsotti, the youngest of the four brothers and one of two who uses his mother Kathleen's maiden name, told *The Democrat* "We're just kind of coping now. We're gonna miss Che."

Freeman said he and Che were brought closer when their mother died nine years ago. The brothers grew up working for Capay Organic, which later became Farm Fresh To You, a Community Supported Agriculture.

"We won't have that feeling again," Freeman said.

Barnes was born in Davis in 1974. He was one of two twins out of Kathy and Martin's four sons.

"As a child he spent many hours selling at farmers markets, moving irrigation pipe, and harvesting and tilling the soil. From an early age he was fascinated with flight," according to the Farm Fresh biography on its Web site.

As a lieutenant commander in the Coast Guard, Barnes had flown both fixed-wing aircraft and search and rescue helicopters.

Meanwhile, a mishap analysis board comprised of Coast Guard and Marine officials was meeting in San Diego to begin a weeks-long process of examining debris, radio transmissions and other information and trying to figure out what happened, Nelson said.

Investigators are also collecting witness statements from those aboard the three other Marine aircraft and will check to see if any distress calls were made.

The Coast Guard plane with Barnes on board was searching for a missing boater. The helicopter's two-man crew was flying in formation with another Cobra and two transports on a nighttime training exercise.