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Two men survive plane crash

By Janene Scully/Associate Editor

Two men in a single-engine plane that crashed in the hills above the Santa Ynez Valley were rescued Monday, authorities said.

Both the pilot, Keegan Bailey, 22, and his passenger, Clayton Fitzgerald, 18, were taken by helicopters to Marian Medical Center. Both men were believed to be residents of the Santa Ynez Valley.

Fitzgerald was listed in critical condition Monday evening while Bailey, who was found in stable condition, was still being evaluated.

The Cessna was reported missing after reportedly taking off Sunday from the Santa Ynez Airport for a pleasure flight over Figueroa Mountain, according to Sgt. Erik Raney of the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department.

The silver plane with a red stripe was last seen Sunday morning at the airport getting fuel - enough for up to four hours of flight - and taking off about 9 or 10 a.m., Raney said.

Neither the pilot nor passenger had contacted family or co-workers Monday and an automobile remained at the airport.

When informed about the overdue flight mid-morning Monday, airport manager Kim Joos immediately contacted authorities, according to Jim Kunkle, Santa Ynez Airport Authority president.

"She understood the magnitude of the situation and really reacted," Kunkle said.

Four aircraft with six pilots - Kunkle with his son Chris, Mike McCann, Yves Bajulaz and Travis Foss with John Peyton - from the general-aviation airport quickly took off to help find their fellow flier.

Just before 3 p.m. Monday, aviators found the wreckage in the Mantana Schoolhouse area of the San Rafael Wilderness of Los Padres National Forest.

"When we saw it, we didn't think anybody survived it. It looks pretty bad," Kunkle said. "That was unbelievable. We didn't expect to have that kind of outcome."

The wreckage was in a "horrible canyon," and not easily accessible, Kunkle added.

"The California Highway Patrol helicopter (crew) reported seeing at least one survivor of the wreckage," Raney said, at the crash site about 10 miles northwest of the Forest Service's Figueroa Mountain lookout.

Helicopters ferried the sheriff's search-and-rescue team and county fire paramedics to the site.

"They found, once on the ground, that the two subjects on board were both alive," Raney said, and both men were transported to Marian Medical Center by helicopters from the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's and Ventura County Sheriff's departments.

"Everybody did good; it was a great team effort," Kunkle said, checking off the agencies and private pilots involved in the search.

The Cessna 140 is registered to Douglas L. Bailey of Hendersonville, Tenn., according to FAA records. Douglas L. Bailey's reportedly is the pilot's dad.

Keegan Bailey, who once worked at the airport, had grown up around planes, Kunkle said. Bailey has had his private pilot's license for only a short time, but Kunkle called the 22-year-old a good pilot.

The cause of the crash remains under investigation. Both the Federal Aviation Administration and National Transportation Safety Board were notified Monday.

* Associate Editor Janene Scully can be reached at 739-2214 or by e-mail at janscully@pulitzer.net.

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