

July 28, 2021

Judge James Igloiorite

Public Inquiry Respecting Ground Search and Rescue for Lost and Missing Persons

Your Honour:

I wish, as a private citizen, to put forth a recommendation for consideration by your committee with respect to the above inquiry.

On Wed. April 21, this year, the undersigned was participating in a COPA (Canadian Owners and Pilots Association) fly in to Bell Island. The event ran from about 1830 hrs. to 2000 hrs. There were 6 fixed wing aircraft, including 2 amphibious, and 1 helicopter (mine) in attendance at the event. Coincidentally in the group there were 7 attendees who are also CASARA members as well as 2 aircraft, which are part of the CASARA fleet.

The next morning when checking the news, I became very distraught upon reading about fatality that took place in Flatrock, the previous evening: the drowning of Supal Jayasinghe. I live in Logy Bay on top of Red Cliff by the old radar site and I keep my helicopter at this location. In checking the news and sequence of events of the evening before, I along with the other attendees at the Bell Island event would have been airborne at the time this tragic incident was taking place. The fixed wing aircraft would have been in the circuit for landing at the airport on Rny 29 (the flight path is a couple of miles south of Flatrock) and I would have been landing at home. For myself the flight time from my house to Flatrock would be about 3 minutes.

Anyone of these aircraft could have diverted to Flatrock to provide overhead coverage to guide potential rescuers to the victim. Unfortunately, unlike Coast Guard there is no mechanism to commandeer aircraft to participate in a search.

With the benefit of hindsight, if the 911 dispatcher had contacted the tower, to determine if there were aircraft in the area, these assets could have been utilized. From personal experience, I have in the past been asked by the tower to investigate issues such as potential forest fires. Most of these have turned out to be kids or hunters having a boil up. However, in a couple of incidents there was an actual forest fire. Nevertheless, it does prove that there is ready line of communication available. The mechanism of utilizing it should be investigated.

Very truly yours,

Maurice J. Murphy