

MISSOURI STATE HIGHWAY PATROL
REPORT OF INCIDENT

STATE CONTROL NO.: 08 246 064 000
REPORTING OFFICER: TROOPER S. L. NELSON 0893
OCC TYPE: HOT AIR BALLOON CRASH
COUNTY: TEXAS
DATE/TIME: 08/17/08, 0830 HOURS
OFFENSE STATUS: INACTIVE
LOCATION: BUSINESS HIGHWAY 60, MOUNTAIN GROVE, MO
REPORT DATE: 08/17/08
TROOP OF OCCURRENCE: G
SCENE PROCESSED: N
DDCC AT SCENE: N

VICTIM NAME: BLAIR, ELMER WILLIAM (BILL)
DOB: [REDACTED]
PHYSICAL DSC: SEX: M RACE: W
INJURIES/DAMAGE: DECEASED

DETAILS OF INVESTIGATION

1. On August 17, 2008 at approximately 0835 hours, I responded to a hot air balloon crash, which occurred near Business Highway 60, near Mountain Grove, Missouri. There was one fatality and one serious injury because of the crash.
2. On August 17, 2008 at approximately 0835 hours, I was notified by Troop G dispatch of an explosion and fire involving a hot air balloon. The incident occurred on property owned by Elmer Lane of Mountain Grove, Missouri. The property is located on Stone Ridge Drive, approximately 300 yards from Business Highway 60. The GPS location is N37 07 57.6 by W.92 13 33.3.
3. As I approached within two miles of the scene I observed a large black cloud of smoke in the area. I arrived on scene at approximately 0850 hours. I observed several aluminum propane tanks and other debris burning near a semi-trailer. A white male, later identified as Elmer William (Bill) Blair, was lying a short distance from the fire. He appeared to be badly injured by the fire and had obvious broken bones. I approached a man who was talking to Blair and discovered he was part of the ground crew attending the balloon. He identified himself as South Alex Noble.
4. Noble explained to me that he and three other men were conducting a tethered hot air balloon flight. They had the balloon tethered to a pickup truck with a 100-foot long cable. According to Noble, he had ridden the balloon up for one flight with no problem. Blair had piloted the second flight. Noble stated there had been an apparent propane leak during the second flight. Blair had attempted to extinguish the propane leak, but the burner ignited the propane, causing a large explosion. Noble estimated the balloon to have been 75 feet high at the time. Blair was unable to escape the fire, which consumed the gondola and jumped to get away from the fire. The fire then melted the ropes holding the gondola to the envelope of the balloon, and the gondola crashed to the ground a few feet from Blair. Noble and another ground crewman, Elmer Lane, ran toward Blair to pull him away from the fire. As they ran, there was a second explosion, which knocked them both backwards approximately 15 feet. They then ran

toward the fire and grabbed Blair under each arm. As they were dragging him back, a third explosion knocked them down. This explosion burned Lane badly on the arms, back, and buttocks, but Noble escaped injury.

5. I interviewed Elmer L. Lane, who explained to me that he owned the property and was assisting as a ground crewman for the balloon. Lane stated he had observed what appeared to be a massive propane leak squirt sideways out of the gondola just prior to the explosion. He described it as looking like a garden hose stream. Lane then recounted essentially the same story as Noble regarding the pulling of Blair from the fire.

6. I interviewed Brian K. Johnston, who also explained to me that he was assisting as a ground crewman for the balloon flight. According to Johnston, Blair had been attempting to get the balloon to come down at the time of the explosion. He estimated the balloon was 75 or 80 feet up when the explosion occurred. Johnston stated Blair climbed out of the basket in an attempt to escape the fire and jumped. He described him as having landed head first.

7. I interviewed Daniel N. Melton, who explained to me that he was traveling east on Business Highway 60 and observed the explosion and fire. Melton described the explosion as massive and stated he observed the gondola separate from the balloon. He did not observe Blair jumping, however. Melton arrived at the scene only moments after the explosion subsided.

8. Elmer William (Bill) Blair was pronounced dead at the scene by Texas County Coroner, Tom Whittaker, at 0940 hours. Elmer L. Lane was transported by private vehicle to St. John's Regional Medical Center in Springfield, Missouri for treatment of serious burns. The envelope of the balloon was located by aerial search at N 37 07 53.3 W 92 14 09.9, approximately three-fourths mile from the crash site. Tail Number N90897 was discovered on the balloon.

9. During a subsequent interview with South Alex Noble, I discovered the balloon was owned by Darold Coffman of Mountain Grove, Missouri. Coffman died around the Fourth of July. Noble and the others involved decided to fly the balloon as a remembrance of Coffman. Blair had flown in the balloon once before. None of the other participants had any training or experience ballooning. Noble provided me with numerous documents pertaining to the balloon. These include: Flight manual, two aircraft logs, registration certificate, two bills of sale, FAA airworthiness certificate, and other financial documents regarding the purchase and finance of the balloon.

10. The documents presented to me by Noble indicate the balloon was a 1990 Firefly 7-15 manufactured by The Balloon Works, Inc., FAA registration number N90897. A bill of sale indicates Darold Coffman purchased the balloon from Cary Yates, of Buffalo Grove, IL, on January 07, 2006.

11. I contacted the FAA Regional Operations Center in Kansas City and spoke with Dawne Gerard and Ron Meyers. I briefed them on the circumstances surrounding the incident and was advised they would not be responding to the scene. They requested photographs be taken of the scene and that all wreckage be kept for possible future examination.

They advised it was permissible for the owner to keep the wreckage as they were not interested in it as evidence. I was later contacted by FAA Flight Standards District Office Investigator, Val Ziedens. Ziedens advised me he would be conducting the FAA investigation and requested he be forwarded the original paperwork for the balloon for his examination.

12. This investigation is closed.

S. L. Nelson, Trooper
Troop G

SLN:mo

cc: GHQ
Val Ziedens, FAA Central Region, 901 Locust Street, Kansas City, MO
64106
Reporting Officer
Troop G File

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REPORT DATE: 08/17/2008
TROOP OF OCCURRENCE: G
SCENE PROCESSED: N
DDCC AT SCENE: N

VICTIM NAME: LANE, ELMER L.
ADDRESS: [REDACTED] MOUNTAIN GROVE, MO
DOB: [REDACTED]
PHYSICAL DESC: SEX: M RACE: W
INJURIES/DAMAGE: SERIOUS BURNS TO ARMS, BACK, AND BUTTOCKS
PHONE NUMBER: HOME [REDACTED] WORK [REDACTED]

WITNESS NAME: NOBLE, SOUTH ALEX
ADDRESS: [REDACTED], MOUNTAIN GROVE, MO 65711
DOB: [REDACTED]
PHYSICAL DESC: SEX: M RACE: W
PHONE NUMBER: HOME [REDACTED] WORK [REDACTED]

WITNESS NAME: [REDACTED]
ADDRESS: [REDACTED] MOUNTAIN GROVE, MO
DOB: [REDACTED]
PHYSICAL DESC: SEX: M RACE: W
PHONE NUMBER: HOME [REDACTED] WORK [REDACTED]

WITNESS NAME: MELTON, DANIEL N.
ADDRESS: [REDACTED] NORWOOD, MO
DOB: [REDACTED]
PHYSICAL DESC: SEX: M RACE: W
PHONE NUMBER: HOME [REDACTED] WORK [REDACTED]

RELATED REPORT: 08170800333