

Incident Summary Page for the Hotshot Crew Line of Duty Death

Name of Hotshots LODD: Michelle Smith	Incident Name: Crew Physical Training Incident Date & Time: 06/9/1996
Hotshot Crew: Globe	Incident Location: Globe, Arizona
Personal Information	
Michelle Smith, age 23, was a first season Hotshot and had spent the previous three fire seasons on an engine in the Nez Perce National Forest in Idaho. She was a college junior majoring in Forestry at the University of Idaho and was survived by her fiancée, her parents in Grangeville, Idaho, a sister, and 2 brothers.	
Brief description	
Smith died during physical training with the Globe Hotshot crew. While doing a morning run she became separated from the rest of the crew. Although the crew circled back to look for her and initiated a search with local emergency services, her body was not found until the following morning. Smith was in excellent physical condition, however temperatures reached 90+ degrees that day and it is believed she succumbed to heat exhaustion and exposure.	
Links to more information on this incident:	
https://wlfalwaysremember.net/1996/06/09/michelle-smith/ https://lessonslearned-prod-media-bucket.s3.us-gov-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/irdoc/Michelle_Smith_Fatality.pdf	



Michelle Smith

3 fatalities in 5 days blamed on temperature

'We feel heat got to her': 'Fit' woman runs to death

By Paul Brinkley-Rogers
Staff writer

GLOBE — What made 23-year-old Michelle Smith continue running until she died is a mystery, especially given the fact that the firefighter knew the risks of testing herself against 100-degree heat.

Gila County sheriff's deputies found her spread-eagled under a creosote bush in a residential area of Globe on Monday morning, almost 24 hours after she inexplicably vanished from a daily 2½-mile conditioning run involving all 20

members of her U.S. Forest Service "hot shot" firefighting team.

"We feel heat got to her," Sheriff Joe Rodriquez said after searchers brought the body out from some scrub behind a house in Six Shooter Canyon.

"Why she went by all these houses with water and shade without ever asking for help we just don't know."

Smith was the third person to die of apparent heat exhaustion while engaged in strenuous outdoor activities in Arizona in five days. All were young and apparently

HIGHLIGHTS

WARNING SIGNS

Symptoms of heat exhaustion:

- Heavy sweating.
- Paleness.
- Muscle cramps.
- Fatigue, weakness.
- Skin may be cool and moist.
- Rapid, weak pulse.
- Shallow, rapid breathing.

Source: Arizona Department of Health Services

physically fit.

The body of Daniel Thorpe, 21, of Mesa, was found Sunday by a prospector

— See **DEATH**, page A9

Tuesday, June 11,

Death of 'fit' woman blamed on heat

— **DEATH**, from page A1

near Elephant Butte in Pinal County. He had taken off sometime during the night Saturday from a Queen Valley campsite he shared with a friend, carrying a gallon container of water, while his friend was asleep.

The Pinal County Sheriff's Department, which was searching for Thorpe, said that he probably died of dehydration and exposure.

Grand Canyon park authorities found a 15-year-old boy dead of dehydration Thursday after the party of six other people he had been hiking with near Nankoweap, a remote wilderness area on the north side of the rim, reported that he had become ill.

Park spokeswoman Maureen Oltrogge said David Phillips of Bountiful, Utah, and his companions were hiking without a valid back-country permit. She said the area is recommended only for "highly experienced

Grand Canyon hikers with proven route-finding ability."

The case of Smith perplexed searchers and her companions at the ranger station in Six Shooter Canyon only a half mile from where she was found.

The Idaho native, they said, had done the 2½-mile run from the station up the paved canyon road many times since she arrived in Globe in April to join one of the Tonto National Forest's three elite hot shot teams. She was in superb physical condition, they said, had been trained in desert-survival techniques, and had taken classes in how to recognize heat stroke. Her brother also was a member of the crew.

Connie Stubbs, a Forest Service spokeswoman based in Globe, said the runners had spread out as they normally do when they ran a "relay," with the person at the end of the pack going to the head of the line and so on until all 20 had done so.

But Smith, she said, simply dropped out of sight. Her companions, who started the run at 9 a.m., doubled back when she vanished and returned to the ranger station shortly after 10 a.m. to report her missing.

Sheriff Rodriquez said that 60 searchers from several agencies scoured the area in and around Six Shooter Canyon, a winding road leading to a recreational area south of Globe, on Sunday. They talked with many of the homeowners in the canyon, which is only two miles from downtown Globe.

Smith's body was found 200 yards off the road on a rise behind a home where a retired couple were watering their garden Sunday morning.

"We heard dogs barking," said Emma Dickison, who with her husband, Roy, owns the ridge right behind their home. "But we did not see her.

"She must have come up here, jumped the fence, and then just laid

down and died."

Rodriquez said that Channel 12 (KPNX) cameraman Travis Johnson first spotted Smith's body from the air in a station helicopter about 10:30 a.m. He said that she was fully dressed and that there were no signs of foul play.

"It was over 100 degrees out here Sunday morning," Rodriquez said. "She must have become disoriented.

"We have a couple of witnesses. A man saw her running at about 11:30 a.m. (Sunday). He talked to her but she did not seem to be in trouble.

"A woman asked her how she was doing shortly after that. She asked her if she needed help. She said she was fine and that she was just playing hide and seek."

"All she had to do was to ask for some help and some water," the sheriff said, shaking his head. "There were lots of people around. There are all these houses. But she kept on running."