



Rescue crews join search for missing NFL players, boaters

by Capt. Cathleen Snow
920th Rescue Wing

3/2/2009 - **PATRICK AIR FORCE BASE, Fla.**

(AFNS) -- An Air Force Reserve Rescue crew from the 920th Rescue Wing here took off in an HH-60G Pave Hawk at 5 p.m. March 1 to join the Coast Guard in a search for four missing boaters in the Gulf of Mexico

Detroit Lions defensive end Corey Smith and Oakland Raiders linebacker Victor Cooper were among the missing persons 50 miles west of Clearwater Pass, off the coast of Tampa Bay, a Coast Guard official and Mr. Smith's agent said.

The pair had been teammates on the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 2004. A Coast Guard representative said the two others aboard are identified as Will Bleakley and Nick Schuyler, but details were not provided.

Watchstanders at Coast Guard Sector St. Petersburg, Fla., received a call at about 1:30 a.m. March 1

reporting that three friends -- Mr. Cooper, Mr. Skyler and Mr. Smith -- and a possible fourth person did not return from their fishing trip as expected. The four boaters left at about 6:30 a.m. Feb. 21 from the Seminole Boat Ramp in Clearwater Pass, in a 21-foot center console boat. The reporting source later updated the information and confirmed there was a fourth person aboard the vessel

Officials from the 920th RQW received notification from the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center to help with the search. According to officials at the AFRCC, Coast Guard officials notified them at approximately 1 p.m. for help with the search that started a chain reaction of notifying various Air Force units. The 920th RQW is one of several other Air Force units which joined in on the search March 1

"Our crews are the best at what they do. We'll do everything we can to find these missing men," said Col. Steve Kirkpatrick, the 920th RQW commander

The Coast Guard assets included a 47-foot motor-life boat crew from Station Sand Key, Fla., HH-60 Jayhawk helicopter and C-130 Hercules fixed-wing aircraft from Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater, and the Coast Guard Cutter Crocodile are searching a 750-square mile area west of Clearwater Pass for the missing boaters.

An urgent mariner information broadcast is also being transmitted on marine VHF radi channel 16. If anyone has any information regarding this case they are asked to call Coast Guard Sector St Petersburg at or by marine VHF radio channel 16.

The AFRCC staff serves as the single agency responsible for coordinating on-land federal search and rescue activities in the 48 contiguous United States, Mexico and Canada. The AFRCC is located under the 1st Air Force at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., and operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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An Air Force Reserve rescue crew from the 920th Rescue Wing took off in an HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter to join the Coast Guard in a search for four missing boaters 50 miles west of Clearwater Pass on the Gulf Coast of Florida at 5 p.m. from Patrick Air Force Base, Fla. Detroit Lions defensive end Corey Smith and Oakland Raiders linebacker Victor Cooper were among the missing persons. A Coast Guard representative said the two other missing persons are identified as Will Bleakley and Nick Schuyler, but details were not provided. (U.S. Air Force photo)