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Crash kills 2 Escondido men

CHP officer hurt

Rescuers pull driver from fiery patrol car

Author: *Ronald W. Powell and Janine Zuniga; STAFF WRITERS*

Dateline: PAUMA

Article Text:

A California Highway Patrol officer was in stable condition yesterday after she was involved in a fiery accident Saturday night that killed two Escondido men.

The San Diego County Medical Examiner's Office identified those killed as Humberto Altamirano, 39, and his passenger, Jose Delgado-Reyes, 20.

Neither the CHP nor the Medical Examiner's Office could provide additional information yesterday about the victims. Autopsies are scheduled today for the two men.

CHP Officer Debbie Grady was driving a patrol car west on state Route 76 at about 8 p.m. when a truck driven by Altamirano pulled out from a stop sign on Pauma Reservation Road, into her path, said CHP spokesman Tom Kerns.

He said Grady was going an estimated 65 miles per hour on the two-lane highway, with lights and siren activated, because she was attempting to stop a speeding vehicle.

Grady's patrol car struck the truck's left side, causing it to overturn and skid into a utility pole. The two men were pronounced dead at the scene.

Following the collision, the CHP vehicle spun around, struck a boulder and erupted in flames.

Four men from a nearby restaurant ran to the car and pulled Grady to safety. She suffered a compound fracture of her left leg.

"With her femur fractured, it's not likely that she would have been able to get out (without help)," Kerns said.

Jose Manuel Medina, a cook at Jilberto's Taco Shop, said yesterday that he and three other men helped get the officer out of the car.

Medina said owner Damian Pinal, his brother, Enrique, and another cook, Mauricio Gutierrez, ran outside to see what happened. They ran over to the truck but couldn't get inside. The two men in the truck were not moving, and Medina said they appeared dead.

Medina, a Valley Center resident, said he and the other men then opened the officer's car. Grady unfastened her seat belt but wasn't able to move because of the leg injury.

"She was awake, but she couldn't get up or walk," he said. "We helped her out of the car."

Medina said the car was on fire, and while they were helping her out another man was pouring water on the car to try to put out the fire.

"We saved her life," he said. "She would have burned. I wasn't afraid because it would have been worse if she would have died."

The accident occurred on a straight stretch of road that is moderately lighted at night, according to area residents. Several noted that the volume of traffic in the vicinity has greatly increased since the Pauma Casino opened in May last year.

"There's just a lot more people now," said Bridgett White, who has lived near the accident site for 22 years. "It's a very busy road."

Grady was airlifted to a hospital where she underwent surgery. State Route 76 was closed until about 2:30 a.m.

Kerns said a special CHP accident investigation team is reviewing the crash.

KEYWORD: Debby Grady.

Ronald W. Powell: (619) 718-5070; ron.powell@uniontrib.com

Zuniga: (619) 498-6636; janine.zuniga@uniontrib.com