Recommendation and Position Descriptions

Chris Ruch – IS Candidate

I have often said that there is no better feeling when, in the command post, overwhelmed with problems, someone in a blue shirt walks through the door and asks how can I help. Chris is one of those people that I always welcome into my command staff. I rely heavily on his vast field abilities to help me with decisions about operational issues and how those decisions will impact the people we put into the field. Chris functions well in both planning and operational positions. He has a solid grasp of search theory and of the practical aspects of search management. It is my firm recommendation that he be moved up to the IS level.

*July 26, 2004: Calliope search – Falls Mills, WV*. This was a search for a middle age woman, with an inoperable brain tumor, who wandered away from her sister’s house where she was visiting. We were asked to run search operations by the local EMA Director after approximately 30 hours of searching by local responders. I functioned as IC and Chris functioned as my combined Plans/Ops section chief. Chris helped with the initial planning process and then took more of an operations role, managing the tasks occurring in the current operational period. In this role Chris interacted not only with the searchers going into the field but also with the local EMA Director who was interested in how the operation was being conducted. During this operation we had teams that were well know to us (on both ends of the ability scale), teams that we did not know and a number of emergent volunteers. Chris’ managerial ability was instrumental in making sure that teams got into the field with tasks that fit their level of ability. This search ended with a Status 2 find. The local EMS was a BLS service and, due to the length of exposure, the management staff thought it appropriate that I ride with the patient to the hospital. At this point Chris took over the operation and executed a successful demobilization.

*January 2005: Pritts Search – Rector, PA*. This was a classic example of an operation run without any real SAR management knowledge. After four days of searching, the local fire departments had been unable to find the subject. The Pennsylvania State Police, at the request of the family, asked us to come in and run the search. Another AMRG member and I went to the scene the night of January 7th and gathered as much information as we could. We then went to Chris’ house were the three of us spent the rest of the night in a planning mode. Chris was acting as Plans Chief at this point. By O-dark thirty we had done our analysis and written enough tasks to get started the next day. During the night planning, Chris was responsible for creating the plans and writing the tasks for the next day. I worked on arranging multiple SAR groups to arrive at staggered periods the next morning (AMRG & MARG at 6:00, Other SAR including CAP at 7:00 and emergent volunteers at 8:00). Since Chris was intimately familiar with the tasks for the next day, I asked him to function as my Operations Chief on January 8th. After the initial actions of getting ~ 200 people into the field, I asked Chris to take on the task of organizing a team for recovery if we had a find. Our highest probability scenario was that the subject had been swept away in the creek behind her home. The task of organizing a recovery team had to be undertaken with great care. There were a number of local organizations that wanted to participate however, we were very concerned about rescuer safety. Chris organized a team without stepping on any toes and had that team ready when needed. This search ended in a Status 3 find with the subject hung up in some strainers on the creek. Chris took the recovery team, now operating as an FTL, and executed an efficient and safe recovery.

*May 10, 2005 – Dunbar, PA* This search was for a Gulf War Vet who had written a suicide note and then disappeared from his home. I functioned as IC and Chris functioned as Ops Chief. This was a very difficult search because we, as a command staff, continuously received conflicting searching and planning data. One contradiction had to do with the subject’s vision. We had reports that he was legally blind, however we had a well-written note. Another centered on the subject’s ability to ambulate. On one hand we were told he had artificial leg(s) and could not walk well, while on the other hand we were told that he walked daily and had a large number of steep steps that led into his home. To complicate operational matters even more, Dunbar is a very small and tight-knit (read inbred) community. Everyone knows everyone and most are related in some way. There were significant issues of the locals either ignoring the tasks they had been given or just taking off on their own. Chris did a skillful job of managing this, trying to make sure that we could track family members by seeing that they got out on tasks with more highly trained FTL’s. This search ended with a Status 2 find. The patient was transported to the hospital. After the news reached the searchers and family in base (actually they learned about it at almost the exact same time we did due to a team member calling a friend/cousin/girlfriend in base) one of the family members became ill and fainted. Chris and I had to provide medical treatment until an EMS unit could arrive from the next town. Chris’ ability to manage a diverse group of searchers and deal with out-of-the-norm issues helped make this a successful search.

*July 31, 2005 – Blue Knob State Park, PA*. This was a search for an autistic youth missing from a group camp. Alex was IC and I was Ops Chief. This was another example of Chris having to exercise his leadership and people handling skills. We had a group of local responders in base who were expressing extreme displeasure at how the search was being run and were threatening to go off on their own. Alex and I asked Chris to lead a task using the locals as team members. One of the key aspects of leading this task was to make the team members feel that this was the most important thing they could be doing. Using his interpersonal skills, Chris easily handled this task.

Don Scelza

Executive Director, Allegheny Mountain Rescue Group

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