


LOCAL NEWS ANYTIME ANYWHERE
 Click to download
FREE iPhone or Android app



Trusted local news leader for Prescott, Arizona communities since 1882 **dcourier.com**

Home | Classifieds | Place an Ad | Public Notices | Subscriber Services | 928 Media Lab | Real Estate Search | Galleries | Obits | TV Listings | Contact Us
 Find It | Blogs | Features | Milestones | Submit | Extras | Other Publications | Circulars | Today's Ads

The Daily Courier

home : latest news

Share

December 11, 2015

 Search
 Advanced Search

Like Share 30 Tweet G+ +1 Recommend this on Google
 9/28/2013 10:00:00 AM

Final photos, videos of Granite Mountain Hotshots come to light



Joanna Dodder Nellans
 The Daily Courier

Christopher MacKenzie left an unexpected gift when he perished alongside 18 of his fellow Granite Mountain Hotshots June 30 in the Yarnell Hill wildfire.

When his father Mike received Chris' charred belongings from the medical examiner's office, one item appeared untouched by fire: a small Canon PowerShot digital camera. Even the cloth cover was unscathed.

"My stepdaughter pulled the card out and stuck it in the computer and said, 'Hey, check this out,'" Mike related. He came over and saw photos of the Granite Mountain Hotshots working the Doce wildfire near Prescott June 18-22, as well as the West Spruce wildfire near Prescott on June 28.

Then he saw 14 photos of the hotshots working on the Yarnell Hill wildfire on June 30 about 30 miles south of Prescott. Chris shot the last photo at 4:02 p.m., less than an hour before he died.

"I can't explain how I felt," Mike said. "The first thing was, you know, they're going to need it for the investigation."

"Then I thought why - and I still wonder - did that survive when nothing else did."

He was surprised that authorities didn't temporarily hold onto the camera and its memory card, as they did Chris' phone.

When Prescott Fire Department Wildland Division Chief Darrell Willis came to Chris' funeral in Hemet, Calif., on July 13, Mike handed him a DVD containing the photos and videos.

"He just said, 'Here's some pictures you might be interested in,'" Willis recalled. MacKenzie asked him to share the images with the families of the other hotshot crew members, too.

Willis didn't check them out until he returned home to Prescott.



Granite Mountain Hotshot Robert Caldwell stands with a torch after lighting a backfire on the Yarnell Hill Fire at 10:45 a.m. on June 30, 2013. Photo recovered from the personal camera of Granite Mountain Hotshot Christopher MacKenzie following the horrific Yarnell Hill Fire that killed 19 of the Granite Mountain Hotshots on June 30, 2013.



A column of smoke rises from the Yarnell Hill Fire at approximately 11:42 a.m. on June 30, 2013. Photo recovered from the personal camera of Granite Mountain Hotshot Christopher MacKenzie following the horrific Yarnell Hill Fire that killed 19 of the Granite Mountain Hotshots on June 30, 2013.

Granite Mountain Hotshots last video by Christopher MacKenzie

Granite Mountain Hotshots last vide...



We want to hear from you
 >>> Send us a news tip, letter or question

Click to download FREE iPhone or Android app

Currently **48°F** Mostly Cloudy
 Tomorrow **High 45°F Low 23°F**
 forecast provided by **wu WEATHER UNDERGROUND**
 Click for weather forecast

Tires Wearing Unevenly? **EUROPEAN AUTO**
FREE Alignment check with Oil Change **Technicians**
 928.445.5559 or click here for details

Earthworks Garden Center
 Over Four Acres of Garden & Landscape Supplies.
 Open Mon - Sat - 8am - 4:30pm

- Living Christmas Trees
- Bird Baths & Bird Feeders
- Unique Gifts
- Garden & Yard Art
- Fountains
- Talavera Pottery

928.636.3972
 www.EarthworksGardenSupply.com
 2531 North Highway 89 in Chino Valley
 Corner of Hwy 89 & Road 3 1/2 North

"It was like, really? Wow. I can't believe this," he recalled. He immediately contacted the team investigating the wildfire for the Arizona State Forestry Division, who also talked to Mike MacKenzie.

