

THE VICTIMS

BY GENE REDMAN

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It was nearing 1600 hours and the sun seemed to be dropping quickly. I was sitting on the west side of a ridge line, several hundred feet above the desert floor. From my position, the sun will be setting over the Vulture Mine. I could see the dust of moving vehicles to the south and west. They were looking for me and I wanted to be found.

Three of us, Marilyn Black, Dave Squire and myself had left the dust covered vehicle parked under some trees near a dry wash, twelve hours before. It was dark and cold that morning when we started walking north. We knew Sheriff's Posse aircraft would be looking for the car, which has been reported missing. We expected to see the aircraft at first light. If they found the car, the arriving ground units would stumble onto the crime scene we had left behind us.

Shortly after daybreak we saw planes flying across our path, flying from Phoenix to the Vulture Mine airstrip. We took the precaution of covering Dave's orange pack with a nondescript poncho and continued on our way. Whenever a plane flew too close we simply stood still. To the people in the plane we were just another plant in the desert.

At 0830 hours we saw one of the aircraft circling the area behind us, where we had left the car. We were surprised they had located the car so soon. Thirty minutes later we saw the dust of southbound vehicles on the road, a couple of miles west of us. It was beginning to heat up by any standards.

About 1000 hours we took a half hour break, resting in a dry wash and grateful for the shade. There was a lot of air traffic overhead. We figure the Trackers would have determined our direction of travel and will be leapfrogging after us with Jeep and Horse units. This day in the Arizona desert was becoming hotter in more ways than one.

We were really surprised when we stumbled onto some Geological Survey markers. We now knew exactly where we were, twelve miles north of the car. We decided to turn east for some ridges so we could see what was going on behind us.

By noon we were settled near a ridge top about seven hundred feet above the desert and heating some soup for lunch. We were about four or five miles east of the Vulture Mine landing strip. We could see a lot of dust from moving vehicles south of us and on the road south of the Vulture Mine. We could pretty much guess what had happened.

The first people to arrive at the car would have found the blood and body we had left there. They weren't expecting a crime scene.



GENE REDMAN, author of this article, has played the 'Victim' many times in Maricopa County 'Mock' Searches.

We didn't know about an unexpected piece of luck. All the trackers were kept at the crime scene to look for evidence. They found the gun and billfold we thought was hidden. But they didn't begin tracking us. This helped in our head start.

Had they first established our direction of travel, left one team of trackers at the scene, then started the others after us they would be much closer.

We were sitting pretty on our ridge top and had even rigged some shade. We wondered why the Searchers were so far behind us. Dave and Marilyn planned to go on to the north. They had bedrolls and the cold night in the desert wouldn't be any hardship. I had other plans.

Around 1500 hours I moved off the ridge top down the western face just onto the talus. I spread out a silver space blanket on the ground and tied a bright orange poncho between a palo verde and an ocotillo. Two aircraft were still in my area and I thought one would easily spot me. Forty-five minutes later I wasn't so sure. I waved both arms and an orange jacket as one plane flew directly over me and at another that was very close; each flying only a couple hundred feet above the ridge. There was no evidence anyone had seen me.

Finally I pulled the signal mirror from my survival pack and waited for another plane. I waited and waited. Finally I saw a plane flying due east. He would pass about three miles south of me. I was in his ten o'clock position when the light from my mirror hit him. We went into a lazy left bank then circled me. A few minutes later he left me and flew away toward the airstrip at the Vulture Mine.

Five minutes later he came back, flying a straight line from the airstrip to me, to show the ground units where to go.

From where I sat above the desert floor it seemed simple. For the Jeeps on the desert floor it wasn't so easy. They had to work their way over a number of low ridges, using washes and trails that wandered in my general direction.

About an hour later two Jeep Posse units were less than two-miles away, but they were angling too far south. I used the signal mirror again. It worked. The Jeep units turned toward me.

They finally reached me about fifteen-minutes before the Sun set on the western horizon. My plans for the night were realized. I had a steak dinner from the camp kitchen and spent the night with my wife in our travel trailer, parked alongside the Vulture Mine airstrip.

The next day Dave and Marilyn were found about six-miles north of where we had spent the previous afternoon.

