



For immediate release, April 28, 2009

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Missing Aircraft Search Team (MAST)

Statement re Recovery of Missing Plane N2700Q

The members of MAST express their sincere condolences to the families and friends of Marcy Randolph and Bill Westover. We know that the recovery of their wrecked plane, N2700Q, and the knowledge that Marcy and Bill almost certainly perished in the crash in 2006 will be very hard to bear. It is our hope and desire that this discovery and the subsequent accident investigation will bring answers to the families' long sought after questions, and that the healing process will begin soon.

While there is a great deal of credit to be shared by many persons and agencies for this find, we think that this story is really about the incredible fortitude and perseverance of Phil Randolph, Marcy's father. A former pilot, Phil recently renewed his pilot's license in order to continue the search for his daughter. He searched tirelessly from the air in fixed wing aircraft and helicopters, and spent countless hours on the ground. He kept the case alive and reached out to many people, including MAST, never giving up until his daughter was found. It has been a great honor and privilege to work with him.

Finding the plane

As described on the family website, the sequence of events leading to the discovery of the crash site began the day it went missing, when two hikers reported seeing a small fire in a remote canyon northwest of Sedona. Despite photos and descriptions of the location passed to authorities, the fire was never confirmed. The hikers had no idea that the fire might relate to a plane wreck at the time.

About a week ago, a MAST investigator came across the fire report while researching how to access the canyon which had been identified as a high-probability search area targeted by MAST. The hikers who made the report were interviewed by MAST team

members seeking to determine the location and other details about the fire. During this interview, the hikers became aware of the possible link to a missing aircraft. An approximate location for the fire was determined.

Armed with the description of the general location of the fire, Phil Randolph and Westover family friend Janet McElfresh hiked up to the general area on Saturday April 18. They did not find the wreck, but were on a steep trail overlooking the canyon where the fire had been observed. They were able to match the photos taken by the hikers to local terrain, and got a general fix on the location of the fire. Brad Andrews, Phil Randolph's brother, conducted extensive geo-location analysis using Google Earth to try to determine the possible fire location from this new information.

The hikers, alerted by the interview, returned to the canyon on their own initiative on Sunday, April 19, hiked to the approximate site of the fire, and discovered wreckage under trees which appeared to be an aircraft.

As soon as MAST learned from the hikers that they had discovered previously-unreported wreckage, the local authorities were immediately contacted by MAST and provided with this information.

What is MAST and what did it do?

MAST is a group of unpaid volunteer experts from around the country who specialize in searching for missing airplanes. Since 1962, almost 100 light aircraft have gone missing in the lower 48 states. This is a national problem that has received very little public attention.

MAST was formed after the search for Steve Fossett ended in 2008. Members had worked together on that search, and they realized that their assembled capabilities should be applied to similar cases. In November 2008, a MAST member was approached by Phil Randolph, asking for help in the search for his daughter. Simultaneously, another MAST member, an expert in law enforcement and SAR, was officially approached by a law enforcement official from northern Arizona, and asked to review documents in the N2700Q case. MAST began work on the case immediately.

MAST is comprised of experts in search theory, search and rescue, aviation, aviation archaeology, radar analysis, emergency management, law enforcement, communications, mountaineering, expedition management and wilderness survival.

MAST efforts in the N2700Q case included the following:

- Devoting over 1000 volunteer hours to the case
- Undertaking and documenting over 40 interviews with friends of the victims, flight instructors, possible witnesses, family members and others
- Reviewing data and interviews from the 2006 search effort
- Obtaining and analyzing over 1,000,000 radar hits for the day in question

- Verifying the radar track which proved to be a vital clue in the case
- Using Google Earth as the MAST team's common tool for visualizing terrain, and locating, analyzing and discussing clues, tracks, anomalies, logistical support locations, and possible access and camping locations for searchers
- Undertaking fixed wing and helicopter recon and search of the Sedona area
- Assembling a team of experts to help analyze the data
- Conducting bi-weekly teleconferences to discuss the case
- Developing 16 different accident scenarios, analyzing them, and narrowing them down to three high probability scenarios. The top priority scenario, based on the latest MAST analysis of the evidence, contained the actual location of the wreck
- Assessing the effectiveness of the previous search effort to determine where subsequent searches should be conducted
- Discussing the planned private search with local authorities.
- Developing a detailed sixteen page Incident Action Plan for searching using an Incident Command System approach and principles.
- Notifying the proper authorities about the existence of the possible plane wreck and its location, immediately after its discovery by the two hiker/searcher/witnesses.

What future efforts were planned?

Based on the scenarios developed by MAST, the Randolph and Westover families and MAST planned two major private volunteer searches: one from April 23 through May 3, and another from June 10 through June 23. The April search was to be very substantial, involving twenty-nine searchers over eight days, using ground search techniques supported by limited helicopter and fixed wing assets. The June search was to be even larger and last twice as long. These planned efforts have now been suspended.

One unique aspect of the April/May search was the fact that participants from as far away as Canada and West Virginia were involved and had already bought tickets to fly in for the search, when the plane was found.

We think it is a tribute to the Randolph and Westover families and their perseverance, that they could inspire so many people from around the country to respond to their call for assistance.

How was the case closed?

The successful closing of this case is attributable to the thousands of hours put in by the families, public agencies and private volunteers over a two and a half year period. The plane's location was finally surmised by associating the information provided by the hiker/witnesses with the scenario development and fact-finding by Phil Randolph, Brad Andrews and MAST, working together.

It should be noted that although the plane N2700Q has been positively identified as the crashed plane, the two occupants have still not been definitely identified by local

authorities as Marcy Randolph and Bill Westover. However, all the evidence points to this being the case, and the families have acknowledged this sad fact. The Randolph family has agreed to MAST releasing this statement at this time.

It is typical of a case like this that one small clue among thousands leads to another, then to a cascade of clues, and eventually to a find. It is clear to MAST that Phil Randolph deserves tremendous credit for his tireless devotion to the case, over a period of two and a half years.

More information?

A website produced by the families and devoted to this search is located at www.n2700q.com/. Family statements regarding MAST assistance are posted on that site.

Biographical information on selected MAST members is available on request.

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