

# TSAR TIMES and TOPICS



*Tidewater Search & Rescue*

*www.TSAR.org*

## Eyes Wide Open—Sharon Jefferies

I'm no stranger to the woods. After 13 years with the Army, between college and active service, I have done a fair bit of "camping" and "hiking", and more than a little bit of bushwhacking. Even now that I am out, I enjoy quiet walks in the woods and hikes in the mountains. Perhaps that is why I was so intrigued listening to Nathan Brown talk about his experiences with local search and rescue groups, TSAR and GARD. I had long been interested in search and rescue; I had even contemplated aerial SAR when I was flying in the Army, but I knew when I left the service that I did not have enough flight time to pursue that route. I had not given SAR much serious thought since then because I never realized search and rescue was a volunteer activity. Now that I knew, I wanted to get involved. To be able to take something you love and use it to help others is a powerful and motivating combination.

I attended my first training events with TSAR before I even applied for membership. Even though I was fairly certain I would join, I wanted to spend a little time getting to know the group and find out just what it was I was about to get myself into. Needless to say, it did not take very long before I had my paperwork in, and it was very shortly after that I received my COQ training to allow me to go on searches. And then began the long wait. Between travel for work and an apparent lull in callouts, it was over a month before that first call came. That call was for Dinwiddie County.

Now, I had been with the group long enough to know the history behind the Dinwiddie case: young woman, missing since early May, suspected to be deceased. We were looking for any evidence that would help the local authorities figure out what happened, and we were

looking for evidence of a body. At first, knowing the nature of the case, I was a little disappointed to get Dinwiddie as my first search, but on that long, early morning drive out to the rally point, I began to realize I had been given an incredible opportunity.

When I got out to the rally point, the last to arrive, I found everyone gathered around looking at maps of the search area and talking over the plans for the day. After handling the administrative business of signing everyone in, we moved out to base at a wooded battleground southwest of Petersburg. We had two dog teams and nine ground searchers (most of us from TSAR) available, and a good sized stretch of woods to search, so it was decided to give each of the dog teams an area and have the ground searchers cover a third area. While plans were being discussed, I was preparing my pack for what was looking to be a few hours work on a sweep through the woods.

With the advice of fellow searchers, I tailored my pack to something more suitable for the task, instead of trying to carry everything I had brought with me. We received a final brief before beginning the sweep so we all knew what we were looking for and where we were going. We would be sweeping in a loose line down through the woods on one side of a road and then turning back along the other side. We were reminded that if the body had been dumped, animals would have been at it, and we were cautioned not to overlook smaller areas where an animal could have carried bones or articles of clothing.

Although the general nature of the search was atypical, what I saw as base came together and teams were sent out isn't much different from what I can expect at a more conventional search. I was a little nervous being out there  
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## SEPTEMBER TRAINING CALENDAR

- 19 1700-2000 Land Nav Training @ First Landing State Park  
 20 1900-2100 TSAR General Membership Mtg. @ TEMS  
 22 0900-1200 Clue Awareness Training @ ICG Bldg. Newport News

**People, if you intend on going to training, then please, please call Bill Schmelling . We decide IF we will have training based on the phone calls. If we decide to cancel the training then we can call those who called and make sure they know it is cancelled. If you don't call but decide to go, you can find yourself the only person in the parking lot. You need to call Bill Schmelling forty-eight hours before the scheduled training so we can decide whether or not it will be held.**

### FEMA TRAINING

A link for the mandated FEMA training can be found on TSAR's website just click on training and news tab from the home page. All operational personnel must complete these courses.