Riding with the Search Coordinator, he and I watched the finish. About fifty-yards in front of us a couple of Horse Posse members were riding north along a trail when they saw something. They turned around, rode back about thirty-feet, then followed tracks up onto a small knoll. This is how they discovered Dave and Marilyn atop the knoll.

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PROLOGUE:

Nearly five-years later I am sitting in the same travel trailer. It is parked behind Jim Mason's house in Wickenburg, Arizona. Jim is now Mayor of Wickenburg but five-years ago he was a Lieutenant with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office. He was at the Vulture Mine airstrip with the rest of us.

His new Search Coordinator, Deputy Ralph Pendergast wrote the scenario and directed the above Mock Search. Ralph was the "new kid on the block" regarding Search and Rescue (SAR). There has been a lot of searches since this one at the Vulture Mine.

Cpl. Pendergast and his wife, Darla, are probably asleep now in a motorhome about a hundred-feet away. Now is Saturday night, actually 2:00 AM Sunday morning , in the midst of Gold Rush Days, February 1985.

Last night I camped in the desert off of the Vulture Mine Road with some of the "Hassayampa Black Feather" bunch.

Bob "Pappy" Dearing was plying Bob Cooper and myself with some Black Velvet. Bob Barnett was sitting there wearing his stovepipe top-hat and drinking his share. I didn't see him taking any notes for his Arizona S&R Newspaper. It was a cold night and we with our womenfolk were enjoying the fire.

The talk turned to Search and Rescue. Pappy told of being the Searchee when a fast moving jeep passed him in a cloud of dust, then stopped. The driver backed up to him and asked, "Say, aren't you the fellow we are supposed to be looking for?"

We all told a few stories about real searches as well as the "mock" ones. This and our location made me think of that "Vulture Mine Mock Search." There were three victims and we were together. Over a hundred people were looking for us. During the early portion of the search we were afraid of being found prematurely and ruining the exercise. Later we learned just how hard it is to attract attention. Especially hard for the real victim, who is without a signal mirror, flares, smoke and all those other things we know about.

We may learn a lot being on a search as a searcher, but we see only a small portion of what takes place. We can learn a lot more by being the Searchee or Victim.

Mr. Search Coordinator, you might try it sometime... Also, there is a lot to learn from these victims. Perhaps we can benefit by more of these stories being told.

EDITOR'S NOTE 1985:

Gene Redman is a Certified Rescue Climber with the Central Arizona Mountain Rescue Association (CAMRA), now the MCSO Mountain Rescue Posse. He is a member of the MCSO Jeep Posse and in his spare time is a Certified Reserve Deputy with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office. He is assigned to Lake Patrol and the Special Enforcement Team.



A Search in Arizona is a Life or Death Matter

This Spring the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office put on a Mock Search near the Vulture Mine, located about sixty-miles west of Phoenix, Arizona. I didn't participate, but I have been on a number of actual searches in this area where the real stakes were life and death.

The purpose of the Mock Search is for training. For learning how to work together, bringing all the available resources to bear in the most efficient way to save lives. Our desert and mountains are unforgiving and time in this environment is often the deciding factor between life and death.

It is important to practice and perfect what is taught in the classroom. Also to expect the unexpected as in the story on the following pages, "The Victims."

In the early 1970s I first visited the Vulture Mine. My young children were fascinated with the remains; with the stories of the "hanging tree" they could actually touch, the remains of equipment and buildings and the dark hole leading to the tunnels far underground. What was once a working mine with a town housing hundreds of miners plus their families, became a ghost town and is now an interesting place to visit, for an hour or two.

The main shaft drops down over 2,000 feet at a thirty-degree angle. It is said over \$200,000,000. in gold and silver was taken from the mine. That is when gold was worth no more than \$32.00 an ounce.

The Vulture Mine was closed in 1942 since gold mining was not deemed essential to the WWII war effort. With the pumps shut down it is said the tunnels flooded. Years later it was not feasible to bring in enough equipment to get rid of the incoming water and make the miles of tunnels safe to work again.

Gene Redman

About the Vulture Mine: <http://www.savevulturemine.org/>

<http://www.desertusa.com/mag00/dec/stories/vulture.html>

<http://www.jpc-training.com/vulture.htm>

<http://www.ghosttowns.com/states/az/vulturecity.html>