The photos and videos show that as late as 4:02 p.m., the hotshots had stopped on top of a ridge while Captain Jesse Steed was talking on the radio to crew Superintendent Eric Marsh, who had delegated his duties to Steed while he was serving as a division supervisor.

Besides a photo that fellow hotshot Wade Parker texted out a few minutes later, they are the last known photos and videos of the hotshot crew. Right afterwards, the crew headed down the mountain.

The Courier posted Chris' online at 10 a.m. Saturday as a report on the hotshots' deaths was released, the first time they have been made public.

"I really think it's going to be pivotal in this investigation," Willis said.

The photos and short videos told Willis several things. Marsh was not with his crew at 4 p.m.; he had likely been scouting the fire to the north and was heading back south toward his crew. The crew had stopped in an area blackened by fire, so the crew ultimately decided to leave a safe area for unburned areas. And below them was the knoll where Granite Mountain Hotshot Brendan McDonough had previously been standing as lookout, with a road cut west for the buggies of the Granite Mountain and Blue Ridge hotshots.

Willis says Steed is in the videos talking on the radio to Marsh, who is not visible in any of the Yarnell Hill wildfire photos or videos. Both 9-second videos were shot in close succession around 4 p.m.

"I was just saying, I knew this was coming when I called you and asked what your comfort level was," Marsh says to Steed in the first short video. "I could just feel it, you know."

Steed replies in the second video, "I copy, and it's almost made it to that two-track road that we walked in on."

Mike MacKenzie personally delivered his son's photos to Joe Woyjeck, father of fallen Granite Mountain Hotshot Kevin Woyjeck, 21. Both Mike and Joe are firefighters from Southern California, and they have become good friends since their sons' deaths. Mike is a retired captain from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection who now lives in Tennessee. He even served on a few of the same wildfires as his son. Joe is an L.A. County Fire Department captain.

"I'll treasure these forever," Joe Woyjeck said of Christopher's photos. He especially enjoys looking at a series of photos of the hotshots trying to figure out how to create a human pyramid at the base of the world record alligator juniper they saved from the Doce wildfire on their namesake Granite Mountain.

"They're having a good time doing it and laughing," Joe said. "You can see how proud they are. My son's on top because he was the skinniest on the crew."

"It shows the kids in a great light. They were a team. They were bonding."

It was obviously a special tree, and it's even more special now, he said.

"For the families, it was a huge gift from Christopher," Mike said of the photos and videos. "Everyone was in at least one photo," including Christopher.

Mike also knows the uncle of fallen Granite Mountain Hotshot William Warneke, since they both worked for Cal Fire.

Chris, who would have turned 31 this month, worked on wildland fire crews throughout Southern California including the Apple Valley Helitack crew, Milk Creek Hotshots and a U.S. Bureau of Land Management engine crew, Mike said.

"That's all he wanted to do, was be a firefighter," Mike said of his son. "He was proud of what he did." He loved being outside and loved the physical exertion.

One of his former BLM captains, Aaron Lawson, recruited Chris to the Granite Mountain Hotshots in 2011.

"He loved Prescott," Mike said. "He found his niche."

Brenda Chris' roommate was Brendan McDonough, the only Granite Mountain Hotshot to survive because he was acting as a lookout in a separate location.

"Brendan now has a special place in our family," Mike said.

Mike has a copy of the investigation into his son's death but he hasn't decided when, if ever, he will read it.

"There's not a living soul that saw what they saw and encountered what they encountered," Mike said. "I've been in the game and I would never, ever question the decisions made by that crew. And I don't think anybody can if they weren't with that crew."

"I look at it as a tragic accident."

Follow Joanna Dodder on Twitter: @joannadodder.

Ask The Editor



The Daily Courier Editors
Prescott Newspapers, Inc.
Expertise: Newsroom managers
Prescott, Arizona
928-445-3333

Q: *What's going on with the Pine Cone Inn? Looks like something's happening!

A: Current owner and long-time Prescott resident Tony Ebarb intends on keeping the name and continuing it as a restaurant...

Q: * What is being built at 89 and Outer Loop in Chino Valley?

A: The 53-acre site was bought by AZ Organics on July 6 for \$1.35 million. That company plans to sell off the land in a U...

