

Slinger, Schofield and McDougall

UNSUNG HEROES



By RUSS BARNES

Robert (86) and Betty (84) Burkhart were stuck in the mud, lost in the middle of nowhere, and had little hope of being found for over 24 hours. Then up in the sky, a small plane appears, in no time at all, a rescue party arrives and all is well with the world again. A miracle, perhaps, or it's just another day for the volunteers of the Civil Air Patrol. This is a true story that happened on June 24th of this year, and the occupants of the vehicle were plenty glad to see the plane overhead. These are our Unsung Heroes for 2010.

The Civil Air Patrol is the Air Force Auxiliary, chartered by congress and is located in every state. They supply the aircraft and fuel to perform the tasks at hand. Currently, Wyoming has five such aircraft based in: Gillette, Jackson, Casper, Cheyenne and Powell. Wing command is in Cheyenne.

The plane, piloted by David Slinger (23 yrs. pilot) with Steven Schofield (8 yrs. pilot), mission observer, and Angus McDougall, mission scanner, was dispatched to the Pathfinder area to assist the Casper CAP. After a brief period, with a little help from another CAP volunteer in Arizona, a cell phone forensic scientist, the search was moved to the area in which the couple was found. All three of the men are well qualified pilots and trained observers who take turns doing all of the roles. The pilots all volunteer their time to train and go out on missions. They fly in all kinds of weather and over all kinds of terrain. "It takes lots of math and science to do this job" says David Slinger, who is a mechanic with Wyoming Machinery, when he is not flying a plane or soaring in a glider. Steven Schofield, the band director at Twin

Spruce Junior High and a Jazz trumpet player, said they were "torn when they got a call out", between the exhilaration of the search and the possibility that the situation won't end well. This time, however, it was a success. Angus McDougall, a self proclaimed "small business owner", not wanting to get any accolades gives all the credit to his fellow pilots and though he has been flying for over 34 years is still learning, as he puts it.

You don't have to be a pilot to volunteer; you can fly as an observer, after a bit of training, more math and science. They also had a cadet corps until 2007 when they lost the cadet commander. These are the kids that are on the ground and actually go and find people. Angus' son Ian was just such a kid, when the corps broke up. They are trained in terrain mapping and navigation. There is an opportunity for a volunteer to get that program up and running again. Sort of like the Boy Scouts only harder. Just takes the willingness to have no free time and help others. That attitude is prevalent throughout the organization. Along with the "opportunity to do good and help people," states David, the young guys learn from the old guys.

If not for the nomination of their director, Greg Schreurs, a retired Air Force Major, who has 40 years of flying under his belt, these guys would just have gone on without any acknowledgment of the time that they put in helping the people of Campbell County.

Next time you see a small red, white and blue plane overhead, give them a wave. It might just be the CAP and our Unsung Heroes for 2010.