**For any additional information on the listed training's contact Bill Schmelling at [tsar39@verizon.net](mailto:tsar39@verizon.net).**

### Eyes Wide Open (*continued*)—Sharon Jefferies

the first time, but everyone was willing to help me out and, now that I have seen what is expected, I know it won't be so intimidating next time. As we began our sweep, I realized I was a lot more relaxed than I expected to be. That, I discovered, was the next advantage of the Dinwiddie case. Before getting the call out I would go over the COQ training and worry over how much of it I would remember when I got on site. Would I forget something important? Could it jeopardize the search? These are just a few of the thoughts that had gone through my mind. But by attending a search where we knew there was not a life on the line, the pressure was eased. I found I could readily recall the training I had received, and I knew I had a great opportunity to practice those fundamental skills. I even found myself challenging myself to try to observe and learn how things looked in the woods, and how they sounded. I've walked through woods many times in my life, but being on the search taught me to truly pay attention. And it paid off, too. About halfway through the outbound leg of our sweep I found a bone fragment, only slightly bigger than the last joint of my little finger. Thus, I discovered the exhilaration that comes from making a find, no matter how small it may seem.

We called in the fragment, marked the location, and I received another lesson in fundamentals that I had heard about in discussion, but was only now witnessing first hand. The find boosted my confidence. As we moved on, I again challenged myself observe and try to learn from the woods. Remembering the instruction to look into holes and under felled trees and branches, I used a stick I had picked up along the way to poke around and explore. One piece of advice I did remember from my experi-

ences in the woods is to never stick your hand into a hole in the ground. Sage advice, because sure enough, I moved some leaves with my stick and uncovered a small snake. I only saw a portion of it, and it did not move, but I did not linger.

It was trying to peer into some bigger holes, deep, dark ones, that I realized I had gone one step too far in lightening my pack. Since it was daylight, I had taken out my big, heavy mag-lite and opted to carry only my smaller headlamp. What I quickly discovered trying to see down into a deep hole is that the smaller lights in the headlamp don't penetrate very far. I learned that you never know when you may need a light. It was an important lesson. Fortunately, it was not a critical situation.

The rest of the search continued much like the beginning. I found as we went along that it became easier to notice things, and I became more comfortable. I was impressed with the way our team worked together, I could sense the tight-knit community that is search and rescue, and from the moment I arrived, I felt like I belonged. I knew this is where I wanted to be. Although some aspects of my first search may have been a little off the norm because of the nature of the Dinwiddie case, I know what I encounter with the next call will be similar, and as such, will now be familiar. Dinwiddie gave me the chance to practice some fundamentals and learn some valuable lessons during a real search without the added pressure of having a life on the line. I was given a rare opportunity that has prepared me to be a better searcher when the next call comes. I am grateful I was able to see it as such and learn. Better yet, I still have all the excitement of my first 'live' search to look forward to!

### Website Happenings—Nathan Brown

The reface of the TSAR Web site has been under way for a couple of weeks now. I have been able to get into the old data and reconstruct some of the information and give mainly just a face lift to the existing pages.

In the near future, I will attempt to remodel the website and incorporate the new programs for ease of transition from one web master to the next.

I would love to have your input on information you wish to see the public see, which best represents our group.

Also what information would you like to have on the web site? Our pallet will be fresh so as of right now we have no limits. Remember this is your group and how you want the world to see us can be inputted by you, (Yes the world, remember WWW = 's WORLD WIDE WEB)

Send your input to my webmaster address:

[TSAR35wm@yahoo.com](mailto:TSAR35wm@yahoo.com)

## LEADERS VIEW—Kevin Brewer

### -AWARDS-

This year there will be something a bit different done from years past. Last year TSAR wasn't able to put together a Christmas Party for various reasons. This year TSAR WILL be holding a year end party and our host is Theresa and Philip Crossland. The little bit different part mentioned above is that this year we will be holding an awards ceremony. There are quite a few categories which were looked at and through sign-in sheets, mission AAR's and a few other measures we have been able to determine who within TSAR has trained, responded and supported TSAR throughout the membership year. Here are just a few of the categories which we've measured, you'll have to come to the party to hear the rest and in fact it would probably be in your best interest to attend since you probably don't know

who may have the highest number, it could be YOU! So, who do you think has responded to the most missions since October 1, 06 under TSAR? How about whose spent the longest time at a mission? Was it you who traveled the furthest to a single mission or logged the most miles traveling to trainings?

BTW, just because you may not have driven the most miles or attended the most trainings, that doesn't mean that you may not have been the second or even the third highest.