Quick Links

- Submit site feedback or questions
- Submit your milestone notice
- Submit your letter to the editor
- Submit a news tip or story idea
- Place a classified ad online now
- Browse the Yellow Pages

This Week's Circulars



Related Stories:

- Report lists recommendations for state, finds no negligence
- Communications, fire complexity doomed Hotshots
- Last video of Granite Mountain Hotshots found on Christopher MacKenzie's camera (larger display)
- Investigation: No indications of negligence or recklessness in Hotshots' deaths

Most Viewed	Recently Commented
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remembering David: Vigil honors Prescott murder victim (1897 views) • Charges filed in Williamson Valley assault, trespassing case (1122 views) • Rainwater catchment project serves as demo in Prescott location (985 views) • Not a bird, not a plane, not a UFO: It was a missile launch test (930 views) • Letter: Firearms (915 views) 	

Reader Comments

Posted: Sunday, September 29, 2013

Article comment by: **Cindy McDaniel**

I rode my horse on the newly opened trails,(Granite Mountain) recently. I can honestly state that the hotshots were all around us in spirits. The forest is healing and so shall we. I know in my heart those brave young men loved that mountain. I could hear their voices as the wind blew threw the open spaces. I got great comfort from those men, they want us to be there and enjoy this great Mtn.,do not lose what they worked so hard to save. I will go again in another day and take another trail, that reaches deeper into the mountain. I can not wait to hear the wind, and feel the honor of these great men.

Cindy McDaniel

Posted: Sunday, September 29, 2013

Article comment by: **Question ?**

Communications aspect of the story is deeply disturbing. As the Hotshots took cover in their shelters, they expected a tanker drop of fire retardant on their area. There are some indications the communications failed in this most critical time. Who is responsible in Yavapai County for coordinatng and developing communications that they relied on?

Posted: Saturday, September 28, 2013

Article comment by: **peter white**

Boy, it seems like it was just yesterday. They were...and are...the best of the best...

Posted: Saturday, September 28, 2013

Article comment by: **the wino**

HELLO MIKE--Sorry for the loss of your son.
 My suggestion would be to print the pictures and e-mail to the right people--understand?
 Then keep the memory card in a safe place.
 "ANGELS TO HEAVEN"

Posted: Saturday, September 28, 2013

Article comment by: **Speechless . . .**

This is SO humbling. I'm stunned that a camera and it's cloth case would survive that. For everything there is a reason . . .

Article Comment Submission Form

Comments are not posted immediately. Submissions must adhere to our Use of Service [Terms of Use agreement](#). Rambling or nonsensical comments may not be posted. Comments are limited to Facebook character limits. *In order for us to reasonably manage this feature we may limit excessive comment entries.*

Submit an Article Comment

First Name:
Required

Last Name:
Required

Telephone:
Required

Email:
Required

Comment:
Required

Passcode:

 [Click here to see a new mix of characters.](#)
 This is an anti-SPAM device. It is not case sensitive.

[Find It](#) [Features](#) [Blogs](#) [Milestones](#) [Extras](#) [Submit](#) [Other Publications](#) [Links](#)

[Classifieds](#) | [Subscriber Services](#) | [Real Estate Search](#) | [Galleries](#) | [Find Prescott Jobs](#) | [e-News](#) | [RSS](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Contact Us](#)

F&W Are you in **PROBATE?** We can help.
 Our in-house, confidential care team is here for you.
 FAVOUR & WILHELMSSEN, PLLC | 1580 PLAZA WEST DRIVE, PRESCOTT | 928.445.2444




© Copyright 2015 Western News&Info, Inc.® The Daily Courier is the information source for Prescott area communities in Northern Arizona. Original content may not be reprinted or distributed without the written permission of Prescott Newspapers, Inc. Prescott Newspapers Online is a service of Prescott Newspapers Inc. By using the Site, dcourier.com®, you agree to abide and be bound by the Site's terms of use and Privacy Policy, which prohibit commercial use of any information on the Site. Click here to submit your questions, comments or suggestions. Prescott Newspapers Online is a proud publication of Western News&Info, Inc.® All Rights Reserved.

Software © 1998-2015 1up! Software, All Rights Reserved