

Pair Missing After Plane Lost



Volunteers and Air Force Scuba Divers Tussle Wind-Bait in Fruitless Search

Sea Thwarts Hunt For Downed Aircraft

By ED PRICKETT

TODAY Staff Writer

Two Melbourne students were feared missing at sea Tuesday after a single engine airplane spiraled into the Atlantic Ocean south of Melbourne Beach.

The search will resume today for Florida Institute of Technology student John Lowry, 25, of Route 3, Box 566, Melbourne Beach and Pamela Hatch, 17, a senior at Melbourne High School.

Officials say Lowry rented a Cessna 150 from Melbourne Aviation about 9:40 a. m. Tuesday and took off for a scheduled hour's jaunt. They were due back on the runway at Melbourne Regional Airport by noon.

A blue and white Cessna veered toward the ocean at 11:00 a. m., skimming treetops seconds before spinning into murky, choppy seas 200 to 400 yards offshore, witnesses said.

Melbourne Aviation President Don Wilson called Lowry "a top flight pilot" who had been flying over a year who "took his girlfriend on a routine flight which resulted in a disaster."

One witness said the tiny two seater sliced into the sea and disintegrated before he

One witness said the tiny two seater sliced into the sea and disappeared before he could count to two.

An all-day search failed to produce the wreckage. Skin divers will comb the ocean's floor again, beginning at 7 a. m.

Two surfers, next door neighbors of Lowry, were on the scene when the plane dropped into the ocean. They made heroic but fruitless attempts to rescue the plane's occupants.

The pair, Thanos and Lou Poulos, turned up a pair of girl's Mexican type cork sandals and a sunshade from an airplane.

After over an hour in the water, Thanos Poulos said, "something must have been wrong with the plane" because of the way it smoothly entered the water with only one spin.

But Wilson said the plane was in top notch condition. The Federal Aeronautics Agency has launched an investigation into the matter, Wilson said.

Another eyewitness, Kathy Salvio, said she saw the plane bank left from a northerly direction then plunge straight down, spin once, and disappear into the ocean.

"One spin and it was sucked right up. And in only about 10 seconds it sank out of sight," she noted.

"I couldn't have counted to two. It disappeared so fast I could hardly believe it," said Brad Marks of Route 3, Box 498, Melbourne. He also witnessed the plane's crash.

The first chopper on the

scene from Patrick AFB dropped three frogmen and an orange life raft into seas fast becoming choppy because of an approaching storm.

About 1:05 p.m. the first frogman emerged to say the water was about 20 to 50 feet deep and that you couldn't see a foot in front of your face.

"If we can find it, we can get them out, but there's lots of ocean out there," Thomas White, an underwater expert from the base said.

Then a squall broke, and high winds and rains lashed the seas and beach while the Coast Guard Cutter Point Charles waited offshore to begin a search using sophisticated electronic equipment.

Combing the sea with sonar and depth finders, the Point Charles and accompanying private boats failed to turn up any new evidence.

Sheriff's Agent Wade Walker was investigating the incident and said only that the aircraft had left the airport with Lowry in the pilot's seat and that he was accompanied by an unidentified female.

South Brevard Fire Chief Ralph Mull called the search off at 5:30 p. m. when a second squall brewed up just offshore.

"It's the most frustrating, cotton-picking thing in the whole world. To know they're out there and no be able to find them," the chief said.