

Beat: Travel

Nevada police officer falls to death while rescuing hiker

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USPA News - A Nevada police officer was killed during a helicopter rescue mission late Monday evening when he fell into a canyon while hoisting up a hiker who had become stranded on an off-limits area of a mountain near Las Vegas, officials said on Tuesday. The incident began at around 8:54 p.m. local time on Monday when the Las Vegas Metro Police Department (LVMPD) Dispatch Center received a call from a man who had become stranded and disoriented on a rock ledge while hiking in the Mary Jane Falls area of Mount Charleston, located about 35 miles (56 kilometers) northwest of Las Vegas.

Sheriff Doug Gillespie said an LVMPD Search and Rescue helicopter immediately responded to the scene and located the hiker at approximately 10:10 p.m. local time. Because of the dangerous terrain, the rescue workers decided to use the aircraft's internal rescue hoist to lower an officer to retrieve the victim. Officer David Vanbuskirk, 36, was then lowered down to the stranded hiker and attached a rescue device to the victim before signaling for the helicopter to begin hoisting them up to the aircraft. "As the pair was being lifted up to the helicopter, Officer Vanbuskirk somehow became detached from the hoist line, falling into the canyon below," Gillespie said. The victim, whose identity has not been released, remained attached to the hoist cable and was safely hoisted into the rescue helicopter. Additional rescue personnel and rescue aircraft immediately responded and soon located Vanbuskirk, but he was pronounced dead at the scene. "The exact distance David fell is still under investigation, however it is clear this was a non-survivable fall and he died on impact," Gillespie said. He said Vanbuskirk had joined the Las Vegas police force in October 1999 and had participated in numerous rescue missions since being assigned to the department's Search and Rescue Section in February 2007. "Normally, an officer loses his life or her life in the pursuit of a criminal suspect. But this officer was doing what he had done dozens of times in his career," Gillespie said at a news conference, calling it a tragic accident. "He was helping to rescue someone. Someone in need of rescue." It was not immediately known what caused Vanbuskirk to fall, but the accident is under investigation by Las Vegas police as well as the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). "In the coming days and weeks, our investigation will reveal details and answers that we don't have today," Gillespie said. Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval said Vanbuskirk's service would not be forgotten while U.S. Senator Dean Heller called the officer a hero. "[I'm] saddened to learn LVMPD and Nevada lost a hero. Thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of Officer David Vanbuskirk," he wrote.

Article online:

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