

News Release

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NY Wing Pilot Spots Body of Missing Woman

A massive weekend search for a missing 82-year-old woman ended Monday afternoon, March 5, when a Civil Air Patrol pilot spotted her body in a field in the Town of Lansing about two-and-a-half miles northwest of Ithaca-Tompkins Regional Airport.

"I circled overhead and notified a search team that was in the area," reported Capt. Vincent Monticello. "A forest ranger arrived and confirmed that it was the missing woman, who was deceased."

Johanna Kirkwood, who suffered from dementia, had been missing from her home since noon Saturday, the Tompkins County Sheriff's Department said. Undersheriff Derek Osborne said law enforcement, under the leadership of state forest rangers, conducted extensive ground searches.

Weather prevented aerial support until Monday, when mission pilots Monticello and Lt. Col. Larry Brinker went up in a plane in the morning and flew over the area for 1.2 hours with negative results. Monticello is New York Wing's counter drug officer and Brinker, a retired Air Force pilot, is the wing's government relations assistant.

Monticello went up again in the afternoon.

"About 45 minutes into the flight, at about 3:30 p.m., I spotted something in a field that I thought could be Mrs. Kirkwood," he said.

Tompkins County Emergency Management Director Lee Shurtleff told searchers that the woman "was located in an area between East Shore Drive and Triphammer Road, having been spotted by the Civil Air Patrol, and was deceased."

Shurtleff reported that some 500 searchers had logged in at the Emergency Response Center, including 200 from local fire and EMS agencies. He said there were search crews from as far away as Long Island and New Jersey, who were part of a search-and-rescue federation that works with the Department of Environmental Conservation forest rangers.

"The scope of the incident by far exceeded anything seen here in recent years, and while not the outcome we had worked for, it nonetheless demonstrated the tremendous capability of our many agencies and partners," Shurtleff said. "Our key principles of cooperation, coordination and communication were evident and abundant."

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