Lastly, so you can mark your calendars the year end/Christmas Party will be held on December 8. Theresa will be sending out an announcement shortly so we can have a head count.

## PLANNING SECTION—Theresa Crossland

Well, August was a busy month for most of us, and September doesn't look like it is going to be slowing down any either. We have the TSAR Officers Election coming up. It would be great to have some new blood in the mix, so if you are interested or just want to nominate someone else, please plan to attend that.

The new points system for members is coming along. Bill Schmelling and I have done some work on it together, and we still have a few finer points to work out. We will be going into more detail at the monthly meetings and looking for input as well, so hopefully we should be completing it by years end.

## Training Opportunity—Kevin Brewer

I could start out by saying it was an opportunity of a lifetime but there will be another like adventure sometime next year. What I am referring to is a recent trip I took last month to the University of Tennessee to visit the Forensic Anthropology Department, AKA; the Body Farm, AKA; Death's Acre with other members of SARTI. We had an 8-hour class, with both classroom, and fieldwork on the stages of human decomposition and TSD (Time Since Death) as well as gridding and probing. I can say it was truly fascinating and worthy of many more trips if available. Our SAR world is getting more callouts looking for subjects who have been out for several weeks and in a few cases months. Knowing what to actually look for is paramount to being effective in looking. Those of us who went clearly acknowledged at the end of the day that what we have gone out to look for in the past is not necessarily what we would have found in 99% of the cases. TSAR has even been involved with a now 4 months since her disappearance missing person case in central VA. Another case we were involved in was SW of Richmond several months ago where the subject was found and had been there for approximately one week so we did see and smell what remained.

The Body Farm being only 1.6 acres in size had, if memory serves, 200 guests deposited above and below ground (most above), and another 30 more awaiting use. After adorning ourselves with tyvec outerwear, shoe coverings

and nitrile gloves we had the opportunity to observe bodies which and been present from 8 days to several years and all in varying stages of decomposition. Unfortunately we were not permitted to take our cameras in for obvious privacy concerns so what we had to take away could only be our visual and olfactory catalogs not to mention in one case auditory as well as some hand written notes. I hope to be able to present to TSAR some time in the near future a summary of what I was able to learn and take away from the experience. Sorry I won't be able to provide any practical stations! But I do hope to be able to provide you with some baseline information which will better help prepare you for what to look for when we get called out to assist LE with a body recovery, looking for the remains of a lost/missing person or worse yet looking for a shallow grave. I know that some of you are thinking or want to ask so let me set the record straight that absolutely no one got sick from the sights or smells and believe me when I say this. Some of what we saw and experienced was worthy of it. Oh yea, I forgot to mention that it was 100 degrees down there when we were wandering through the sights and smells.

Lastly, all of the staff we encountered were very passionate about what they do. We believe that the professionalism and knowledge of the Forensic Anthropology Department is a great credit to the University of Tennessee.



## Organization

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### **UNITED WAY TSAR**

**To contribute through payroll deduction:**  
**TSAR Peninsula #9057**  
**TSAR South Hampton Roads #1248**

### MISSION STATEMENT

*Tidewater Search and Rescue Group, Inc. provides trained personnel who effectively manage, support and sustain search and rescue operations when requested. This is accomplished through specialized training, constancy of purpose and continuous improvement.*

### VISION STATEMENT

*For the search subject, the Tidewater Search and Rescue Group, Inc, will be recognized as the leader in training and management, providing the most professional and effective response to Ground Search and Rescue Incidents.*

# SAVE THE DATE

*The TSAR Christmas party will be held on December 8, 2007 at Theresa Crossland's house. The menu isn't nailed down yet, so if you have any idea's or want to help, we should be finishing up planning at the monthly meetings. We will be using the party as an award ceremony as well, so everyone should plan on attending.*

*You never know who might be surprised!!*

### **TSAR Library—Theresa Crossland**

We only have one new addition to our Library.

Lost! A Ranger's Journal of Search and Rescue  
 by Dwight McCarter and Ronald Schmidt.

We aren't getting much use of our library books. If you want to check out a book to read, just let me know and I will be happy to make arrangements to get it to you.